













**WHEN GERONIMO RODE**

BOOKS BY  
FORRESTINE C. HOOKER

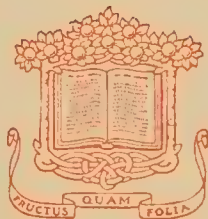


PRINCE JAN  
STAR: THE STORY OF AN INDIAN PONY  
WHEN GERONIMO RODE  
THE LONG, DIM TRAIL



# WHEN GERONIMO RODE

BY  
FORRESTINE C. HOOKER



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TO

MEN WHO RODE GERONIMO'S CRIMSON TRAIL,  
THEIR SADDLES AS PILLOWS, STARS AS  
CANDLES, AND THEIR ONLY ROOF THE SKY



I wish to express my deepest appreciation of the invaluable collaboration of my loyal and unselfish friend, Grace Geldert, in the writing of this story.

—FORRESTINE COOPER HOOKER.

WASHINGTON, D. C.

May 3, 1923.



## FOREWORD

“TELL me a true story,” a child invariably pleads; and men and women are but “children of a larger growth.”

Often I have been asked, “How can I get authentic material for a western story?” My stereotyped answer is, “Live in the real West from earliest childhood, and remember the things you have actually seen and the people you have known. Then the story will write itself, for the real West is romance.”

When I first knew the West, it was still a bloody battleground where the soldiers and white settlers waged grim warfare against the Indians. Buffalo herds were a common sight to my brother, sister, and myself en route with our parents from one frontier garrison to another, as my father was then an officer in the Tenth U. S. Cavalry. Often we would be a month or more travelling by wagon with escort of soldiers, camping at night; and the troopers were always on the alert for signs of hostile Indians. I recollect vividly a buffalo stampede that swept across the prairie toward us, on one occasion, while the soldiers waited ready to shoot into the herd in case it headed too near our wagons.

Famous soldiers, my father's comrades, often visited our garrison homes in various parts of Texas, Indian Territory, and Arizona. As a very small girl I breathlessly listened to their conversations which held more fascination for me than my beloved fairy tales, or even a ride on my pony.

When I was graduated from an Eastern school at the romance-loving age of seventeen, the regiment in which I had been raised was just beginning its campaign work in Arizona against the Chiricahua Apaches who were led by Geronimo.

That is how it happened that though I am a mere woman and the story of "When Geronimo Rode" is a tale of valiant heroes whose names are written in American history, it was not necessary for me to read what other authors had already written. I lived in the heart of the Geronimo campaign and those who were actively engaged in it were my own friends; friends of my mother and brother-officers of my father, the late Brigadier-General Charles L. Cooper, U. S. Army, who held the distinction of having struck the last blow of the campaign by his capture of Chief Mangus and the remnant of the Chiricahua Apaches.

Fort Apache, Fort Grant, Fort Bowie, Willcox, Bonita Cañon were familiar to me, not only in girlhood but later. After my marriage at Fort Grant in 1886, I went to live at the headquarter Hooker ranch, ten miles from the garrison. So I remained



for many years in that section and frequently rode over the old trails.

Personal recollections of men who lived in Arizona: the memories of my mother and myself concerning the Geronimo campaign; official reports preserved by my father, which my mother and I went over after his death; private letters written to our family by officers during that period; records from the War Department and from the Historic Department of the U. S. War College; and above all in value, personal letters and conversations I have had with such men as Lieut.-General Nelson A. Miles, Major-General Anson L. Mills, Brigadier-General Marion P. Maus, and other officers who served through the entire campaign, have made possible the writing of a true story of the most arduous, protracted, and dramatic campaign ever waged against the fiercest Indians of America.

It is also a story of a vanished race of people. For the original Chiricahua Apaches, sent to Florida as prisoners of war for life, were transferred to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, where most of them have died, and their few descendants are fast assimilating the white men's standards of living.

And it is a faithful sketch of the coloured soldier of the old Tenth Cavalry; his devotion and loyalty to his officers and their families, his cheerful endurance of hardships, his bravery when facing danger, and his pride in his regiment.

I have been fortunate in having as my collaborator in writing this book Mrs. Louis N. Geldert, National President of the League of American Penwomen, herself a distinguished author. Like myself, she was writing about men who had been friends of her father and of her own girlhood days, notably the late Major-General Frank D. Baldwin, who was Chief of Staff for Lieut.-General Nelson A. Miles when the latter commanded the United States Army.

Many incidents familiar to me before Mrs. Geldert and I had ever met had been related to her by Generals Baldwin, Shafter, Miles, and Maus; and as we worked together we constantly discovered mutual knowledge of facts. Each trail, date, and incident regarding the actual campaign has been verified; real names and places are given except in the love story where we, together, have worked a mosaic design of fact and fiction which is inlaid against the gold background of truth.

The book is an authentic record of American conditions, heroism, and hardships endured by a little group of officers and enlisted men of the United States Army in the winning of the West, and it is heart and soul an American story.

FORRESTINE COOPER HOOKER.

May 17, 1923.

Washington, D. C.

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**WHEN GERONIMO RODE**





# WHEN GERONIMO RODE

## Chapter I

### THE WEB

**T**WO watched.

A hawk poised against the sky between mountain peaks, and Geronimo, patient as Fate, on a rock that jutted high above the cañon.

No war bonnet of eagle plumes adorned his head. He wore a plaid gingham shirt, faded blue vest, and trousers bought at the post trader's store. Moccasins were on his feet, and the red handkerchief bound around his forehead not only held back his grizzled locks, but proclaimed that Geronimo, medicine man and self-constituted war chief of the Chiricahua Apaches, was a "good Indian" and on peaceful terms with his white brothers.

Those who saw Geronimo for the first time shrank at his cruel mouth, but when they once looked into his eyes all else about him was forgotten.

No one ever forgot Geronimo's eyes.

Now, as he squatted immovably on the mountain-

side, those eyes scintillated venomously, like those of a rattlesnake coiled and ready to strike.

The hawk swooped!

Geronimo waited.

Below him dashed the east fork of the White River where trout leaped at insects darting over the cool ripples. Here and there deeper pools reflected the brilliant colours of approaching sunset. Pines and cedars loomed dark against the pink glow, and cañons gutted the majestic slopes of the White Mountains which converged into a green cup of mesa land.

In that cup lay Fort Apache.

Geronimo's eyes focussed on the distant parade ground which was the heart of the garrison. Around that green square were rows of buildings. He knew them all. A trig line of white cottages told where the officers lived; across, and facing these quarters, stood long barracks which sheltered the enlisted men: adjutant's office, signal office, quartermaster's, and the commissary building flanked the third side.

A sentinel paced slowly to and fro the length of a little guardhouse. Back and above it stood the hospital, luminous with white paint and the windows flickering red in the fading day.

Geronimo's flat mouth twitched.

The seasoned white cavalrymen, who knew the Apache trails, had gone away and in their stead were

new soldiers—black men who were strangers to the Apaches and their country. Only a little copper wire connected Fort Apache with Holbrook, the railroad station ninety miles to the north as the crow flies. Sixty miles south of the garrison lay Fort Thomas. There were no habitations between.

The mountains around Fort Apache were dotted with wickiups which were grouped according to tribes. And these villages reached away from the garrison and stretched here and there on the banks of creeks tributary to the river. During the day the Indians wandered at will within the garrison limits, and at night they flitted silently about, evading the sentinels while women and children slept with no thought of danger.

The lower rim of the sun touched the horizon. Clear and sweet, the call of a bugle drifted to the ear of the watcher on the cliff. He saw men forming into lines. Again the bugle notes rang. The crashing report of a cannon echoed and reëchoed from the encircling mountains as the smoke floated hazily away. Slowly and gracefully the flag—emblem of a nation's honour—fluttered from the tip of the tall staff until it reached three soldiers who waited with outstretched hands that the sacred folds might not touch the ground.

Geronimo rose to his feet and nimbly made his way along the bluff until he reached his own wickiup. Once inside, he jerked off the red handkerchief and

flicked it scornfully away. As he looked at it, his thin lips curled into a sneer.

Dragging a pipe from his pocket he filled it with tobacco bought at the garrison store. Then, smoking, he waited.

His face was stolid when the flap of his wickiup was lifted and two Indians entered. Silently the three regarded each other.

Natchez, young, lithe, tall, stood before Geronimo, and the War Chief's glance, apparently unobserving, lost no detail of the distinctly handsome face with its regular features and the air of dignity befitting the rank of Natchez, hereditary chief of the Chiricahuas.

Josanie was an older man, keen-eyed, furtive-glancing. He was too small a factor to act save in conjunction with the others. But Josanie, too, had his followers.

In spite of their efforts the three Apaches were unable to conceal a gleam of interest when the approach of steps caught their ears. Once again the flap of the wickiup was raised. Geronimo's eyes narrowed.

Mangus, the Big One!

The newcomer met their gaze impassively. He was a power in his tribe and his right to chieftainship came through Mangus Colorado, the famous war chief of the former generation—a name that had spelled terror in Arizona, New Mexico, western Texas, and northern Mexico for many years.

Silently the four Indians squatted on the ground, but Geronimo's face did not betray his elation that Mangus had come. The conference began.

Hours passed.

Smoke curled upward from the wickiups of the waking Chiricahua village when the conference ceased at dawn; and each leader had pledged to join Geronimo in one of the most carefully planned outbreaks that had ever been attempted in the history of the West.

And while they had plotted, a large black spider, lured by the flickering light, swung on a silver thread until it touched the top of the wickiup. Swiftly it ran to a low-hanging twig.

Up and down, over and across, the spinner wove the web until its frail beauty barred the entrance, as though the place were deserted.

The Indians arose to their feet. Geronimo, turning, saw the web. With a swift gesture he brushed it aside. His moccasined foot crushed the spinner. Silently the Apaches went their way. Geronimo watched them go; satisfaction shone in his eyes as he looked down at the sleeping garrison. The fools! They had thought to hold him, but he would thrust them aside as he had brushed aside the web.

Blinded by egotism, Geronimo believed that he had taken the first step on the way to absolute dictatorship over Natchez, Mangus, and the entire tribes. He knew that there were forty thousand Indians

peopling Arizona and New Mexico. Though the majority of these different tribes were peaceably inclined, each tribe held a percentage of lawless spirits who were ready to throw their fortunes with any successful hostile band.

The Chiricahuas and Warm Springs Apaches occupied the same reservation at Fort Apache and were friendly to each other. Together they numbered over four hundred, and all were ripe for mischief. Turbulent, defiant, and desperate, the Chiricahuas, though the smallest band numerically, dominated all the others through sheer terrorism.

The White Mountain Apaches, while sharing the same reservation, feared and avoided the Chiricahuas.

On the San Carlos Reservation, forty miles south of Fort Thomas, dwelt the San Carlos, the Yuma, and the Mohave Apaches, all of whom were friendly to the Chiricahuas, and who would aid and abet them even if they did not openly join a war party.

Geronimo, standing in the dim dawn of a May morning, dreamed of combining all of these forces into one immense band that should drive every white person out of Arizona Territory and leave it to his despotic rule.

But he did not know that Natchez, with superior intelligence, had deliberately planned that Geronimo's authority should appear paramount. Natchez understood full well that sooner or later the soldiers

would subjugate the Chiricahuas, and when that day should come, Geronimo, the puppet of Natchez, would be held responsible for the atrocities committed during the outbreak.

Across the entrance of the wickiup the broken strands of the spider web were stirred by the morning breeze, but no one knew that another web was being woven by the hand of Destiny—a web with intangible filaments too strong for any man to break. Its delicate threads were to be flung to far-distant places, to touch the lives of many whose names would be written on the pages of history, and to wrap about others who would pass into obscurity.

And in the very centre of that strange web was woven the life of a girl—Bonita Curtice.

## Chapter II

### BONITA

**B**ONITA opened her eyes and lay framed in her tangled mass of dark curls, lulled by the jarring rhythm of the train.

Hours before she had lifted the shade to watch the desert stars that seemed so near. Heavy fragrance drifted through her window from where the blossom-laden yuccas towered dimly, like unlighted tapers upon the altar of a sanctuary.

“Hit’s fibe o’clock, Miss Cuhtice,” the porter’s voice whispered hoarsely from outside the agitated curtains of her berth. “Yo’ done tol’ me yo’ wanted me to be suah an’ wake yo’ up. De train’s on time.”

Aware of the small dressing-room and the woman-filled car, of children to be washed and two overdressed dames to be coiffed, Bonita became alert. Pinning up her long, thick hair, she slipped into a pale blue *négligé*, thrust her feet into soft slippers, and then, after a quick survey, assured that no man was in sight, hastened down the aisle.

Half an hour later she picked her way back through



billowing curtains, protruding feet—masculine and feminine—over obstructing luggage, and gained her own section, which the porter had already made up. He greeted her with a smile and lingered solicitously despite urgent demands for ladders voiced by marooned occupants of upper berths.

Bonita's head was turned away from the aisle as the passengers descended, but in the little mirror between her windows she saw a foot shoot out like a battering ram, between the curtains of the opposite upper berth. Back and forth swung a trousered leg, the toes spread in prehensile groping. But there was neither branch of tree nor Pullman ladder. Evolution had done away with the branch and the porter had taken the steps.

Bonita laughed. Only the racket of the rushing train kept the owner of the leg from hearing her.

The foot was suddenly withdrawn and the face of a fat, red-whiskered man appeared like a wrathful sun god intent upon shrivelling the skunk who had taken away that ladder. The porter approached nonchalantly, steps in hand.

“Heyah's de laddah.”

With red hair and whiskers bristling like an oriflamme, the man descended as gracefully as a hippopotamus, and clothed in little more than outraged dignity he careened out of sight.

The long journey from a convent school to an

Arizona garrison had been rather monotonous for a girl who was travelling alone, but now it was drawing to its close. Miles of alkali flat dotted with salt grass and browsing cattle flashed past. Silver threads of barbed-wire fences were strung parallel with the railroad track—leading-strings of civilization.

From her window Bonita could see a few scattered adobe houses. She was coming home, but there would be neither father nor mother to welcome her there. Mist gathered in her dark eyes as she looked across the mesa, picturing a little graveyard of the Texas garrison where her mother had slept many years; and the official records of the army told her father's fate during the Comanche warfare.

Curtice, Boyd, 1 Lt. 10 Cav. 6 Nov. 1874 near Ft. Sill Ind. T. Killed.

Just one printed line—nothing more.

The adobe houses were closer now. The shrill warning of the engine and grinding of brakes on the wheels brought Bonita to her feet and she followed the porter to the platform. Curiously she noted the row of little stores, where ponies with dangling reins hunched nervous backs and squirmed sideways and eyed the train distrustfully. Groups of bow-legged cowboys sauntered out of stores and saloons; for the daily passenger, whether east bound or west, was an important event in the little town of Willcox.

The train stopped.

With a cry of joy Bonita ran down the steps and flung herself into the arms of Mrs. Duncan, while Captain Duncan beamed paternally over his wife's statuesque shoulder at their ward.

## Chapter III

### READY AND FORWARD

**W**HILE the Duncans were welcoming Bonita a Negro soldier gathered the hand luggage from the platform and transferred it to the front of the covered vehicle. The trunk was slipped into the buckled canvas "boot" at the back.

The driver cracked his long-lashed whip and the four trig mules trotted briskly down the dust-clouded street. Back of the ambulance a soldier rode. His pistol holster sagged heavily on the cartridge belt and a carbine was slung in its leather scabbard at the side of his saddle.

Mrs. Duncan and the captain settled down for the twenty-seven-mile drive to Fort Grant, but Bonita was eagerly alert and scanned with sparkling eyes the row of low adobe buildings which formed the principal street of Willcox. Irregular rows of houses, built far apart, like a mouth with many front teeth missing, stood back of the main business street.

Farther on, Mexican children stopped playing in the doorways of their adobe homes, where festooned strings of brilliant red peppers were drying in the sun. Mongrel dogs yapped. Their hair bristled in ridges,

along their backs, but though their barks were brave, their tails were between their legs, and they did not pursue.

Sombre women with black shawls over their heads raised soft Spanish eyes to watch the ambulance rattle out of the little town and turn to the east on to a road that wound through the broad, undulating valley north to Fort Grant.

“That highest peak with the snowcap is Mount Graham.” The captain indicated the landmark with a wave of his hand. “Fort Grant lies directly at its base.”

“Isn’t this a wonderful country!” Bonita exclaimed. “I wish I could make you understand how happy I am at coming back. I never wrote you how homesick I was, nor how I hated streets and brick walls and crowds of people. There were many nights when I actually cried to come back here.”

She flung out her hands in a quick gesture and her voice vibrated tensely.

“Why!”—Mrs. Duncan smiled at her—“you have never been in Arizona before.”

“No. But the mountains are home, no matter where they may be. They seem like dear old friends. I love them all!” She turned impulsively and lifted Mrs. Duncan’s gloved hand against her cheek with a little caressing movement. “You and the regiment and the mountains! Nothing else means home to me.”

The older woman withdrew her hand, and though she was moved out of her customary dignified reserve, she spoke impersonally. "Bonita, now that you are seventeen years old, you must learn to control your emotions."

"I will try to do just what you would like, Aunt Marcia," was the quick reply. "I am bubbling over to-day because I am so happy that my heart is singing."

Captain Duncan, with a bluff man's dread of sentiment, hastened to remark: "Aunt Jane has been having conniption fits ever since you started for fear something might happen to you."

"Bless her loving, loyal old heart! I brought her a gorgeoussome black silk dress!"

"She was sure that the train would be 'wrocked' or that someone would kidnap you," supplemented his wife. "She thinks she owns you, you know. But for that matter, so does the whole Tenth."

"It does!" Bonita nodded. "Are there many I used to know stationed at Grant?"

"Hold on," the officer commanded the driver, who pulled the mules to a stand.

"What is the matter?" Mrs. Duncan inquired.

"I'm going to get on the driver's seat and smoke in peace while you inventory the garrison. If Bonita has not changed, I know she'll find out everything I want to keep to myself. It's too much risk!"

“Coward!” taunted the girl gaily.

“Discretion is the better part of valour,” he retorted.

Laughing, they watched him exit, and as the ambulance started again, Mrs. Duncan and her ward settled down for a comfortable chat concerning the families at Fort Grant. But even while asking and answering questions, Bonita was absorbing the details of the scene around her.

Sometimes they skirted a small ranch with its brown adobe walls and red roof of corrugated iron, adjoining thick, mud-walled corrals and guarded by the inevitable Perkins' windmill creaking noisily in the light breeze.

They travelled over a smooth road on either side of which white-faced Hereford cattle lifted their heads and gazed placidly after them.

At this time of the year the native grasses, growing luxuriantly, were flecked with wild flowers, and the deep yellow blossoms, called by the Mexicans “Cup of Gold” clustering thickly in spots, gave the impression of a fairy banquet from which the revellers had fled, leaving their golden goblets behind.

“How sweet the yuccas are!” Bonita exclaimed, as the tall stalks, tipped with pyramids of bloom-like bells of delicately carved ivory, swayed in the breeze and filled the air with fragrance.

“Roy said he would ride out to meet us,” Mrs. Duncan remarked as the girl settled back in the seat.

“Mounted drill and other duties kept him. There is no first lieutenant in our troop, so Roy and his father cannot be absent at the same time.”

“I wonder if I shall know him?” Bonita mused. “Five years make a big difference in everybody!”

“He has changed much more than you have,” Roy’s mother smiled.

A group of cowboys driving a small bunch of stock rode toward them.

“I am wild to get on a horse once again,” Bonita said, without taking her eyes from the horsemen. Another rider came into sight. He reached the cow-punchers, passed them, and galloped rapidly toward the ambulance.

“Isn’t that Roy?”

Without waiting reply from Roy’s mother, Bonita waved her handkerchief. The horseman jerked off his cap and made a few passes in the air. The girl recognized the code of their childhood days.

“What regiment?” wigwagged the cap.

“Tenth! Ready and Forward!” her handkerchief signalled in reply. Bonita laughed delightedly. She had not forgotten.

The young officer dashed up on his handsome bay horse. The wind blew his dark brown hair from his forehead; brown eyes looked into hers.

“By Jove! It’s good to have you home, Nita!” He held her hand while his horse cavorted beside the wheel.



She lifted her other hand in official salute. "Lieutenant Mustachio!"

Roy's smile was his only reply as he reined his horse into a cavalry trot beside the ambulance.

The cattle herd had passed, and as another rider loomed indistinctly back of the dust haze, Roy rose in his stirrups, waved his arm, and shouted, "Come along, old man!"

The cowpuncher galloped up expectantly.

"It was a mistake," explained the lieutenant. "I thought you were a friend of ours."

"You're darned dead right it was a mistake," the other retorted emphatically. "Cowmen ain't no friends of soldiers—leastways, not till you fellers round up Geronimo!"

The man dug his big spurs into his pony's sweating sides and raced after the cowherd.

Roy scanned the horizon. "Now, where in the devil is Jerry?" he muttered.

## Chapter IV

### A DAUGHTER OF THE REGIMENT

**E**SCORTED by Roy, the ambulance with the Duncans and Bonita rattled along the driveway in front of the officers' line and stopped before a large double house of gray stone.

It was known as The Folly and reputed to be haunted, though why and how no one had ever satisfactorily explained. But the double distinction of a ghost and a name instead of a mere number made the Duncans' quarters quite exclusive. Jane scorned the implied "ha'nt," and was regarded with awe by more timid "culled ladies" on the back line and along Suds' Row.

The old woman, wearing her best black silk dress, a fluted white apron fastened about her thin waist, and an immaculate cap perched on her grizzled head, waited respectfully within the front hall as Bonita jumped from the ambulance and ran up the six steps to the porch—to the door—to Aunt Jane's welcoming arms.

"Bress yo', honey-chile! You'se suah a sight fo' so' eyes, caze dey done git well when dey see yo'!"

the old woman exclaimed rapturously, holding the girl away and studying the radiant face. "De Lawd's bin moughty good ter let me see yo' sunsetty face ergen. Lawsy, we all suah done miss yo'!"

Jane wiped her eyes and shuffled down the long hall toward the kitchen, but she could not resist turning more than once to glance backward in her flight.

She had nursed many children in her long life, and at nightfall, when she sat alone, a group of little white-robed figures seemed to gather about her. Children whom she had nursed and loved years long past. Many of them had wandered to far-distant lands; others had gone to sleep in narrow beds, tired from the daytime play and the grief of broken toys.

But to Jane they were always the same as when their heads had rested on her flat breast. Always "meh babies." She had loved them all, but none of them had ever crept so deeply into her heart as had Bonita Curtice.

Night after night, while the girl had been away at school for five years, Aunt Jane's prayer had never varied and never been omitted. "Good Lawd, bress meh honey-chile an' tek cayah ob her an' mek her happy. Amen."

To-day, as she stirred and mixed and baked, Jane's cup of joy overflowed.

At daybreak the next morning Bonita awoke at the cannon's salute and the bugle's sounding reveille.

The familiar call, heard for the first time after five years, was like a welcome home, and long before the breakfast hour she was dressed and on the front porch. Each detail of the day's routine revived her memories.

It was true that she had not been in this garrison before; but only the houses and the view across the valley to the distant amethyst peaks differed from her recollections of other frontier posts. In those by-gone days of regimental promotion a man remained in the same regiment from the time of his graduation at West Point until he was a portly, gray-haired officer. So most of those who called that first night to welcome the girl back to her own were men and women who had known her babyhood—men and women to whom she would always be "Bonita Curtice of the Tenth."

Mrs. Duncan and the girl had breakfast alone, as the men of the family had eaten earlier and would not return from their various duties until midday.

The meal was a leisurely one, and while they lingered at the table, old Jane, brimming with importance and mystery, summoned Bonita to the back porch where she found gray-headed Sergeant Faulkner, who had held her in his arms when she had been two days old. Quick tears dimmed her eyes, and the old soldier seemed to be afflicted with a cold.

Back of him, rigidly correct, stood the old Negro soldiers of her dead father's troop.

“We all done come ter pay our respec’s, Miss Bonita,” Faulkner announced with great dignity, “an’ we all wants ter tell yo’ dat we’s e moughty glad yo’ done come back ter de Reg’munt.”

Bonita shook each hand, calling every man by name and reminding him of many escapades of long ago which set them all chuckling.

Faulkner was the Homer of the regiment, and when he told its glories, three names were always mentioned—Grierson, Curtice, and Miles; but Miles, though not of the Tenth Cavalry, was Faulkner’s Ulysses; and the story of the Comanche Campaign was his Odyssey, into which was woven the name of a baby girl.

It was an emotion-filled reunion for all concerned. And when the men had gone back to their barracks, Faulkner sat on the edge of his bunk and spun his yarn for the benefit of the “rookies” who gathered around him—new men, who did not yet know the annals of the Fighting Tenth.

“Jackson an’ me wuz in de Thu’ty-ninth Inf’ry when hit wuz o’gnized in sixty-six, an’ Lieut’nt Cuhtice done belonged ter hit when Miss Bonita wuz borned,” rambled Faulkner. “De next yeah de Thu’ty-ninth wuz con—sol—i—dated wif de Fo’tieth and made inter de Twenty-fif’, and den Lieut’nt Cuhtice wuz ’signed to de Tenth Cav’ry. Miss Bonita wuz jes’ two yeahs ol’ when her paw jined de Tenth, an’ she jined it wif him.

“Ah recommember,” he went on musingly, sure of his audience, “de bery fustest time dat Aunt Jane done let me tote Miss Bonita down ter show to de troop. Dat baby wuz on’y six weeks ol’, but she nebber cry a tall. An’ dere warn’t a man in de troop dat er day dat wou’dn’t of died fo’ her aftah she done squinch up dem big black eyes at dem all and smile lak she thought it a big joke. She wuz de spunkiest chile Ah eber seed.”

“We all ain’t gwineter forgit how she done follow her paw aroun’ an’ stan’ an’ salute wif him,” grinned Jackson. “An’ dat day when Lieutennt-colonel Davidson wuz in command ob de post while General Grierson wuz on leab! Ah wuz orderly and Ah seen dat chile come marchin’ down de front line wif all de chillun ob de garrison, white an’ cullud. But yo’ cain’t tell which wuz white an’ which wuz black, caze she done plastered all ob deyah faces wif mud, jes’ lak her own. An’ she knock at de doah and salutes de colonel an’ says, ‘I’s e got some recruits fo’ de Tenth Cav’ry.’ De colonel, he neber bat his eye but says solemn as yo’ please, ‘Thank yo’, Lieutenant Cuhtis.’ Den he ups an’ gibs her some money an’ says to tek de recruits down to de pos’ trader stoah and git some candy. Dat’s how came we all calls Miss Bonita de additional second lieutenant ob de Tenth Cav’ry.”

Faulkner took up the theme when Jackson paused for breath. “Jes’ as soon as me an’ Jackson an’

Clark fin' out dat Lieutenant Cuhtice is transfuh'd to de Tenth, we ast ter go long wif him. An' den, sah, de hull troop hit hup an' ast ter be transfuh'd, too, long wif we all. Dar wuz ten ob us got our transfuhs, but de res' nachully bleegeed ter gib hit hup. Aunt Jane, she transfuh'd, too, wif Miss Bonita. An' dat's howcome Miss Bonita belongs ter de Tenth Cav'ry."

"She suah do," endorsed old Private Clark, who was a man of few words and a great admirer of Faulkner's fluency.

"'Tain't bery long aftah dat Miss' Cuhtice ups and dies, and den we all pitched in and holped Aunt Jane tek cayah ob Miss Bonita. So did eberyone in de reg'munt, from de colonel down, 'twill Lieutenant Cuhtice wuz killed whilst he wuz fightin' de Comanches and Kiowas de time Colonel Nelson A. Miles whopped Quannah Parker, de Comanche chief. 'Course aftah Miss Bonita's paw and maw wuz bofe daid, she done belonged ter de hull reg'munt, but Cap'n Duncan he done took out gyardian papers fo' her, so she knows she's got a home wif dem."

"Ah specs she gwineter git mah'ied ter Lieutenant Roy someday," Jackson commented. "'Member dat time he done kidnap her when she wuz a baby down at Ship Island and toted her home to his maw?"

Others besides Jackson grinned and shook with laughter, for Aunt Jane had sent them on a wild

search over every possible place of concealment on the tiny strip of sand which formed the island.

“Whar eber dat chile went, she suah done raise a commotion,” asserted Faulkner. Then still more positively he added, “An’ she’s gwineter raise one right heyah. You lissen ter me!”

Mess call brought the men to their feet:

“Soupy, soupy, soupy, without a single bean,  
Porky, porky, porky, without a strip of lean;  
Coffee, coffee, coffee, the meanest ever seen,”

sang one of the “rookies” as they filed through the door.



## Chapter V

### A MILE A MINUTE

**F**ORT GRANT, nestling at the foot of Mount Graham, was one of the largest garrisons in Arizona Territory. Five troops of the Tenth Cavalry were under their own major, but the entire garrison was commanded by Colonel Shafter of the First Infantry, and one company of his own regiment completed the force.

A peculiar condition existed. The cavalrymen felt that their own colonel, Grierson, should have been assigned to command because the preponderance of the Tenth made Grant practically a cavalry post.

Official relations, though apparently cordial, held an undercurrent of resentment, and the infantry commander was fully aware of the sentiment. This situation made each cavalry officer or private soldier more keenly anxious that no dereliction on his part should give opportunity for official reprimand from Colonel Shafter.

From the wide, inviting porches of the officers' homes was a view across the Sulphur Spring Valley to the Galiuro Mountains, twenty miles distant.

In the heart of this valley lay the Diamond H ranch, which was a village in itself, and constituted the headquarters for many smaller, tributary ranches, all of which were the property of a man who was counted the cattle king of Arizona.

The hospitality of the rancher was as well known as his slogan—"No scrubs."

Officers stationed at Fort Grant were frequent guests at the ranch, and the cavalry officers especially were able to appreciate the high-headed standard-bred trotters which were the pride of the rancher's heart.

To own and drive a single animal bred at the Diamond H ranch was the ambition of one and all, but Colonel Shafter was more ambitious. He wanted two, and to-day his ambition was realized.

He had never thought when he was learning to drive the farm horses in Michigan, as a boy, that he would ever have a team like the one he now drove: Hambletonians with less than a three-minute gait, their shining flanks bearing the tiny H brand which stood for pedigree and speed.

He was anticipating the joy of sending them full clip along the front line with the new Brewster buggy spinning behind them. A thousand apiece the bays had cost him. Stiff figure—but, by thunder! they were worth every penny. He wished he had someone to pace 'em a mile, as they had done on the speed track at the ranch.

A cloud of dust on the road caught his eye. As though some kindly genie had rubbed a magic lamp, out of the yellow haze emerged a fractious roan horse, and on its back sat a young officer.

West Point spoke in the squared shoulders, and the easy poise said—cavalry, born and bred. The colonel recognized him. Here was a man of the right mettle—a horseman.

The officer rode nearer, lifted his hand and saluted the colonel, who pulled the bays to a stand.

“What do you think of my team, Lieutenant?”

Lieutenant Gerald Stanley turned his horse and eyed the team critically from foretop to fetlock. Admiration was written plainly on his bronzed face and showed in the clear blue eyes. Shafter saw it.

If Colonel Shafter had had a hand in writing the immortal Declaration of Independence he would have had it set forth:

“All men who love horses are born free and equal.”

“What can they do?” Stanley asked, still studying the fine points of the team.

“Three minutes, or less, in this buggy with me,” announced the colonel proudly.

It was something to brag about, for the colonel was colossal. At this moment he was proud of his weight for the first time in his life. The young officer glanced from the team to the colonel, recalling a remark he had overheard in the stables, when one ebon soldier had asserted that “de kunnel’s jes’

as tall when he's a layin' down on his back as when he's standin' hup on his feet."

"Great!" exclaimed Lieutenant Stanley.

Shafter was no longer the commanding officer, he was a horseman. So was the lieutenant.

"Want to pace 'em a mile?" challenged the owner of the bays, the gambling light in his eyes.

Stanley wavered. He had in mind a matter concerning a lady.

The other saw hesitation. "Ten to one," he declared. "A mile in three minutes!"

"I take you."

The lieutenant dismounted and marked a starting point with his spurred heel.

Tiswin snorted and shook his head as his owner lined him beside the bays. The officers compared watches.

"Ready—go!" ordered the lieutenant. They went.

The bays, with noses pointed, flew over the hard, smooth road as though their dainty hoofs scorned to touch it. Tiswin, running low, led them by a neck.

"Get along—get along, you rascals!" urged the driver of the team.

They trotted smoothly. Their satin flanks moving as though the steel muscles worked by machinery. Their nostrils expanded, they watched the nose of the roan pacemaker and lengthened their stride. Lieutenant Stanley, watch in hand, measured the distance. He glanced at the steadily moving hoofs.

Not once had the furious gait been broken from the smooth-actioned trot.

“Bully!” he cried.

“They’ll do it in two forty-five,” shouted Shafter.

“Three,” called the rider of the roan.

And then out of the thick mesquite beside the road came a bugle blast, sudden and unexpected as the trumpet of the Archangel Gabriel.

The bays leaped in air and whirled.

Three? A mile a minute!

Across the valley they headed toward the ranch. The colonel held manfully to the reins, but it was not a team he now drove, it was fright. Tiswin was no match in this race.

A front wheel struck a yucca.

The colonel’s portly body rose elliptically, reached perihelion, and descended to aphelion with a thud. Buggy seat, robe, and whip obeyed the immutable law of gravitation.

Colonel William Rufus Shafter dented the desert and marked the finish of the race.

Two thousand dollars’ worth of horseflesh was racing madly across the valley. What had been a five-hundred-dollar Brewster buggy a few minutes before was now first-class kindling.

Tiswin and his rider approached. The officer on the ground gesticulated with both arms: “Get after ’em! Get after ’em! They cost a thousand apiece!”

Stanley swore under his breath, whirled about, and

obeyed orders. But the team, freed of buggy and driver, were well on their way to the ranch, where such things as bugle calls were unknown.

The colonel rose with imaginable difficulty and started toward the garrison. As an exponent of cause and effect he was a wonder.

Yesterday a bugler had been two minutes late, and realizing this, had fumbled his call.

The colonel, who had a fine ear for music, had fairly frothed at the mouth when discordant, jerky toots smote his ear.

The orderly had been sent double-quick across the parade to summon the offender, who reported tremblingly, his black face turning an ashy gray, his knees quaking.

“You enlisted as a bugler?” the colonel had demanded.

“Yes, sah, Colonel. I’s e been a-bugling three ’listments.”

“Well, you take that blankety-blank bugle of yours and go two miles out of the garrison and blow those calls from reveille to taps, until you know how to do it!”

“Yes, sah, Colonel.” The bugler had saluted and withdrawn. He had practised.

And Colonel Shafter, trudging now along the road, knew that he had practised well.

Down the back line of the officers’ homes the commander limped painfully. Across the valley

Lieutenant Gerald Stanley raced after a Hambletonian team. The race ended at the stable door of the ranch, with the bays, neck-and-neck, two lengths ahead of Tiswin.

The amazed rancher stood at the big stable door.

“How are you, Lieutenant? What’s your haste?”

“This team of yours got away from the colonel,” Jerry grinned.

The story was soon told, and the ranchman slapped his knee and chuckled. Together they examined the lathered horses and found them uninjured, and left them to the stableman to be rubbed down and blanketed.

It was sunset. A bell sounded.

“They ought to cool for an hour or so. Come on in and have dinner,” suggested the rancher. “Besides,” he added with another chuckle, “you’d better stay till after taps and get them to the stables before another bugle call.”

“Darn it all, I wanted to get back,” the young officer grinned ruefully as they went into the courtyard together. “There’s a new girl in the garrison.”

## Chapter VI

### THE UNEXPECTED

**B**ONITA had been away at a convent school for five years, but the day after her return the very walls seemed to reflect her joyous youth, and Aunt Jane paused often in her work to listen to the snatches of song and girlish laughter.

Mrs. Duncan, sitting sedately in the front room with a bit of embroidery in her hands, smoothed her carefully dressed hair after Bonita, bubbling with happiness, had danced into the room, whirled about, top-fashion, and suddenly flung her arms about her guardian's shoulders and kissed her cheek.

"Bonita"—there was a trace of irritation in the tone—"you really must not be so impetuous. I do not approve of emotional displays. But that does not mean that I care less for you or that you are not as welcome in our home as our own daughter would have been had she lived."

"I understand, Aunt Marcia," the girl replied quietly. "I will try to remember."

She moved about the room for a few moments, pretending to arrange the sheets of music that she



had just carried in from her trunk. Then slowly she returned to her own room where old Jane was importantly superintending Lewis, the striker, as he adjusted a loose window screen.

“Dar now, honey-chile! Ain’t no wasp gwinter git in heyah. Ah recommember how scairt yo’ wuz ’bout ’em eber since yo’ an’ Mastah Roy done poked a stick inter de wasp nest. Lawsy! Lawsy!”

“And I still am afraid of them, the nasty mean things!”

Her shudder was no pose. Tarantulas might spring, centipedes scurry across the floor, and the diamond-backed rattler block her path; but not one of these was so terrible as a wasp. Already she had discovered that Fort Grant was well-populated with the pests.

It was a busy day. Unpacking her trunks and arranging the mementos of school days about her walls and on the mantel, Bonita had no thought of anything else until Mrs. Duncan entered and suggested a short walk before dinner. Roy and his father had appeared at noon, only to vanish again, victims to official duties.

Bonita, with white lace parasol above her hatless, curly head, walked sedately down the officers’ line beside Mrs. Duncan. But the girl’s eyes were keenly alert, and her mind was full of curiosity about Roy’s classmate who had been so mysteriously absent the previous day.

Roy's letters from the time he had entered the Academy had been full of enthusiasm about his classmate and friend. Their assignment to the same regiment had been a matter of jubilation with Roy, and among the treasures unpacked from Bonita's trunk had been two large photographs of Roy and his friend, taken in their newly acquired cavalry uniforms just after they had been commissioned as officers.

And Roy's conversations with Stanley had given that young man a vague and conflicting impression of a dark-eyed girl with rebellious curls and a wonderful voice—a girl who could ride like a Comanche and make a marksman's score on target range—a bully pal, but hardly the kind of girl one prefers in the ballroom or on a moonlit porch.

Seventeen! She was neither child nor woman. An awkward age for any man who wishes to be polite to a girl on account of his friend—and especially difficult with such a girl as Roy had described most vividly.

Stanley scowled as he strode along the walk, his sabre clanking at his heels, for he was officer of the day. He knew that it was up to him to make a formal call on Miss Curtice that evening, sometime between retreat and tattoo. The coming of this foster sister of Roy would break up much of the intimacy between the two men and interfere with many care-free hours.

Immersed in gloomy forebodings, he stalked along, his eyes fixed upon the gravel walk, when suddenly he recoiled.

A girl in white dress, brandishing a white lace parasol, had dashed full force against him.

“Oh! Oh! Oh!” she gasped, waving the parasol in frantic circles and paying no attention to the man whose arms had caught her, and in fact, who still held her.

Had he moved a step he would have literally dragged her by the hair of her head, for a strand of soft, curly brown hair was caught on an imposing brass button that bore a spread eagle and the letter C.

“Don’t move.” Stanley jerked off his white cotton glove and attempted to untangle the hair.

“I know how Absalom felt,” a little ripple of laughter answered, and Stanley tried to get a glimpse of the lowered face. Roy was right. She had a wonderful voice. “A wasp was after me!”

“Blessed wasp!”

She glanced up sideways and he looked into twinkling brown eyes. His fingers were clumsy, but at last the curl was free.

“Thank you,” she smiled. “I know you must be Lieutenant Stanley, Roy’s friend. I am Bonita Curtice.”

“Bonita!”

Mrs. Duncan was beside the girl. Stanley swept off his cap. Bonita saw that his light hair had a

wave and a glint in it, and that his forehead was broad and fair where the vizer of his forage cap had shaded it from the Arizona sun.

“Bonita,” the lady’s tones were exasperated, “you simply *must* learn to control your emotions.”

The culprit flushed guiltily, and Mrs. Duncan’s all-seeing eyes moved from the girl to the young officer. “There is a long hair on the button of your blouse, Mr. Stanley.”

He looked down. “Oh, yes! That is my decoration of the Ancient and Honourable Order of the Wasp,” he announced solemnly.

Mrs. Duncan sniffed, if dignity such as hers ever did sniff. Bonita’s eyes danced with laughter and a dimple appeared on guard beside a tempting mouth.

The older woman bowed formally. “Come, Bonita.”

The girl obediently resumed the interrupted promenade, but Stanley turned from the direction in which he had been hurrying before the collision.

“You were not going our way, Mr. Stanley?” Mrs. Duncan’s voice and eyes challenged him to deny the charge.

“I wasn’t but I am,” came his prompt reply, and he gazed at her serenely as he fell into step beside the girl.

Stanley was irrepressible, but the little air of self-assurance was not egotism. It was the unconscious outcropping of youth that had found life a smooth

path; youth that had accepted without question the favours of the gods, totally unaware that such things were favours.

Militantly Mrs. Duncan edged between them, but her compressed lips had no effect on the gay spirits of Bonita and Stanley. They reached the gate of The Folly, and as the young officer lifted his cap, Bonita held out her hand impulsively. Mrs. Duncan's frown was unobserved.

"I will see you this evening at the hop." Stanley was still holding the girl's hand and smiling down into her face. "Please save a lot of dances for me."

"Come, Bonita," warned a voice from the porch. "Dinner will soon be ready."

"I'll save all I can." Then, with a swift glance at Mrs. Duncan's vanishing back, she added quickly: "All that Aunt Marcia will let me save."

Running into the house Bonita lost no time in gaining her own room and opening her closet. Breathlessly she gloated over the array of dainty frocks—white, blue, rose—and slippers to match. She clasped her hands in girlish delight.

Which should she wear for her first dance?

Old Jane loomed anxiously. "Honey-chile, yo' dinnah is gittin' spiled, an' Miss' Duncan done sent me to tell yo' she's waitin', an' de captain an' Mister Roy, dey's waitin', too."

Even as Bonita obeyed the summons, she turned

to cast a final glance at the gowns visible in the closet. The blue one—the rose—the white——

Not until dinner was over did she decide upon the rose gown, and as she danced down the hallway of the Folly her heart kept time with her feet.

Though a pen be dipped in the colours of the rainbow to write a description of a girl's first dance in an army garrison, the words would look sombre, and when Bonita returned home that night Aunt Jane, unfastening the rose-coloured gown, gazed with adoring eyes at the radiant face.

“Honey-chile, did yo' done hab a nice time a-dancin'?”

“Oh, it was wonderful! Wonderful!” she answered softly, and her eyes sparkled brilliantly.

After the girl had been tucked into bed, the old woman puttered about, hanging up the gown and arranging the room.

“Ah cain't fin' one ob yo' glubs,” she announced finally.

“Oh, never mind it. I have lots more. Good-night.”

But at that very moment, down in a room of the bachelors' quarters, Lieutenant Gerald Stanley was contemplating a long white kid glove. The fingers curved as though a warm, small hand were still within the soft kid.

“I'll give it back to her in the morning,” he remarked virtuously, as though that were not the

very reason why he had surreptitiously appropriated the article.

Even Mrs. Duncan could not object to having a lost glove returned as soon as possible. Why, Miss Curtice might be worried over losing it!

## Chapter VII

### THE BARBED-WIRE LANE

**B**ONITA, dressed in her riding habit, came out on the porch of The Folly and stood looking across the valley to where the purple-shadowed mountains cut a jagged line against the clear blue sky. The lure of long, dim trails enthralled her, and there were few days that she did not gallop across the flat or ride up the steep trail to the top of Mount Graham. And always Roy and Jerry rode with her.

She went down the steps to where the three horses now waited. Her own horse, Don, twisted his neck and watched Roy jerk the sidesaddle. Slowly Don inflated his sides as Roy's forefinger slipped beneath the girth. But the young officer was wise to Don's tricks, and tightened the girth without pity.

Bonita always insisted that "when you know a horse there is nothing to fear from him," and she knew Don. Another authority on horses, even among cavalrymen, was Captain Kern, Stanley's troop commander. It was an axiom of Kern's



that "A man is known by the company he keeps—and a rider by his horse."

And the three horses waiting at the gate of the Folly were as different as their owners.

Don, high-headed and hard-mouthed when coerced, was a bay of Kentucky breeding, with racing instincts from his mother and speed beyond that of any other horse at Fort Grant.

Stanley's spirited mount had been well-named Tiswin, after an intoxicant made by the Apache Indians. This liquor was produced from a mash made of young green corn or barley, crushed and allowed to ferment. The insidious drink was calculated to rouse the worst traits of Apaches or whites. Tiswin, prohibited by the Government, was brewed secretly, and when tiswin was ripe, trouble loomed for soldiers and settlers.

Tiswin, Stanley's horse, was a large strawberry roan with muscles that bunched and quivered under a sleek skin. Racing blood and mustang had produced a one-man horse with endurance, speed, and intelligence. He had been classed as an "outlaw" at the Diamond H ranch, and the young officer had bought the horse at half his real value; but even that had been a stiff figure for a second lieutenant.

Comet, the third horse, was a stolid, handsome trooper, reliable under every test. The name had been selected by Stanley, not because of Comet's speed but because of the long, flowing tail; and Roy

Duncan accepted Stanley's choice of name for the horse.

Bonita, in conventional riding habit, jockey cap, and white gauntlets, slipped a loop over her right wrist: from this guard hung a delicately carved ivory-handled whip—a gift from Jerry Stanley. Her right hand grasped the horn of her sidesaddle, the left rested on Roy's shoulder. Stooping, he held his left palm for her foot, and she rose lightly to the saddle.

The three riders swung at a brisk gallop from the garrison, past the stables, and turned on a road that led toward the valley.

They had ridden several miles when Don became restive. Snorting, he shook his head and began to fight the bit. But Bonita, familiar with his tricks, pulled him down to an even gait with the other horses. Though he appeared submissive for a short distance, there were red flecks of anger in his eyes. Then he thrust his nose forward violently, twisted his lean neck, took the bit in his teeth, and bolted.

Bonita flung a merry word and a laugh over her shoulder.

“Don't try to keep up with me!” she called, and was off like the wind with the two men following her.

Jerry and Roy knew that her saddle was firm; but a five-strand barbed wire fence, bristling with vicious points only a few inches apart, was tautly

stretched on either side of the road, and presented a terrible danger if Don should indulge in his trick of jumping sidewise. On the unfenced flat the girl could handle him in any emergency.

Why on a prairie the lane had been made so narrow was a mystery to all save the man who had built the fences. Only one horseman could safely pass a single team, while miles of prairie reached on either side of the road.

Confident of the girl's horsemanship, her companions kept far enough back to give her a clear field but not too far away to reach her in case of an emergency.

The road lay straight ahead to the end of the reservation, four miles beyond the fort. There the wire lane terminated, and a little general store which faced it compelled a sharp turn. As the riders neared the store a drunken man reeled out of it, climbed uncertainly on the seat of an open buckboard, and turned his team toward the lane.

The half-broken broncos pulled back against the breast-pole. Muddled with liquor, the driver laid his whip furiously across their flanks. The team reared and lunged madly down the lane toward Bonita, who tried to rein her horse sharply to the right of the team, preferring to be brushed against the wheels of the vehicle, if it came to that, rather than the barbs on the stirrup side of her saddle.

Jerry, keenly alert, turned white and caught his lip

between his teeth to keep from crying out. But he heard Roy's startled exclamation.

"God!"

Then Tiswin leaped under the spurs.

Don held stubbornly to the middle of the road.

The driver of the buckboard, suddenly sobered, struggled to control his fright-crazed team. It was useless. The light rig careened from side to side—a collision was inevitable.

Then above the noise of the rattling wagon and clanking harness, above the pounding of galloping hoofs of five maddened horses racing furiously, the man on Tiswin heard her calling to him:

"Jerry!"

Goaded by merciless spurs, the roan horse gained by terrific bounds. Slowly his nose crept past Don's flanks and reached his shoulder.

Neck and neck the two horses ran. The dust from their flying hoofs filled the air.

The driver of the buckboard saw them coming and, with a hoarse cry, dropped the reins of his team and threw his arm across his face. The lines dragged on the ground.

Jerry's heart was in his throat, but he thrilled with pride at the dauntless figure that faced the approaching team. Her one swift glance met his; there was no fear in her eyes.

He shifted his reins to his right hand. Understanding, she freed her foot from the slipper-stirrup;

in a moment he had caught and lifted her from Don's back to his own saddle.

Bonita, who had never fainted in her life, lay white and still in Stanley's arms. Half-dazed, she heard him whisper her name; then she knew that his lips touched her cheek, but she did not open her eyes.

Then she heard Roy's anxious voice, "Is she all right?"

## Chapter VIII

### JUANA GONZALES

**B**ONITA sat on the porch, an open book on her lap. But the romance written on the pages was forgotten in her day dreams.

A familiar whistled strain woke her suddenly, and a flush mounted her cheeks as she turned to watch for the whistler. But the thick clinging vines shut him from sight. She waited.

The steps slowed near the gate of The Folly, turned toward the porch, and came up the stair.

“That pink dress of yours would be a bad thing to wear if you were out scouting,” commented Stanley, seating himself on the top step of the porch as the girl deserted the rocker and sat down near him.

But conversation was prevented by a childish voice calling insistently, “Miss Bonita! Miss Bonita!”

“Why, here’s Dorothy!” The girl turned with a smile and held out her hand.

But five-year-old Dorothy’s hand was firmly held by a Mexican girl, whose face, though pretty, was coarse and sullen. The child battled determinedly.

“You lemme alone! I wanner go to Miss Bonita!”

“What on earth is the matter?” Bonita hastened down the steps.

“Her mother wants her and she won’t come.” The maid’s voice was more angry than the occasion seemed to warrant.

“I won’t—I won’t—I won’t!” wailed the rebel, increasing her efforts to break away.

The nursemaid picked her up bodily, but small fists and kicking feet beat such a fierce tattoo that the girl set her down with considerable emphasis. The child rushed to Bonita, clinging and crying.

“What is it, Dorothy?” Bonita put her arm around the little figure and brushed the curls back from the tear-drenched eyes.

“I don’t wanner go home. I want to stay wif you.”

“She was running away and Mrs. Crane sent me after her,” the Mexican girl explained sullenly.

“Oh, I’ll tell you what to do.” Bonita spoke brightly. “You go home now with Juana, and to-morrow morning bring your doll and dishes and we’ll have a tea party. I’ll coax Aunt Jane to make some little cakes and I’ll tell you a new story!”

“What about?” Already Dorothy’s troubles had vanished in the alluring prospect.

“Wait and see”—mysteriously.

“I wanner stay now.”

“No, dear. I am going riding this morning, so you must run along with Juana and come to-morrow morning.”

Satisfied, Dorothy lifted her face for the customary kiss; then waving her chubby hand she skipped down the front line toward her home. The Mexican girl lingered, but she was not looking at Dorothy or Bonita. Her mocking, provocative glance was upon the face of the man beyond Bonita's shoulder—Jerry Stanley.

Although not catching the meaning of that stare, instinctively Bonita crimsoned. Juana tilted her head slightly and turned slowly away, but cast a lingering side glance at the man. A smile was on her lips as she swung voluptuously on her way. Bonita looked after the departing figure. How dared Juana Gonzales look at Jerry in that way!

It is difficult now to hark back to the demure 'eighties, when innocence and ignorance were synonyms, and a girl was kept until her marriage morning completely unaware of the mysteries of love and life—matters which to-day are open books. Adhering strictly to mid-Victorian standards, Mrs. Duncan had kept all knowledge of evil from the girl who was her ward. Five years in a convent had nurtured the same ideal. All of Bonita's short life it had been everybody's business to keep her like the sleeping princess in the enchanted garden. Yet a prince had found and wakened her with the touch of his lips.

And with that kiss had awakened knowledge and the heart of a woman ready to share any fate—



pillow of earth, tent of stars, primitive hardships of frontier army post, dangers along wagon trail, desert sand, rugged mountains, isolated garrisons, with always the menace of lurking Indians. But far greater than any and all of these, the courage to let go of best-loved hands when duty called.

It was this newly awakened Bonita who stared after the Mexican girl.

“I have to work on my muster rolls.”

Jerry's voice roused her to the consciousness that he was standing beside her. The touch of formality in his voice woke a feeling of restraint of which both became suddenly aware as Stanley went on his way.

Bonita's eyes held a thoughtful look as she turned into the Folly.

Stanley was also thoughtful when he reached his own quarters and entered his unlocked room, where there was nothing to tempt a thief: an army bunk similar to those in the barracks but with a white spread on it; a quartermaster's dresser painted dark brown; a plain wooden table covered with a large blue blotter; three yellow wooden chairs, also the property of the Government, as was attested when the chairs, inverted, displayed the burnt letters Q. M. D.

These articles of furniture, with a rough rack for books, constituted Lieutenant Gerald Stanley's home.

It was no easy pull for even a chap who did not drink or sit in at the great American game of poker to get out of the unavoidable debts incurred at graduation through having to buy numerous expensive uniforms and equipments; especially for a cavalryman, who was compelled to have high-priced riding boots, saddle, and a horse.

Stanley surveyed the room. Then, jerking off his cap he tossed it on the bunk and sat down at the table. For a while he sat industriously covering clean sheets of paper with pencil marks, his eyebrows knit as though he were deep in military problems of national importance. Large sheets of muster rolls lay on the table, but the figures that absorbed him had no connection with them.

The problem he was trying to solve was how long it would take a second lieutenant of the Tenth Cavalry to get out of debt and save enough money to furnish the one room and kitchen to which his rank entitled him; and, if the garrison were not crowded, he might get an extra room.

Muster rolls were the devil but they were nothing in comparison to the other problem that he faced.

## Chapter IX

### GERONIMO'S CRIMSON TRAIL

**I**T WAS the second week in June when the renegade Apaches encamped in the State of Sonora, Mexico, a short distance from Guadalupe Cañon, where a few days earlier they had surprised a detachment of three troops of the Fourth Cavalry under Captain Hatfield, from whom they obtained much plunder.

Among other articles, a number of new-style guns with pistol-clutch stocks had created great interest among Geronimo's followers, and as the plunder from the fight was added to the spoils of various raids in Arizona and Mexico, each of the Apaches watched eagerly, hoping that one of these guns might fall to his share.

Of the three piles arranged, Mangus laid no claim to any spoils collected in Arizona Territory. That had been agreed upon at the start of the outbreak.

The perfunctory harmony that existed at first between Natchez, Geronimo, Josanie, and Mangus had soon grown into open distrust on the part of Mangus, and now only a breath was necessary to fan

the smouldering spark of hostility into a flame of bitter enmity.

It was no secret to any of the Chiricahuas that the followers of Mangus had shared his reluctance to join Geronimo. White men as well as Indians were aware of the craftiness and unreliability of the old medicine man. But when Mangus had hesitated to take part in the outbreak, Geronimo had reminded him of a pledge given by the Chiricahuas to their old chief, Cochise.

It was a pledge that every child in the Chiricahua tribe understood. In the days of Cochise, the great chief of the Chiricahua Apaches, the tribe was on friendly terms with both white men and Mexicans, and under these conditions had accepted an invitation to a great feast at a big mine in Mexico.

The feast was to celebrate a pledge of friendship between the mine owners and the Chiricahuas. Laughing and talking, the Indians—men, women, and little children—squatted elbow to elbow, enjoying the feast. None of them was armed.

A hundred yards away a man stood carelessly beside a heap of pack saddles and blankets. His hand lay across them and he smiled as he watched the Indians, who did not suspect that beneath the saddles was hidden a small cannon loaded with nails, slugs, and bits of broken glass.

The chatter and laughter of those who feasted were interrupted by the cannon's roar.

Men, women, and children screamed in agony. Shots from rifles mingled with their death cries. Only a few escaped without being injured.

The story of that treachery was carried to Cochise, and he with all of the Chiricahuas swore vengeance against the Mexicans. And when Geronimo reminded Mangus of the pledge, Mangus had stipulated that there should be no depredations on the American side of the border. It was not because of any friendship for Americans that Mangus had pressed this point, but because his superior intelligence and more logical mind had warned him that fighting the American soldiers would be a losing game and invite annihilation.

The pledge was given, and broken within ten days. Again and again it had been broken.

Then Josanie, in a spectacular effort to attain equal importance with Natchez and Mangus, had taken ten picked men and crossed the border from Mexico into Arizona. A network of vigilant troops guarded the American side, and Mexican rurales and regulars patrolled their own side. But Josanie, with the ingenuity of his race, had eluded them.

He reported how he had not only slipped past the soldiers of two countries, but had actually reached the reservation at Fort Apache, where he had killed six White Mountain Apaches almost within sight of the fort itself.

The straight, coarse Indian hair on the blood-

stiffened scalps that he carried proved the truth of his boast.

Nearly two hundred captured horses had been added to the Chiricahua pony herd during Josanie's trip over twelve hundred miles in a space of four weeks.

He looked at Mangus defiantly and flung on the ground the scalps of thirty-eight white men and women.

"Americans, not Mexicans," he taunted.

Mangus looked at the scalps. His eyes flashed and his men crowded about him, muttering angrily. It was a thing unprecedented in Indian history; for an Indian's pledge in those days was more rigidly kept than the average white man's oath.

Outnumbered six to one, the men who followed Mangus were ready to fight, but he checked them with a commanding gesture.

Geronimo rose slowly and walked over to where three heaps of booty were stacked. Plunder acquired in Mexican raids—food, guns, saddles, blankets, and ammunition—had been sorted for distribution. In another place were the spoils from American raids.

The war chief, with a peculiar smile, motioned Natchez to the largest portion of the Mexican loot. Natchez and his adherents took possession of it.

Again Geronimo pointed, nodding at Josanie,

who swaggered past Mangus with an insolent smile. Mangus ignored him and gazed steadily at Geronimo. Their eyes met.

Then with a gesture of contempt, Geronimo indicated the third and smallest share of the Mexican plunder.

Mangus rose to his great height, his arms were folded across his chest, and he frowned down at the scalps lying near his feet.

Geronimo's eyes glittered in triumph. He stooped and picked up a small clod of earth and crumbled it deliberately, letting the particles fall slowly to the ground. It was the sign of a repudiated pledge.

Mangus strode past him, plucked a twig from a mesquite bush and tossed it scornfully away.

Not a word was spoken.

Stooping, Mangus touched the ground with his index finger and drew two sharply diverging lines in the soft dust. And those who had followed him, as well as those who watched silently, knew that the path of Mangus would forever lie apart from the trail of Geronimo and Natchez.

He rose and gazed steadily upon the group of Apaches back of Geronimo. Then followed by those who were still loyal, Mangus, the Big One, turned away forever from the camp of the Chiricahuas and from the tribe of his forefathers.

Geronimo watched him with a look that was half dread, half satisfaction. He had driven out the

man he most feared and envied, but a man whose power the war chief did not underestimate.

Mangus had stood determinedly between Geronimo and his war upon the Americans. So Mangus had to be crushed.

Mangus estranged weakened Geronimo's band, but Mangus dominant would have been the only alternative.

As Geronimo had swept away the spider web across the entrance of the wickiup the night the four chiefs had plotted, so he had thrust aside the only man who might interfere with his plans and ambition to become the absolute power of all the Apache tribes.



## Chapter X

### THE SYCAMORE TREE

**W**HILE the soldiers and officers in actual pursuit of the hostiles rode day and night, social life in the various garrisons of Arizona remained practically unchanged. But the orderly assigned to distribute the mail groaned under heavy sacks of conjugal letters, and the informal weekly hops were abandoned on account of scarcity of men.

Bonita practised target shooting and took long rides with Roy and Jerry; for neither Captain Duncan's troop nor that of Captain Kern had as yet been ordered on field duty.

The first break in the care-free days of the three young people occurred when Captain Duncan was ordered to scout toward Fort Apache in an effort to intercept Josanie. Roy, second lieutenant of his father's troop, accompanied him.

During the time that Roy was absent from the garrison, Jerry and Bonita, free from the slight restraint of a third person, drifted rapidly into an intimate companionship which neither of them paused to measure.

Through the day, Jerry would frequently stop for a few moments when his way led past the Folly. If he were officer of the day he contrived to reach the porch on which the girl waited, so that he would have time before guard mounting for a short chat. Days when he was not on duty at that hour, and the band played its regulation extra, which was generally a dance, the rough board floor of the porch could not mar the pleasure of the two dancers.

But there were emotions deeper than these; hours when Bonita's music filled The Folly; and Jerry, seated where he could watch her face, fought his desire to tell her the love which, fanned to life in an instant, was now like a great fire burning in his breast.

And there were evenings when they sat on the porch steps under the silvery sheen of Arizona stars, when words died on their lips, but the very silence, like a presence, brooded over and enfolded them.

Two weeks had elapsed since Roy had gone with the troops. Jerry came whistling blithely down the line toward The Folly, where Bonita stood in her pink gown among the morning-glory vines.

"That Mexican song came this morning. I'll come in and we'll try it," he announced, waving a sheet of music.

They entered the living room and Bonita, seated at the piano, ran her hands lightly over the keys. Something of her heart seemed in the tips of her

fingers and the notes responded to her mood as she sang:

“Where wilt thou go, my agile little swallow?  
Thy wings would tire if long thy flight should be.  
Oh, if wind and storm should bring thee pain and anguish,  
If seeking shelter, none be found for thee,  
Where wouldst thou go?”

“Ah, come to me, a soft, warm nest I offer,  
Where all the wintry season will pass thee by,  
For, also, I wander in regions so lonely,  
Mid cold and tempest, and have no wings to fly.  
Ah, come to me.’”

She whirled about on the piano stool:

“I had no idea you could sing! Why didn’t you tell me that your voice had been trained?”

“Oh! Was I singing?” he laughed. “Well, any man might make music of those words, if—if he sang them—to the right girl.”

A red flush swept under his tan and the girl’s lids fell till her long lashes lay on her cheeks. Jerry fumbled confusedly in his pocket for a pencil, and copied the words of the song on the back of an envelope.

“We must learn the Spanish. It sounds like a different song,” he said.

Tucking the envelope in his blouse pocket, he left the room and ran down the steps, whistling the refrain of the song—

“Ah! come to me, a soft, warm nest I offer,  
Where all the wintry season will pass thee by——”

It still echoed in Bonita's thoughts when Jerry returned and claimed a promised walk up the Grant Creek. It was a crystal mountain stream that sprang from the rocky heart of old Mount Graham, whose snowcapped head rose proudly ten thousand feet above the level of the far-distant sea. Like a silver-winged sprite the water danced and sang over jewel-coloured pebbles, between boulders worn smooth by its soft touch, or glided into little pools for a moment's rest before it hurried on to mingle with the hidden river that flowed beneath the valley.

Bonita and Jerry, rambling beside the creek, reached a point where the shallow ripples eddied between large stepping stones very systematically arranged.

“I wonder who found this place and fixed these stones?” said Bonita.

“I did,” he replied. “There's an old sycamore I wanted to show you, and I didn't want you to cross on anything as common as a bridge.” He held out his hand for hers.

“Splendid!” she laughed, laying her hand in his, and they made their way across the flat, dry stones.

On the opposite side of the creek a venerable sycamore towered high above its companions, its branches far-spreading and its white roots, like gnarled fingers,

thrust down as if to clutch and hold the ever-eluding stream.

As they stood beneath the leafy canopy, Stanley took a tiny leather book from his pocket and held it out. "Have you seen this?" he asked.

Bonita glanced at the title and shook her head.

"It is beautiful. Let me read some of it to you."

"Please."

They sat at the foot of the tree, and as he opened the book she looked over his arm and saw a monogram on the front page—a monogram in red.

Bonita looked up with a puzzled frown. "What is that? I can't make it out."

He leaned nearer and a strand of her hair touched his hand, which trembled, as with the stem of a leaf he traced the red outlines.

"Can't you see it?" he asked softly. "Your initials and mine—together. Here's the J, and there's the B."

She turned away tremulously. He took the book and began reading.

The world drifted away; time ceased; the universe held only two—themselves.

So, in an elder day, Paola read to Francesca.

The sun crept slowly down the western sky. The stream slipped softly on its way to hide in the heart of the valley and carry its message to the sleeping seed. A mocking bird trilled softly as it guarded a nest hidden among the sycamore's leaves. The

breeze that had lingered to kiss the girl's flushed cheek stirred the last page of the book as the man handed it to her.

"I wanted to show you this tree because I am going to mark it," Stanley said. "The woodsman in the virgin forest puts his mark upon a tree and no other man may claim it. This is our tree—our tree. Do you hear, Bonita?"

He read his answer in her eyes, and she stood beside him as he cut upon the smooth, silvery bark the same monogram which was in the little book she held against a heart that fluttered like a captive bird.

"Our tree!" he repeated as he finished his task.

They looked at each other with understanding eyes. A sudden flush tinged his cheeks; the girl's breath quickened.

"Some day we will come back to it together." He bent to hear her low "Yes."

The old tree heard the pledge. High above their heads its branches trembled like aged and holy hands in benediction. Only the breeze caught the sycamore's whisper:

"Nothing shall keep you apart. Though you travel distant trails while unshed tears blind your eyes and grief rends your hearts, your love shall triumph. You will not be lonely in your sleep, your eyes will not ache, neither will your hearts be troubled, for in dreams your hands will touch and you shall find each other."

A leaf, the gift of the tree, fell at their feet. The golden banner of day was furled. Hand in hand the man and the girl recrossed the stepping stones.

They had glimpsed a vision of pure and perfect love shining on eternal heights, and they walked in the haze of its white radiance.

## Chapter XI

### WHO WAITING, SERVE

**W**HILE Mangus with his loyal followers struck trail into the heart of northern Mexico, Geronimo's band slipped from place to place, leaving in their wake mutilated bodies of those who travelled alone, or cattle slaughtered and the loin cut out while the rest of the carcass lay untouched.

Editorials in local newspapers denounced the dilatory management of the campaign, and accused the military of apathy, while the army men, rank and file, growled helplessly in homes, the club, and the barracks.

In the officers' club at Fort Grant a number of the senior officers had gathered between duties, to growl ad libitum and incidentally watch a game of billiards between Captain Kern and Captain Keyes.

"Any of you see that swat in the Tucson paper yesterday?" Kern asked as he leaned across the billiard table and made a shot that only an expert could hope to put over.

The captain had been the one man in the regiment who could make that play until Stanley had joined



the Tenth and had beaten his troop commander. But the old officer was a sport. He knew how to win and how to lose.

Kern was one of the most rigid disciplinarians of the regiment. Even his nose was dominant. It was a military nose, acutely belligerent and in itself tantamount to a declaration of war—the kind of a nose which has always led the United States Army to victory!—curved high in the centre, like an eagle's beak; and behind that arch were two surprisingly mild blue eyes, which though usually benign as a bishop's could turn as fierce as an Apache's on the warpath.

Kern's profanity was an accomplishment. He could, when the occasion warranted, swear with the sonorous rhythm of a Gregorian chant, or with the soft melliflence of a lover whispering to a lady.

Now, as he hung his cue in the rack, he repeated his question, and Keyes smiled grimly.

“One paper?” he drawled. “They've all slammed the army ever since the campaign started. What surprises me is that they have anything left to say.”

Nothing ever accelerated Keyes' speech. But his fellow officers declared that if he had to go into action, Keyes would win the fight before he could complete the order—“Charge!” Kindly, whimsical, talented, brave, he was that anomaly, a man without an enemy.

“This paper hits a new note,” Kern went on.

“Takes a fling at us affluent, commissioned, feather-bed soldiers who loaf around the garrisons and enjoy lives of luxurious ease on the taxes of the helpless, slaughtered citizens!”

“Wow!” retorted Keyes, “and we poor devils are scratching to buy shoes for our children and pay our commissary bills!”

Kern was enjoying himself. “The editor suggests that the citizens of Arizona appeal to their representatives in Washington to take a hand in the campaign at that end.”

“The army is being ruined by a lot of confounded politicians who do not know the muzzle from the stock of a gun,” Duncan interjected sarcastically. He thrust a bit of twisted paper through the stem of his pipe as viciously as though he were spearing an editor. It was a sore subject with Duncan ever since Josanie had slipped past his troop.

Wrathfully he snapped his teeth on the stem of his favourite pipe and the bowl rolled to the floor. The polished mahogany-coloured surface of the meer-schaum, which Duncan had lovingly cultivated for many years, showed a large white spot—a chip. The tragedy was too deep for mere words.

Duncan’s brother officers regarded him sympathetically, even mournfully. It was a fitting climax to a gloomy day. For the army was restive and flinched under the unjust and indiscriminate criticisms—even abuse—of public and press.

While the older officers growled in the club room, Stanley and Roy Duncan, in the front room of The Folly, were as vehemently threshing over the campaign conditions, and Bonita, in a transparent blue frock that veiled yet revealed her white throat and rounded, dimpled arms, curled comfortably on the couch near their chairs.

October sunlight streamed through the long French windows facing the porch. A dome-shaped coal-oil lamp with dangling prisms swung above a table littered with books and magazines. Logs burning in the fireplace flashed upon the prisms, which reflected dancing, multicoloured lights upon whitewashed walls. Comfortable easy chairs, a few good pictures simply framed, an open, upright piano across a corner, and large, bright Navajo-rugs upon the brown-painted floor made a typical and homelike sitting room of frontier army days.

“I had a letter from Jim Hughes,” Stanley spoke. “He writes me that General Crook has been up at Whipple Barracks again, and Jim has been following him around like a hound-pup, asking to be assigned to field duty. Crook told him there was no place for him. Then he begged to be sent out somewhere, if only to sit beside a water hole. And Crook replied that there were more second lieutenants than there were water holes in the department. That settled it!”

“The campaign has been on ever since April,” complained Roy, “and here it is October. Nothing

has been accomplished except to wear out men and horses. We're muzzled and hamstrung and have no votes, so we've got to take our medicine with a grin. Confound the newspapers!"

He walked over to the fireplace, picked up the poker, and attacked the logs as though they were Apaches—or editorial writers.

"For the Lord's sake sing, Bonita," he jerked irritably. "I'm in a tantrum, and 'music hath charms to soothe the savage breast'—sometimes!"

"Anything special for your case?" she asked lightly as she moved toward the piano.

"Something new, if you have it."

While she searched through her music, Roy stood by the fireplace, scowling into the flames, his hands thrust into his trousers pockets. Jerry regarded him soberly, then turned in his chair so that he could watch the girl at the piano.

And Bonita, remembering Jerry's words, "Any man could make music of those words if he sang them to the right girl," now sang the words for him—sang with her heart in her voice:

"Adonde irá veloz y fatigada,  
 La golondrina que de aquí se va.  
 Oh! si en el viento gemiera angustiada  
 Buscando abrigo y no lo encontrara,  
 Junto a mi lecho le pondré su nido  
 En donde pueda la estación pasar,  
 También yo estoy en la región perdido,  
 Oh! Cielo santo y sin poder volar."

“Did I get it right?” she challenged brightly as she faced the two men.

“How did you learn the words?” Roy asked in surprise before Stanley could speak.

“Juana Gonzales, Mrs. Crane’s nursemaid, taught me!”

Roy made a quick, resentful movement. “How in the world did you happen to select that woman for a teacher?” he demanded sharply.

“Why! I wanted to surprise you and Jerry by learning the Spanish words. Juana heard me telling Mrs. Crane, so she volunteered to teach me. I think it was very nice of her. She speaks pure Spanish—Mrs. Crane said so.” And defiantly, “I have arranged for regular lessons from her.”

“That is out of the question.” Roy spoke peremptorily and again attacked the fire.

“For goodness sakes, why?”

“Oh, I just don’t like the idea, Bonita. I—I—hope you won’t have anything to do with her.”

“Roy and I had a notion that you’d let us teach you,” Jerry interposed with a smile, “but I wanted to polish up my accent a bit before we spoke to you about it. Now that the cat’s out of the bag, we might as well get up our little class right away.”

“Oh, that will be splendid!” cried Bonita, with sparkling eyes.

“Bully!” exclaimed Roy. “And, I say, Nita, you don’t mind my being grouchy, do you?”

“Not a bit,” she replied, smiling.

“Gee! Bonita, you’re an angel!” he said, as he and Jerry rose to their feet at the sound of a bugle and started toward the door.

Bonita waved a deprecating hand as they went out, but Jerry lingered a second in the hallway to glance back, and a warm flush dyed her face and white throat at the message she read in his eyes.

## Chapter XII

### CAPTAIN EMMET CRAWFORD

**E**AT, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we scout," had been the slogan of officers who fretted to join in the chase after the Apaches.

Stories of outrages below the Mexican border and in Arizona Territory were constant and proved conclusively that the Chiricahuas were making a blood-red trail in both countries. Stolen horses, slaughtered cattle, Mexican wood-choppers scalped in their little camps, and cowpunchers fired on by concealed hostiles were daily reports.

Just back of garrisons the hostiles flashed their signals by holding and dropping blankets in front of fires, and the smoke message by day, or fire signs at night, could be seen plainly from far-distant points. Yet so skilfully did the Apaches select their signal places that those in the near-by garrisons were totally unaware of their proximity until some irate rancher exploded in bitter criticisms regarding the indifference of officers and soldiers.

The troops doggedly trailing the hostiles were discouraged by the knowledge that an Apache could

thrive where other men would die of thirst or hunger. Mountains made no obstacles to the Indians, who scaled them as flies climb walls. Country unmapped for military or other use had been familiar ground for generations of the Apache tribes. In arid regions they knew where to find water. Cactus furnished food and moisture which sustained them when other men would succumb.

The Indians, able to make almost a hundred miles each day afoot over the roughest mountains, outstripped the infantry and cavalry alike. Their ponies, ridden without mercy until exhausted, were never abandoned until killed. This was no act of mercy, but to prevent possible use by pursuers.

Heavy cavalry horses, accustomed to grain and hay, played out on scanty, dry wild grasses, or limped with torn hoofs over rocky trails. Each soldier had but one horse, and no opportunity to rest or replace it: whereas the Chiricahuas accumulated bands of stolen horses, which they drove along with them to furnish relay mounts.

Such was the situation confronting the army in Arizona Territory the beginning of November, eight months after Geronimo and his followers had jumped the reservation at Fort Apache. Horses were breaking under the terrific physical strain, while the morale of the men was slowly ebbing. With fiendish ingenuity, the Chiricahuas harassed yet evaded them, committing depredations on the American



soil, then slipping across into Mexico. On the other hand, Mexican soldiers pursued to the border and could go no farther without creating possible international complications. A situation of which old Geronimo was fully aware.

“What do you think?” Captain Duncan entered the front room of The Folly where his wife and Bonita were making lists of Christmas presents from numerous catalogues. “Emmet Crawford is here! On his way to Fort Bowie with two companies of Indian scouts. Bound for Mexico!”

“Oh, I am delighted!” Mrs. Duncan turned to her ward. “We haven’t seen him since you were a baby in the old Thirty-ninth at Ship Island. Your mother and father were his most intimate friends and he was devoted to you. But”—she regarded her husband with puzzled eyes—“what is he doing here when the Third is in Texas?”

“General Crook’s request that he be sent back here for special duty. Crawford’s influence in keeping the Apaches from outbreaks was almost hypnotic, I’ve heard. He leaves early in the morning for Fort Bowie but will be over for dinner with us.”

Captain Duncan looked at the clock. “Board of Survey,” he commented as he started for the door, where he paused to add, “I hope we can have the evening alone with him.”

“I’ll see that we do,” replied his spouse, and he knew that he could depend on it.

Mrs. Duncan left Bonita to dust and rearrange chairs and to collect the catalogues they had been studying. In Arizona there are two things a woman can always do—look at catalogues and dust furniture. Possibly winds and sandstorms were dispensations of Providence to prevent ennui.

The commissary, as usual, had closed at one o'clock, so the menu had to be planned expertly. But Jane had often triumphed over closed commissaries and unexpected guests.

Retreat was over before men's steps were heard in the hallway, and Bonita, waiting with Mrs. Duncan, looked up at the tall, gaunt figure in the uniform of a cavalry captain.

Crawford turned toward the girl after he had greeted the captain's wife. His deepset, steel-gray eyes regarded Bonita with searching kindness.

"It makes me feel old, seeing you grown into a young lady," he smiled as he clasped her hand. Then his serious face lightened and he added, "I would have known you anywhere by your eyes and curls and smile. But the last time I saw you, you were small enough to let me kiss you."

"I am not too big now," she answered, and there was no trace of coquetry in the eyes that looked up at him. "Uncle Jim has often told me how you used to carry me around and what chums we once were."

"That has been one of the sweetest memories of

my life," he said earnestly, as he gently pressed a kiss on her white forehead.

In the conversation that followed, memories, like unseen forms, peopled the room until Jane brought them back to the present by announcing dinner.

Seated at the table, Crawford turned to the girl beside him and said, "The very last dinner I shared with your mother and father was at Ship Island when we received our orders—I, to go to the Third, and your father to the Tenth Cavalry. I shall never forget that night. We had a terrible storm and the Gulf was washing under the pilings which supported the officers' quarters. We finally had to leave the house, and I carried you to the bomb-proofs, where we had a number of military prisoners in the stockades. We stayed all night, and the next morning we found that a schooner, which had been anchored on the Mississippi Sound toward the land, had been carried right across the Island and was riding safely on the Gulf side."

"Have you forgotten 'Bleeding Kansas' and Chick?" Captain Duncan's eyes twinkled.

"I have often wondered who did that," his wife laughed.

"Well," Duncan replied slowly, "I have kept one secret from you."

"You always insisted that you did not know," accused Mrs. Duncan.

"What was it?" questioned Bonita eagerly.

“It all started with ‘Bleeding Kansas’,” the captain began, and those at the table knew that a story was coming and even Duncan’s family enjoyed his yarns. “We called him ‘Bleeding Kansas’ when he joined the Thirty-ninth. He was tall, ungainly, and had the most indescribable shade of red hair imaginable. He hailed from Kansas and looked it. With him came a hairless Mexican dog named Chick. Neither Chick nor his owner was popular in the regiment. One night a few second lieutenants visited his quarters while he was absent. Chick was home, but his objection to callers was of no avail. A bottle of mucilage and a roll of cotton batting furnished the covering that nature had failed to provide for Chick.

“‘Bleeding Kansas’ arrived in his usual hilarious frame of mind and Chick rushed to meet him in the dark. But a woolly dog was not familiar. Those who were hiding heard a cuss word and a yelp. Chick’s owner, like Chick, was in the dark mentally and physically. The matches had been removed. An expurgated edition of the monologue might run something like this—

“‘Shoun’s like—hic—hic—Schick—don’ feel like—Schick. Here—hic—hic—Schick. Come here—Schicky—Schick!

“He got matches from his pocket, for there were none in that room anywhere else. I can take an oath to that fact!” Captain Duncan grinned at Crawford, whose face was a study of mirth.

“When poor old ‘Bleeding Kansas’ saw a freak French poodle wagging the queerest tail ever wagged by any dog, he stared wildly and backed against the wall, saying in a quavering voice, ‘I’ve got’ em again. It’s worse than uzzer time. Got stop drinkin’!”

“He tried to dodge the cotton-batting dog that was hopping around him. He staggered around the centre table, dog at heels, and finally Chick dodged under the table and sat up ‘attention,’ then rose on his knotty white legs and ‘walked like a soldier.’ The only two tricks he knew. That identified him!”

“Then what happened?” Mrs. Duncan was determined to learn the whole story.

“‘Bleeding Kansas’ commandeered a bucket of hot water and soaked Chick in it. By the time he finished plucking a Mexican dog, day broke and Chick’s master was sober enough to attend reveille. He made threats of shooting whoever did it, but it remained a dark mystery.”

“Well, you seem pretty well posted,” the captain’s wife commented promptly. “Who did it?”

“Murder will out. I held Chick,” confessed Captain Duncan, “and Ford applied the mucilage while Cooper and Crawford transformed a hairless Mexican dog into a miniature bale of cotton.”

When their laughter had subsided, old jokes, almost forgotten names and incidents formed the conversation. Only a few were left of the ones who had shared the pleasures and privations of those

days at Ship Island—days that had been a part of Bonita's baby life.

Captain Duncan rose to his feet, wine glass in hand.

“Here's to those who are gone!” he said.

Their eyes were misty, as standing they drank the familiar toast to the comrades who had answered the Last Roll Call.

Then the half-emptied glasses were lifted higher as Captain Duncan gave the end of the toast—

“And here's to the next one to go!”

Silently they set the glasses on the table and resumed their places, but a shadow seemed to have fallen upon them all.

Mrs. Duncan, after a few forced sentences, rose and led the way to the front room and, as usual, took up her fancy work, while the men lit cigars.

“Give us some music, Bonita,” Mrs. Duncan spoke, and the tense atmosphere relaxed as the first notes of the girl's song filled the room.

Crawford sat staring into the glowing log fire and the lines of his gaunt face in repose, with its deeply set eyes and heavy dark brows, gave an impression of unutterable weariness. One thin hand lay limply on the arm of his chair, the other held his forgotten cigar.

As he listened to Bonita's exquisite voice, the long-vanished face of a girl he had loved smiled at him from the soft firelight. It was a face that had once

awakened dreams of a home and children—dreams that no one ever knew but himself—dreams that had faded forever. Ah, yes! Eighteen was very young. Too young to die. He had laid a flower in her hand. Maybe she had known when he placed it there—maybe she would see it when she should “wake and remember and understand.”

The music ceased. The dream faded. But Crawford's eyes were serene as he turned to the girl.

“You have a wonderful gift, dear child. It makes one feel that the door to some better world had been left ajar.” He sighed almost imperceptibly, then added with a smile, “I remember how you used to climb into a big rocker and sing and trill like a bird, though you were too small to speak plainly. You could not possibly sing, though, unless you were in that particular chair, and the harder you sang, the faster the chair rocked. I often rescued you at the danger point.”

They laughed at the memory, and Captain Duncan held out a match as he said, “Your cigar is dead, Crawford. Light up and tell us what you have been doing since we last saw you.”

## Chapter XIII

### WHEN DUTY CALLS

**T**HE exchange of experiences over, conversation veered to the topic that engrossed them all—the Geronimo campaign.

“I owe one debt of gratitude to Geronimo,” affirmed Crawford, “for he has given us the chance to be together once more. I was sure that I had left Arizona for good when the Third went to Texas, yet here I am in the thick of the Apache problem again. I am so tired.” He paused and sighed. “So tired that I hoped for a chance to rest. It all seems so futile.”

“Crook’s request for your return to Arizona proves how valuable you are here,” said Captain Duncan warmly.

“What are General Crook’s plans, Captain?” Roy broke in before Crawford could answer. Then apologetically he added, “I beg your pardon, sir. I did not mean to be officious.”

“There is nothing to apologize for,” the older man responded with a kindly glance at the now embarrassed young officer. “General Crook intends



to send a force of a hundred friendly Indians into Mexico. There will be two companies of fifty each, which will include Chiricahua, Warm Springs, and White Mountain Apaches."

"Do you know who will go with you?" Mrs. Duncan spoke, letting her fancy work lie in her lap.

"Lieutenant Maus of the First Infantry and Lieutenant Shipp of the Tenth have been selected to command the two companies. Lieutenant Faison of the First Infantry is to be adjutant, quartermaster, and commissary officer. Doctor Tom Davis goes as medical officer and I will command the entire force. We expect to start from Fort Bowie as soon as General Sheridan inspects us."

"Any special orders?" inquired Captain Duncan between meditative puffs on his pet meerschaum.

"Keep hot on the trail of Geronimo until he has been captured or is forced to surrender. Just that!"

The firelight flickered dully. The smouldering log parted in the centre and rolled into the deep ashes as Crawford's voice went on: "Captain Wirt Davis, of the Fourth, with Lieutenant Hay, will have another hundred Indian scouts—San Carlos and White Mountain in addition to their own troop of the Fourth Cavalry. They will operate in Chihuahua while we cover Sonora. The entire work of the scouts, as you see, will be in Mexico."

"Just between ourselves, what do you think the probable outcome will be?" Captain Duncan had

risen and, taking the poker from the side of the fireplace, struck the log vigorously. A sudden shower of sparks rushed up the chimney. Then, as the blaze gained strength, Duncan settled down once more and turned questioning eyes on the other man.

“Everything depends on the loyalty of our Indian scouts,” was the reply. “It is hard to tell which ones are friendly to Geronimo. Many of them belong to the Chiricahuas and we have to reckon with the tribal spirit, no matter what race is involved.”

“Captain Crawford”—Lieutenant Duncan, who had been listening to the older officers, joined the conversation—“it seems to me that the real problem would lie in having to operate in Mexico. What do you think about that?”

“That is an important issue,” Crawford assented with the gentle courtesy which he always accorded the young officers. “In spite of the gentlemen’s agreement between Mexico and our own country, the feeling down there is very antagonistic toward American soldiers. A perfectly logical sentiment on their part, since they regard our going into their country as tantamount to an invasion by an armed force.”

“I understand that about seventy-five per cent. of the population down there can neither read nor write,” commented Captain Duncan. “Naturally they would be ignorant of any agreement that exists

between the United States and Mexico regarding the present campaign.”

“That is the big risk,” Crawford answered slowly. “In isolated districts the least misunderstanding may precipitate international complications. Because of the peculiar conditions surrounding the sending of this expedition into Mexico, only volunteer officers are being used.”

“You did not volunteer!” exclaimed Mrs. Duncan indignantly.

“I did not volunteer”—he spoke the words very deliberately and quietly, as though he had forgotten that any one besides himself was in the room—“but no officer can decline an official request.” Again the almost imperceptible sigh before he added, “I am very, very tired. When this work is over I want to take a good, long rest.”

“I don’t see why American officers should be sent there!” Mrs. Duncan was vehement, and her husband looked at her in surprise. Rarely did his wife display an emotion. “Everyone knows that no American is safe in Mexico just now. Any army officer from our country, even when authorized by the Mexican Government, may meet death at the hands of irresponsible natives!” Her voice was unsteady and the folded hands in her lap trembled slightly.

“Geronimo has a record established already. Three times he has surrendered and returned to the

reservation with all his plunder, under guarantee of immunity," growled Captain Duncan. "It's certainly enough to discourage the army, and be an incentive for Apache outbreaks. Why"—he spoke sharply—"even your Indian scouts may turn against you down there! What could four white men do against a hundred armed Apaches down in the heart of Mexico?"

"I am reasonably certain that I can trust each scout I have picked to go with me," was Crawford's calm reply. "Still, no one can ever tell. No white man will ever understand the Apaches' peculiar racial code. Tom Horn, whom I have known for a long time, is going to act as interpreter and also chief of scouts. His influence is remarkable. I guess he understands the Apaches as well as any man in this section."

"Everyone speaks well of him," commented Roy.

"Horn's only handicap is that he is a white man. And no white man can tell what is going on under the scalp lock of an Apache." Crawford lifted himself in his chair and gazed earnestly from face to face. "Eskimizeen is proof of that."

"In what way?" questioned Mrs. Duncan.

"Sixteen years ago he killed a rancher named Jones. They were good friends, and the Apache frequently stopped at the ranch. One day, after sharing a meal, the Indian shot Jones without the least provocation. He coolly explained that the act

showed his own courage. That any coward could kill an enemy, but it took a brave man to kill a friend whom he loved!"

"I never heard of such reasoning!" exclaimed Bonita, aghast.

"I wonder how far white men have the right to judge them." Crawford looked at Captain Duncan. "I have honestly tried to be fair-minded and see this problem from both sides. The Indians have not been given a square deal. Ever since the first settlers it has been a policy of civilization by extermination, and they come back at us in the only way they know how. General Miles's report in 1874 hits the nail on the head."

"No man in America has a better right to an opinion on that subject," answered Captain Duncan emphatically.

Crawford nodded thoughtfully. "Our unintelligent handling of the Indians—a mixture of sentimentality and merciless punishment—is a black page of American history. We punish the innocent with the guilty, and the end will only come when the Indians have ceased to exist as a race. They understand this themselves."

Slowly he rose to his feet, his gaunt shadow silhouetted against the white wall as his sombre eyes looked into the firelight.

"Don't think I am morbid"—there was a note of appeal in his deep voice—"but somehow I have a

feeling—a premonition, I might call it—that when I go down there to Mexico, I shall never come back!”

He stood among them, yet alone. Just as his life had been lived from boyhood. No one had ever guessed the hunger in his heart, the craving for human love and understanding, except a little curly-headed baby who had clung to his neck and showered kisses on the grave face pressed against her own. And now she understood, as then. He did not know Bonita was at his side until warm fingers slipped into his own and her cheek was pressed against his sleeve. Crawford looked down and saw the message in her eyes, and a beautiful smile irradiated his grave face. The gap of vanished years was bridged.

The silence of the room was broken by Roy's voice. “Captain Crawford, I would like to make an application to go with you.” The young officer did not wait reply, but turned eagerly toward his father. “Dad, you're my captain. You've got your first lieutenant now. Will you give me permission to go?”

Mrs. Duncan paused in her sewing and looked over at the three men. Her lips parted. But the faintly articulated “Roy” was like a hastily suppressed breath.

Bonita leaned forward with shining eyes. “Good! Good!” she cried. “Oh, I wish I were a man so I could go, too!”

Roy's father cast one swift glance at his wife as she again bent over her work. Then he walked to

the long window and stood staring out into the night.

Crawford watched his old friend, understanding the father's thoughts. He looked at the boy's mother and read the struggle in her heart. Her shoulders sagged pitifully and the stitches in her embroidery were uneven. She was the wife of an officer, the mother of one. Hers was the silent battle in the lonely night hours.

So she did not lift her eyes when her husband turned from the window and said quietly, "All right, Roy, if Captain Crawford wishes to have you with him."

"I shall be glad to have him," Crawford spoke in a formal voice. "I expect to start an hour before reveille, and will request General Sheridan and General Crook to assign you to the command."

The young officer's head lifted proudly.

Crawford regarded the others in the room. No one had moved. The silence was tense. "I hope"—he hesitated slightly—"that none of us will regret that I came here to-day."

He bade the Duncans good-night and turned to Bonita. "Good-bye, little girl. God bless you and make you happy."

His lips touched her forehead, then he turned from the room and passed out of the house into the silence and shadows of the night.

## Chapter XIV

### GOOD-BYE

**B**Y JOVE, I'm glad to get that chance!" exulted Roy when they had returned to the sitting room. "I'll be away before reveille, and if my application is approved, I won't get back here."

Mrs. Duncan stood by the table, and methodically folded her sewing. She placed it in the fancy basket as she said quietly, "I'd better pack your scouting things now."

"A canteen, a toothbrush, and a smile will be about all he will need on a trip like this one," suggested her husband. "The toothbrush will soon become superfluous, but he will hang on to the canteen and—I hope—the smile."

The young officer laid his hand on his father's shoulder. "I'll do my best to play up to your level, Dad!"

"I know you will, Son."

Bonita was gathering scattered music and arranging it in the cabinet, and Roy turned toward her.

"Sleepy, Nita?" he asked.



“Not a bit.”

“Then get a wrap and come on the porch. It’s a bully night.”

Mrs. Duncan studied Roy’s face as the girl left the room, and the mother’s hand reached out involuntarily, then fell to her side. Twice that evening she had watched her son slipping out of her life. Her face was very pale as she turned it away from him. The call of duty—even the risk of death for him—she could stand, but the call of love for another woman was harder to bear.

Even that struggle was not apparent in the smile as she saw Bonita reënter the room with a soft white scarf twisted over her head and shoulders. The mother’s smile did not waver when Roy moved to the girl’s side.

“Turn out the lamp when you come in, children,” she said. “Roy, I will call you in the morning when your coffee is ready.”

“Call me, too, Aunt Marcia,” Bonita waited to look back and speak. “I’ll drink a stirrup cup with him before he starts.”

Outside the house they stood together in silence. The barrack lights were dead, but the stars were brilliant and clear, and velvet shadows lay beneath the cottonwood trees that bordered the driveway. Bonita sat down on the top step, her shoulders against a pillar, her slightly upturned face outlined softly against the darkness of the porch.

To the man sitting at her feet she seemed far away.

“Nita——”

She turned with a smile so frank that he repressed the words he had intended to speak.

“I’ve been hoping to get a chance to do something besides garrison duty, and now, at last, it seems to be coming my way,” he substituted awkwardly.

“It’s fine for you,” the girl responded, “but it will be hard for Aunt Marcia, especially if Uncle Jim is ordered out, too.”

“I’m mighty glad you will be with her.” He paused, then hurried on, “I want to do my share in the campaign, and I want you and Mother to be proud of me.” He forced a short laugh. “Don’t think it’s pure egotism, Nita. I’ve simply got to do something worth while to balance my shortcomings.” His voice trembled with emotion.

“Your shortcomings, Roy, cannot be so very bad. We are all proud of you.” She laid her hand on his and he turned his palm upward so that her fingers rested in his clasp. “Of course you will make good!”

“You will write me?”

“Yes, but there won’t be much to tell. Aunt Marcia will keep you posted about any news in her letters.”

“But I will look for your letters, too,” he insisted.

“Twelve o’clock and all is well!” the call of the sentries echoed through the stilly night.

“We must go in.” The girl was on her feet. “You will need a good night’s rest. I will see you in the morning over our coffee.”

“But I want to talk to you.” He turned a rueful face toward her.

“Not now,” was her smiling answer. “Didn’t you hear that sentry call?”

He followed her into the hall. “I don’t want you to get up in the morning, so it’s good-bye, Nita.”

She looked up into his eyes, then impulsively laid her hands upon his cheeks and drew him down until her lips touched his own.

“Good-night and good-bye, Roy,” she said earnestly. “God bless you and bring you back safely to us all!”

He watched her go along the hall until she reached her own room. Pausing, she looked back and waved her hand.

A mist blurred the light as he turned down the lamp wick. It flickered out and left the room in darkness. The young officer stood irresolutely; then taking his cap from the rack, he hurried down the quiet front line to the bachelors’ quarters where he banged at the door of Stanley’s darkened room.

“Wake up, old man!”

“What the dickens——” the sleeper protested as he woke.

Roy was already lighting the lamp on a table beside the bunk. He dropped into a chair and con-

fronted the blinking, tousled man who slipped back among his pillows, looking very boyish.

“What do you think is up?” jubilated Duncan.

“Evidently you are. It’s the first time since I left the Academy that I’ve gone to bed early, and now you butt in and bust up my slumbers! What’s the matter, son?”

Roy’s news stirred him. “Jiminee! You’re in luck!” said Stanley enviously. “It’s a bully chance! Wish I were going with you, but there’s no such luck. Kern hasn’t any first and says he can’t let me go. I’m too valuable to lose,” he grinned, but his face sobered as Roy told of Crook’s plan to use Indian scouts in Mexico.

“Everything is fixed all right,” ended Roy, as he helped himself to Stanley’s tobacco and paper, rolled a cigarette, and passed it on to his friend. The same thought was in the mind of both. When and where would they share the “makings” again?

“What the devil am I going to do about Juana?” Roy demanded irritably. “She’ll raise Cain after I get away, I’m afraid.”

Stanley puffed silently, and his friend went on: “It’s a damned rotten mess. She wants more money, as usual. She never lets up in her demands.”

“How much have you on hand?”

“I can dig up fifty dollars. That’s all. Will you give her my cheque? I hate like the deuce to ask you, Jerry, but I can’t manage it any other way.

“All right.”

Roy seated himself at the table and filled out the cheque. Stanley accepted the slip of paper, and Duncan went on hastily, “It’s a darn shame for me to bother you this way, and I wouldn’t do it just for myself—I’d face the music. But—oh, hang it—there are the folks——” he broke off suddenly.

“Does this break you, old man?” asked his friend.

“You bet it does! I won’t have an extra sou till next pay day. Tell her she’s got to make this do!”

“Don’t worry over this. You’ve got a big job ahead. Nothing else counts but that. Leave this thing to me.”

Stanley was at his friend’s side. He laid his two hands on Roy’s shoulders and they looked into each other’s eyes.

“Jerry—you’re the best——”

“Shut up!” commanded Stanley, reaching toward a pillow.

“All right. I’m off!”

Together they reached the door. Their hands gripped tightly.

“Good luck, Roy!”

“So long!”

Roy closed the door and walked briskly back to his home, but Stanley sat beside his window staring at the dim outlines of The Folly.

Three chairs instead of four were at the breakfast table that morning in The Folly; and Bonita, enter-

ing the room, felt a lump rise in her throat as she looked at the empty place. It was like a death in the home.

Mrs. Duncan's voice greeted her cheerfully, but her pale face told of a sleepless night. Captain Duncan forced a note of gaiety into the conversation by telling that a thief who had been stealing money and cartridges had been identified as the troop's pet crow.

"Lucky they caught him at it yesterday," concluded the officer, "for circumstantial evidence warranted charges against Private Williams and I intended to push the matter to the limit."

He left the room as Aunt Jane came in to hold the regular conference as to the commissary list. She was deeply apologetic over a slight delay in serving dinner the previous evening.

"Yo' see, Miss' Duncan," she explained solemnly, "w'en Ah done cayard de dishes out befo' de dessu't, dayah wuz a black cat a-settin' in de kitchen, an' Ah done figgered we all is suah gwineter hab a streak ob good luck. But, lawsy! Mis' Duncan, dat yeah cat wuz a skunk, an' hit wou'dn't leab de kitchen noways an' de dessu't wuz on dat kitchen table."

"What on earth did you do?" exclaimed Bonita.

"Ah jes' frowed a bucket ob watah on him." Triumphantly the old woman surveyed the aghast faces of her auditors. "Skunks cain't mek no

'sturbance long's dey's wet, or if yo' grab em by de tail an' hol' 'em haid down. So Ah picked him up and' gib him ter Lewis to tote off. An' Mis' Duncan"—Jane's voice quivered with indignation—"whut' yo' think? Dat yeah fool nigger Lewis, he ain't come back yit!"

## Chapter XV

### MUTINY

**B**ONITA must be protected," Mrs. Duncan said to her husband in the privacy of their room. "Your leaving in the morning complicates the situation, but before you go you simply must do something to make Stanley know his place."

"It may all be confounded gossip," Captain Duncan answered, cutting his chin with a final irritated scrape of his razor.

"It is common talk among the servants. You know Jane does not hunt gossip, and she feels dreadfully over this. Stanley has been repeatedly seen going to the hut where that Gonzales woman lives. Mrs. Crane discharged her as soon as her condition was apparent."

"Condition, eh?" he turned a startled glance upon his wife.

Her lips tightened and she nodded emphatically.

"I didn't know that it was as serious as that," Duncan said. Throwing down his razor, he strode over to the window and stood staring out while he ruffled his hair with a nervous hand. "Hang it, Marcia!" he turned about, "it's a beastly mess,



but I can't see my way clear to do anything about it without starting a scandal in the regiment. I don't want to do that."

"Well, why need you? The only thing that concerns us is his pursuit of Bonita."

"How do you mean pursuit?" the officer snapped out.

"Why, haven't you noticed his eyes always follow her; wherever she goes, you'll find him there, and he doesn't pay the least attention to any snubs I give him. I turn my back on him, and he comes up beside me as cheerful as you please and acts as though I were his bosom friend!"

She looked up so indignantly that the captain's mouth relaxed in a smile. In spite of herself, Mrs. Duncan laughed.

"Well, don't worry," he reassured her, "I'll take care of that! I'll make it cussed plain before I leave that he must keep away from Bonita!"

"What shall I do if he ignores your command and comes here after you have gone?"

"Cut him, and have her do the same! Show him the door! A woman can handle a situation that way."

"But if he persists?"

"Tell her the truth about him. That ought to settle it for good."

"I cannot do that! It is too disgusting." Mrs. Duncan's voice was positive. "It is not a matter to

discuss with a young girl. Why! Bonita has no idea such things even exist!"

"Well, she ought to have an idea," he retorted with asperity. "I don't think you are on the right track there. You should have talked with her when she came from school."

"Jim Duncan, you agreed when we first took her in our home that she should be brought up like an old-fashioned girl," reminded the officer's wife tartly. "However you may vacillate in your ideas, I have followed the original plan to the letter. The day before a girl's marriage is the proper time to enlighten her."

"Well, that's up to you," he conceded grudgingly. "I suppose we see these things differently, but a man wouldn't let a poor kid go it blind."

"Then talk to her yourself," she replied quickly.

"I don't want to do it," he hedged.

"A word from you would mean more than all I could say about Stanley. If I tell her the whole story she will probably take sides with him and name me as authority for the first open charge."

Duncan scowled at his mutilated cigar. "Oh, all right! I'll see her now and get it over."

"But do be careful what you tell her." The words floated after him as he went reluctantly toward Bonita's room.

When he tapped on her door she was opening a letter which had arrived in the mail.

“Oh, Uncle Jim!” she cried, “here is a letter from Roy. It’s to me, but you read it.”

He took it eagerly. It was the first word from Roy since the short note announcing that he had been assigned to Crawford’s command and that General Sheridan had been very cordial to him. The young officer’s father took the letter over to the window, and read aloud:

En Route for Geronimo.

NEAR FRONTERAS, MEXICO.

*November 25, 1885.*

DEAR BONITA:

He smiled at the girl and continued:

Just got a chance to send a line via courier. All the command is in fine fettle so far. We crossed the border about twenty miles north of Fronteras and hope soon to cut trail of old Geronimo and his bunch of broncos.

While we are travelling with the scouts, it is giving us a chance to learn Apache tactics. Crawford understands them thoroughly and does not attempt to handle them like regulars. It’s a sort of a go-as-you-please formation.

They have a system of sending out advance guards, and others work on either side of the main body, but some distance away to watch for hostile signs and give warning. As soon as we reach camp, they install sentinels their own way. The queer part is that everything is executed without an apparent order, and the camp is as noiseless as the catacombs when no tourists are around.

These Apaches are smaller than the Comanches and Kiowas, but the way they scurry over rough mountains would make a jack rabbit green with envy. Takes a mighty husky white man to keep in sight of their dust on these long marches.

When on the trail they wear cotton undergarments, moccasins, a waist cloth of white cotton with dangling ends, which even the

Apaches themselves are learning to call a "gee string." Their blue blouses, like the enlisted men's, they frequently wear inside out. Crawford says that the gray lining is less conspicuous than the dark blue cloth against rocks and mountains; and the Apaches never miss anything of strategic value.

We use dry wood and make small fires in the day when among rocks. Green logs smoke. No fires are permitted at night, even when it is very cold. While our scouts are watching and hiding, they know that the hostiles, too, are on the alert. Nothing escapes their notice.

By the way, Dutchy is with us. Remember Dad saying that Dutchy had killed a man at Fort Thomas, but no civil action had been taken by Territorial authorities, and he wondered why? Well, Dutchy is a dandy scout and he and I are quite chummy. We agree in thinking that Crawford is about the finest white man in the whole United States.

Crawford is simply splendid. Takes the brunt of everything, never utters an unkind word or allows himself to show irritation. No wonder he had such influence over the Indians. I'm learning how fine a man can be, since I've been under him. And he is so gentle, too.

Couldn't pick a bunch of officers anywhere who could outclass those I am lucky enough to be with now. It's a big privilege. They are bully to me. Tell Jerry I wish he were along. It would suit him to a T.

Maybe I'll have more exciting news in my next, whenever I get a chance to send it. The beauty of this work is that you never know what minute something may crop up.

Maus, Crawford, Davis, and Shipp join in messages to you all. If we capture Geronimo in time, save dances for Maus and Shipp and myself Christmas night. Love to Dad, Mother, and heaps for yourself.

As ever,

ROY.

P. S. In addition to picking up Mexican I'm learning the Apache lingo now—grunting in different keys. I practise the grunts when we hit a bad bit of trail. It helps a lot and sounds worse than it really is.

“Isn’t he fine!” exclaimed Bonita. “Oh, Uncle Jim, aren’t you proud of him?”

“Good boy!” the father answered, as he folded the letter and handed it to the girl.

She started toward the door. “I’ll take it to Aunt Marcia at once!”

“Wait a minute, Bonita. I want to have a little talk with you.”

“About Roy?” She paused with anxious eyes as she realized how long his letter had been on the way.

“No, about—this fellow,” he replied, soberly indicating the photograph of Stanley which stood on the mantel.

“Why!” Her eyes were wide with amazement.

“Bonita”—her guardian turned from the picture of the young cavalryman, booted, spurred, and wearing sabre, with jaunty cap and cape—“I have an unpleasant duty. There are grave reasons why I must ask you not to associate with Lieutenant Stanley. In fact, I must insist that you have no further acquaintance with him.”

“Oh, Uncle Jim! Why do you say that?” she cried out sharply. Captain Duncan’s embarrassment made him gruff. “I cannot give details. What I say must be sufficient. I shall expect you to do as I request.”

He started toward the door, but Bonita reached his side and laid her hand on his arm while she looked up with pleading eyes.

“Uncle Jim, won’t you please tell me what is the matter?”

“It is something that involves very dishonourable conduct on the part of Lieutenant Stanley.” He stopped suddenly, remembering his wife’s admonition. “I have nothing more to say.”

“I don’t believe it!” she flared. “Why don’t you explain? It isn’t fair.”

“I am the best judge of that. You must do as I say.”

“Unless you tell me a good reason, I shall not do it!” She faced him with rebellious eyes and crimson cheeks.

“Yes, you will, young lady!” he replied with an assurance that he did not feel.

“I won’t! So there, now!” A small foot stamped on the uncarpeted floor.

Captain Duncan was a seasoned warrior. He knew when to retreat. As he swung on his heel to open the door, his glowering gaze rested on the portrait of the debonair lieutenant, smiling at him from Bonita’s mantel. The captain shut the door with a bang, mopped his brow nervously, and returned to his wife’s room.

“Well, the fat’s in the fire!” he announced grimly in reply to her questioning eyes. “Bonita defied me—said she would stand by him—and we know she will do just what she says! I knew how it would be. I had no business meddling in the affair, but you insisted——”

“I insisted! Well! If that isn’t just like a man!”

““Just like a man!”” he echoed wrathfully. “What do you expect me to be like? An old woman?”

The connubial council of war terminated half an hour later, and Captain Duncan strode angrily across the parade ground to answer stable call.

The familiar summons conjured up a memory of times long ago, when he and his friend, Boyd Curtice, had walked together while Bonita skipped between them, her chubby hands gripped in theirs, and her birdlike voice carolling in unison with the bugle:

“Go down to the stable, all you who are able,  
And give your poor horses some hay and some corn;  
Give your poor horses some hay and some corn,  
Give your poor horses some hay and some corn.  
For if you don’t do it, the colonel will know it  
And then you will rue it, as sure as you’re born.”

“Damn Jerry Stanley, anyhow!” he muttered.  
“I’ll handle him without gloves and settle this matter!”

## Chapter XVI

### A QUESTION OF BOOTS

**B**ONITA stood staring dazedly at the closed door. For a moment she thought that she would follow her guardian and insist that he tell her plainly what the matter was with Jerry. But she turned, instead, to her desk and wrote a note to the lieutenant, telling him not to pay any attention to anything Uncle Jim might say; that she didn't know what it was all about; and she didn't believe it, anyway; and she was, as always, his friend, Bonita.

Sealing the envelope, she carried the note to the kitchen. Aunt Jane was not there, but Lewis, the striker who did errands and chores, was just leaving.

"Take this note to Lieutenant Stanley's quarters and leave it. There is no answer."

"Yes, Miss Bonita. Fust call fo' stables jes' sounded, an' I'se gwine 'trectly pas' deyah right erway."

But Jerry was not at home. He had already gone to the troop stable: so Lewis, recalling that there was no reply, dropped the note in an Indian bowl on the hall table where mail and official communications were placed during absence of the bachelor officers who occupied the quarters.



Official duties of stables were over and the men had departed but Lieutenant Stanley, busy teaching Tiswin to shake hands, with lumps of sugar as educational inducements, looked up with a smile as Captain Duncan stopped beside him.

“Good afternoon, Captain. I’m training my horse. Great little fellow, isn’t he? I gave a pretty stiff price for him, and it screwed me a bit to pay it. But he’s worth it, and more, too!”

Tiswin, as though to corroborate his master’s good opinion, lifted his right hoof gingerly and “shook hands,” twitching his upper lip for the sugar.

“No sugar, no shake,” laughed the young officer, proudly patting the satiny arched neck and running his fingers through the thick mane. “I’ve promised Miss Bonita she shall ride Tiswin. She can manage any horse that I can ride.”

He was modest; for he was acknowledged the best horseman in the cavalry, not only among the officers but also including the enlisted men.

“Lieutenant Stanley,” the curtly formal tone of the older officer brought the younger one erect. As he saw Duncan’s unsmiling face Stanley instinctively assumed an official attitude and awaited a communication.

His hand lifted in salute.

Captain Duncan flushed and cleared his throat. “It is a personal matter; not official. I desire you”—he spoke with deliberate emphasis—“to keep away

from my home and to discontinue all attentions to Miss Curtice.”

Stanley's face whitened. He started as though struck a physical blow. Tiswin's lips nipped his master's hand but brought no response. Then the young man straightened up tensely.

“What reason have you, sir, for making such a request?” he demanded furiously.

“I decline to discuss the matter. Sufficient reasons probably occur to you. Your attentions to Miss Curtice are obnoxious both to Mrs. Duncan and to me. I shall expect you to govern yourself accordingly.”

“I do not know what you mean and shall ignore your request until you give me a perfectly plain reason for it.”

The reply, spoken deliberately, enraged the captain, who realized that he could not quote his authority without implicating his wife. Official dignity demanded the termination of the discussion, but Duncan knew he could not leave until he had the upper hand of a situation he had unwillingly provoked.

“I had assumed that you were a gentleman,” he said curtly, “but if you come to my home again I shall be forced to treat you like a cur and kick you out!”

Lieutenant Stanley, in quiet rage, measured the other man with steady eyes.

“You wear quite a good-sized boot, Captain Duncan.” His voice was coolly insolent.

“You confounded, impertinent young puppy!” gasped the older officer, advancing threateningly. Stanley waited.

“I shall respect your wishes so far as calling at your home is concerned,” the lieutenant spoke, outwardly calm and inwardly seething with rage. “But I give you fair warning I do not intend to avoid meeting Miss Bonita elsewhere unless she makes that request herself.”

“If you meet her clandestinely I shall take more drastic steps and prefer charges against you for conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman.”

“I object to that word—clandestine! It is not a word to be used in connection with a lady!”

The younger man’s hands were clenched, his jaws set grimly. White with fury they confronted each other, murder in their eyes. Lieutenant Stanley stepped a pace nearer Captain Duncan.

“Damn you! I demand an explanation!” he burst forth in uncontrollable rage.

The captain measured him contemptuously: “And damn you, I refuse to give it!” He swung about and left the stable.

Back of him stood a white-lipped young officer whose clenched hands and set jaws told the fierce battle for self-mastery.

It was not an easy victory. But Stanley knew

that any act which savoured of violence against Captain Duncan would result in a court martial and subject Bonita to widespread gossip, if not actually involve her name in official records.

Deep in thought he reached the hallway of his quarters and, glancing at the table, saw the note in Bonita's writing.

Hastily he tore it open and read it eagerly.

"God bless her!" he exclaimed. "She's true blue. I'll be damned if Duncan or any one else shall keep us apart!"

## Chapter XVII

### THE DUCHESS TAKES THE HELM

**M**RS. DUNCAN, who had been nicknamed "the Duchess" by the regiment, had moved serenely through life, accepting as a dower right the homage of husband and son, and never experiencing any heavier anxiety regarding her household circle than that involved in supervising competent servants.

The Duncans, unlike most army families of those days, had a private income apart from the Captain's pay, as Mrs. Duncan had a small fortune in her own right.

So, like an untried ship, the Duchess sailed the shallow waters of conventional existence, undisturbed by any ripple of emotional storms. Anchored safe in port with spotless sails she viewed with inflexible severity the battered hulks of humanity that had been wrecked in rough, uncharted seas.

It was thoroughly established that Mrs. Duncan had no double standard. She prided herself that her door was shut socially to all with the least shadow on their reputations; whether the offender happened to be a man or a woman. Hence, to be

on informal terms of friendship in the Duncan home, was equivalent to having the Duchess bestow a medal of respectability. As her husband was the ranking captain, her influence was important in the social life of the regiment.

She had never been the type, either as girl or matron, that offered or invited confidences of sentimental nature. Imposingly dignified, her very entrance into a room caused an invisible straightening of vertebral columns.

From different temperamental causes, but with the same result, Bonita's sensitive shrinking from revealing her inner emotions had begun when she was very small. The grief of a broken toy, the hurt of cut or bruise, was borne in silence or covered with a laugh. But the repressed tears flowed freely in solitude.

While this characteristic helped form an impassable barrier between the girl and Mrs. Duncan, there was a comradely understanding between Bonita and the Captain. The sudden unaccountable breach between them was the first in all her life. But more than once she and the Duchess had been on coldly official terms because of the girl's impulsiveness.

The morning after the stormy interview, Captain Duncan was not in the dining room when Bonita entered it, but frequently he breakfasted early because of special duties.

“Good morning, Aunt Marcia.”

The Duchess was pouring coffee. She handed the

cup to the man who was waiting on the table, then said, "You may go now, Lewis."

He withdrew and silence fell. Bonita recognized the symptoms, but her small mouth became stubborn. She would not speak again until her aunt addressed her. And then, as though reading her thoughts, Mrs. Duncan spoke:

"Your uncle left at daybreak with the troop," Mrs. Duncan said, her tone implying that Bonita was responsible for his departure.

"Oh, Aunt Marcia!"—the girl's eyes filled with tears—"why didn't he say good-bye to me?"

"After your conversation yesterday, you must realize that another good-bye would be superfluous. You told him that you had nothing further to say. Naturally, he believed it."

"But I wanted to talk with him this morning." The words rushed out in a flood of emotion. "Oh, I am so sorry he went away angry at me; but I don't think he was fair!"

"You are not old enough, nor wise enough, to form any independent opinion." The icy voice lashed Bonita into a quick rage. "We decline to go into particulars with you."

Nita sprang to her feet, "I insist——" she began tempestuously, but Mrs. Duncan continued calmly, "Mr. Stanley knows that we are justified in our attitude toward him."

"I don't believe——"

“For the sake of the regiment,” the older woman went on, ignoring the interruptions, “I hope that the matter will not go further than merely ostracizing him.”

Bonita stood with defiantly lifted chin and regarded the other woman furiously. The captain’s wife coolly poured another cup of coffee and carefully measured the cream.

“Sit down, Bonita. You certainly should have sense enough to know that we are trying to save you from a false position in case this matter regarding Mr. Stanley should reach official status. That would mean his resignation, or a court martial.”

“Aunt Marcia, please tell me——”

“I have nothing to add. Sit down and finish your breakfast and don’t make a scene. We are late and the servants are waiting.”

Bonita sank back into her chair, aware of the utter futility of argument or protest. Silent, but not convinced, she forced herself to continue her breakfast. Mrs. Duncan, with the calm magnanimity of one who has scored a victory, rose with a smile and left the table.

As the door closed behind the lady, Bonita’s eyes flashed, her lips tightened, and her hands clenched. Resentment grew by leaps and bounds until it became a tornado of rage. With an ominous gleam in her eyes she hastened to the front porch and watched the path toward the adjutant’s office.



She did not have to wait very long before Lieutenant Stanley, evidently in deepest thought, made his way along the pathway and turned toward The Folly. Bonita went down the steps toward the gate and waited. As he approached he glanced up and saw her outstretched hand and smiling face. But his own countenance was very sober as he took her hand in his own.

“I did not get your note until after I had returned from stables,” he said. “Thank you for what you wrote.”

“What on earth is the matter, Jerry?” she asked, looking up at him and touching his sleeve impulsively.

“I don’t know,” he replied earnestly, his eyes on the hand that still rested on his arm. “All I can say is that when a fellow has been trying to walk forward all his life, it isn’t natural for him to walk backward. Not”—he paused and met her eyes steadily—“not when everything that his heart desires is in front of him.”

“Well, I don’t care what any one says”—her voice vibrated tensely—“I believe in you!”

“Then I can fight the world and win!”

They heard Mrs. Duncan’s step and turned toward the porch. She stood in the doorway, the personification of virtue defending the home. Her cool blue eyes arraigned the culprits.

Lieutenant Stanley lifted his cap and looked di-

rectly at her, but the captain's wife ignored him. The cut was unmistakable, and Bonita flushed painfully. Her eyes filled with tears but Stanley smiled at her reassuringly and said, "Never mind. I will go."

She held her head high and reached out her hand as she spoke very distinctly, so that Mrs. Duncan would hear the words: "Au revoir, Jerry."

"Au revoir," he replied, but his eyes said much more as he bowed formally and turned away.

Bonita watched him go down the line, shoulders squared, a gallant young figure, and her heart throbbed with pride, love, and indignation. Suppose he had broken some of the silly regulations! No one but very old officers could remember them, anyway.

She moved toward the steps where Mrs. Duncan waited truculently.

"Well, Bonita"—the accents were glacial—"have you elected yourself Mr. Stanley's champion?"

Bonita paused and looked with flashing eyes into Mrs. Duncan's implacable face. Slowly the girl went up the steps until she stood in front of her guardian; then very quietly, very positively, she answered, "Yes!" and walked past Mrs. Duncan into the house.

But she would have felt less assurance had she seen the peculiar gleam of the older woman's eyes and the tightly compressed lips as Mrs. Duncan watched Lieutenant Stanley's receding back.

All those who once had read these storm signals knew that cyclonic weather impended. And further that the Duchess invariably weathered the gale and rode safely into the port for which she had been steering, though smaller craft fared disastrously.

## Chapter XVIII

### CHRISTMAS AT OLD FORT GRANT

**D**URING the weeks that followed, Bonita continued to meet Jerry Stanley in open defiance of her guardians, and the newest regimental bride, doubly sentimental in the absence of her husband on duty, braved the wrath of the Duchess and welcomed the young people in her home. Absorbed in each other, they did not notice that Mrs. Leslie spent much of her time in another part of the house, presumably supervising culinary mysteries; whereas the good little soul was more often in her own room, where murmuring voices were inaudible, while she contemplated with understanding smile a photograph of her husband which adorned her bureau.

In *The Folly* a conventional armistice between Mrs. Duncan and her ward to a certain extent prevented servants' gossip; but the breach was too pronounced to escape some comment. Both Bonita and Mrs. Duncan knew that there was no possibility of capitulation on either side.

The girl had written a note to the captain, spon-

taneous in its expression of regret that he had not said farewell to her, but she received no answer, and so understood that the captain's wife kept him fully informed regarding the situation in the garrison.

Once or twice Bonita had been tempted to write Roy of the matter, but on reflection decided not to do so. The situation was peculiar because she still had not the least idea of what the trouble was really about, and Jerry was equally ignorant, as she knew.

Conditions remained unchanged when Christmas dawned on a garrison blanketed with snow. The white storm had continued all day, but was not allowed to interfere with festivities already planned. Each home held its family celebration during the day, so that the evening would be free for a general affair.

Christmas in a frontier garrison in those days was a signal for community rejoicing, with a tree for all the children, irrespective of their parents' rank or colour; a formal ball for the officers' families in the evening, and in the barracks the enlisted men exchanged tokens and anticipated the Christmas dinner.

Christmas in the old Tenth Cavalry! Who that once shared it can ever forget?

Weeks ahead each mess sergeant and each troop cook had darkly plotted to out-do the other.

When that feast had been prepared, the table was spread with snowy linen and the "company silver," with big goblets, all bearing the emblem of the troops

—crossed sabres, the troop letter, and the regimental number 10—while the white china edged with gold was marked with the same insignia.

Spick and span the soldiers were lined against the walls of the mess hall of each troop, their eyes shining, their mouths watering at the sight and smell of the turkeys, the small shoats holding apples in their mouths and decorated with Christmas green, cranberries, sweet potatoes, mince pie, nuts, raisins, candies—all were there, fit for the commanding general!

And then through the door came the officers and ladies, to inspect, compare, and compliment the mess sergeant and the cook, and finally to decide which troop had accomplished the finest dinner. For it had all been bought with troop funds saved for that very purpose by the men themselves.

Later in the evening, before the officers' ball began, the coloured soldiers had their own dance in one of the mess halls; and it was not considered properly begun until the officers' families had "opened de ball." The men in their dark blue uniforms and white cotton gloves, eyes and teeth gleaming white in their black faces, stood respectfully while the officers and ladies danced the first waltz and then withdrew from the floor.

How the musicians played!

Back and forth, swinging, laughing, bowing, and side-stepping, with now and then a pigeon-wing by some exuberant spirit, they wove in and out in the

sheer jollity of the occasion, with the black belles of the post swaying joyously at their sides. Not one among them but wished in his heart that Santa had been born triplets.

And then, the glory of glories! Two by two they walked and danced before the judges who decided which couple was the most graceful, when to that envied pair was awarded a huge cake decorated with elaborate icing.

How they laughed! How they danced! In those bygone days of the old Tenth Cavalry! Yet ready to leap to their saddles and follow the officers they loved, though following meant to die.

And it was the boast of the whole regiment in those times that not once had a negro soldier of the Tenth betrayed the trust of his officers. In lonely camps, on trails where hostile Indians lurked, families of officers had been entrusted to these men, who would have laid down their own lives to protect the white women and children whom they guarded.

While the enlisted men and their families were enjoying their own festivities, along the officers' line all were anticipating the evening dance.

The tête-à-tête dinner at The Folly had not been hilarious.

"The ambulance will call at half-past nine," advised Mrs. Duncan in an impersonally polite voice as they rose from the table.

"I will be ready," answered the girl.

In the absence of Roy and his father, it had been arranged that Bonita and Mrs. Duncan should be gathered up with the other official widows in the big ambulance—an appropriate vehicle for dismembered families.

Bonita went to her room, glad to be alone for a while. All day she had felt an intense depression. Jane called such moods “prees.” Bonita called them cloud shadows because they were just as intangible and evanescent as clouds.

As far back as she could remember, these moods had been part of her life. As a child, she had grown to dread the shadow of a cloud. When one had drifted near, she had always closed her eyes that she might not see when it touched her. Yet she had always known when it reached her, and not until her outstretched hands felt the warmth of the sun did she open her eyes.

All day that sense of the cloud shadow had been strong. Not even the prospect of the ball could drive it away; and hoping to escape her mood she sat down to reread some of the letters that were scattered among parcels on her table—schoolgirl confidences, Christmas plans and greetings from former classmates. She glanced at them and put them aside to take up the letter from Roy. It seemed almost as though he had known she would need a cheering message and had planned to have it reach her on the very day she would need it. But it



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had been fifteen days on the way and showed the effect of much rough handling.

HUASAVAS, BAVISPE VALLEY,  
MEXICO.

*December 10, 1885.*

DEAR BONITA:

Here we are, and Christmas only two weeks away. No prospect of claiming a dance on Christmas night, but Jerry may have what belongs to me. None of us count on a tree or turkey, but we did see some lemon and orange trees here in full bearing. High mountains all around this valley and it could be made a wonder spot. But so long as a Mexican has frijoles enough for mañana, the rest of the world may go to pot before he will work.

I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw carts with wheels that were just slices from big logs, and the ploughs are merely pointed sticks of wood. They use oxen for teams, but one team I saw consisted of the family cow and a burro! Can you imagine the combination? The family in the chariot, from great-grandmother down to a baby, seemed satisfied and proud, and passed us with scornful glances.

The only flour we can get is from corn grown and dried by the women. They work the dry kernels into a meal by means of a hollowed stone into which a smaller one fits, like a ball and socket. Looks easy to handle, for little girls only five and six years old grind the meal rapidly. I tried it. But all I got after half an hour's honest labour was a choice collection of blisters on my palms. Then a small girl airily showed me how easy it was—for her.

These people have lived in terror of the Apaches for years and it took careful handling to avoid complications when they saw our Apache scouts. Unfortunately, mescal is sold wherever there is a settlement of huts, and two of our scouts got drunk. One scout was unarmed. A Mexican policeman shot him. Then the second scout, who was armed, promptly shot Mr. Policeman. Then the scout who had done the shooting decided it was "Home, sweet home" for him, and bolted for our camp *muy pronto*.

Lieutenant Maus happened to be on his way into the town from camp and saw our scout on the jump with two policemen following and firing at him. They had managed to put a bullet through the Indian's jaw, but that didn't bother him so long as his legs were in working order. And they sure were!

It was a ticklish situation, and you may figure out the wonderful influence of Crawford and Maus over our scouts when you learn that though every man-jack of them was prepared and determined to make an attack on the town in reprisal, the trouble was averted.

It all began over some trivial violation of a local law that no one knew much about, not even the citizens of the town. The whole affair wound up with a payment of five dollars fine and the scouts were released from the calaboose.

But we had been sitting on a powder keg those few hours, and what might have been an international rumpus ended like a comic opera, with all of us shaking hands with the officials and citizens of the town.

Anyway, we have learned here that the hostiles are killing stock and slaughtering people south of us. It is authentic news. So we are heading for Granada. That sounds like Spanish romance, but we know better.

And near Granada is—Bacedahuachi! Get that?

Don't try to pronounce it. But you ought to hear how grandly the Mayor of Huasavas rolls it off! He told me how to spell it. I don't try to say it. I have it written down, and when I need the name I take out that paper and flourish it. Everyone knows that paper now. Even the scouts grin when they see it.

They say there is a fine old Mission at Backy (for short) but from present indications Geronimo won't give us time for sight-seeing trips.

Am feeling fine. Less flesh, but muscles hardening every day. Crawford looks badly. His iron will keeps him up, but the pace is grilling him. He never complains. Only when he gets into camp we can see his whole frame collapse.

Of course, the heaviest responsibilities are on his shoulders,

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though Maus is fine in taking his share, as well as all of Crawford's that he can lift. The rest of us just do what we are able to ease things for both of them. I tell you, Nita, this kind of work—shoulder to shoulder—teaches one the bigness of real men.

Captain Crawford just said that he sends Christmas greetings and wishes that he and I were near enough to drop in on you folks and share the evening and Jane's Christmas dinner. But we will all celebrate together when old Geronimo has been rounded up and Johnny comes marching home again!

Heaps of love for you and Mother, and a jolly Christmas Day,  
As ever,  
Roy.

Jane rapped at Bonita's door and entered with a small box. "A sojer done lef' dis fo' yo', honey-chile. An' I'se raidy ter dress yo' now."

Curiously the girl opened the box and lifted the white tissue paper.

"Oh! How beautiful!" she cried in delight, as she saw the gray-green leaves and waxen berries of mistletoe. There was no card, no note. She did not need it. She understood. Close by the old sycamore on Grant Creek grew stately oaks and clusters of mistletoe hung from the branches. It was Jerry's Christmas message.

"I will wear some of it on my gown to-night." She did not glance up at Jane as she arranged the exquisite sprays in a bowl of water.

But Jane was not deceived. Her baleful eyes glared at the pearly berries as she busied herself about the room. If the old woman could have re-

sorted to ancient voodoo customs of her forebears, she would not have hesitated to poke sharp pins into each and every berry, hoping to “conjure” the man who had sent them to her young mistress. Jane scowled. She was a practising Christian—and besides, she did not know where to find any one who knew how to conjure.

Bonita, with a happy smile on her lips and her eyes sparkling radiantly, held out her hands before her.

The cloud shadow was gone. The sun was shining again.

## Chapter XIX

### “ONLY TO-NIGHT!”

**W**HEN the ambulance reached the hop room lights streamed through the uncurtained windows and open door.

Already the first arrivals were trying out the floor which had been liberally waxed earlier in the day. Stanley had directed a small squad of men who whittled tallow candles and tobogganed until the rough floor would form less resistance to dancing feet.

Bonita, entering the hall, saw the young officer marching around, candle and penknife in hand, gravely testing and correcting neglected spots. It was a self-appointed duty in every frontier garrison, and the shave-tails never shirked it.

Wrapped in a white swansdown-trimmed cloak, the girl walked demurely behind her chaperon and disappeared back of a tall screen labelled “Ladies’ Dressing Room.” In a few moments Mrs. Duncan emerged, and Bonita slowly crossed the ballroom—a slender, white-gowned figure with ungloved dimpled arms and rounded girlish throat. Against her dark

hair and among the laces of her dress mistletoe was fastened.

Many of the soldiers, with their wives, had deserted their own dance long enough to look at the officers' ball, and their Christmas faces shone through the windows like ebony jack o' lanterns. Aunt Jane and old Sergeant Faulkner were wedged tightly in front of the others, and their broad smiles answered Bonita's gay little nod of recognition. Directly back of Aunt Jane's grizzled head an Indian scout watched curiously.

He had never seen an officers' dance, for Pacer had always lived on the San Carlos Reservation, where only officers and soldiers were stationed. There were no accommodations for families, as the five thousand Apaches crowded about the little garrison of San Carlos made it rather unsafe in event of any sudden uprising.

Unusually tall for a San Carlos Apache, Pacer's physique was superb. Pride that bordered on arrogance showed in every movement, but his bronze-red face, sternly handsome, was devoid of expression; even when his dark eyes dwelt upon the girl who nodded and smiled at the old Negro woman and man, no flicker of lids or gleam of interest betrayed his thoughts.

Two days before Christmas the Indian had arrived at Fort Grant with other scouts, who waited to be assigned to some troop in the field. Pacer had been

very proud when he had been accepted as a government scout. Curiously, Christmas night, he had followed the soldiers across the parade ground to the hop room. And now his eyes intently watched the white-gowned girl who stood against the dark green of a cedar tree.

Though robbed of its gifts the sprays and ropes of tinsel still remained. Each strand was festooned from the outer points of the limbs to the very top of the tree, making a skeleton canopy that ended at the tip in a big silver star.

The Apache's eyes moved slowly from the girl's face to the star high above her head. To him she seemed the spirit of a star that had slipped down into a silver tepee hidden in the heart of a great forest.

Pacer, peering through the window, saw a tall, blond young officer hastening toward the girl, whose welcoming smile told a story that Pacer understood. But Stanley and Bonita were oblivious to those about them. The always convenient excuse of a lost handkerchief had been murmured into Mrs. Duncan's left ear by the girl, while an interesting bit of gossip was being imparted to the right ear by Mrs. Garth, who was called the Garrison Daily News.

Though Bonita actually went behind the screen, she was perfectly aware that the handkerchief was in its proper place. Very slowly she moved toward the

tree and watched Stanley approach her, while his eager eyes looked at the spray of mistletoe upon her breast, then met her own.

“Thank you for the mistletoe, Jerry,” she said, dimpling.

“I got it this morning for you,” he replied. “It was growing near our tree.”

She flushed at what she saw in his eyes and turned her face toward the window to cover her confusion.

“Have you saved a dance for me?” the young officer asked in a matter-of-fact voice. “Let me see your card.”

“I haven’t any card. Aunt Marcia has mine. She’s taking care of it.” Bonita’s eyes challenged him to get it if he dared.

“I won’t disturb her,” answered Stanley gravely. “She’s enjoying a chat with Mrs. Garth just now. Never mind! I’ll find a nice fresh card for you. Don’t stir from here till I get back.”

She nodded. The Christmas tree branches reached out like friendly arms to screen the girl from the Duchess’s vision. It was a strategic point and Stanley had not been slow in recognizing its value. Programme in hand he retraced his steps, but as the dancers swung near, he paused a moment, and in that interval he caught a glimpse of the dark faces pressed against the window and the eyes of the Apache scout watching the girl. With an impatient jerk Stanley



moved nearer the window. Pacer's gaze turned slowly, impassively. The eyes of the two men—civilized and savage—clashed like tempered steel against crude flint.

Then Pacer faded into the outer darkness. Stanley went over to the tree and triumphantly held out the programme.

“Here is a beautiful clean page, fit for an angel's record,” he announced. “I'm not going to let any one spoil it by scribbling an unworthy name upon it. Here's a waltz—that's mine. The next is a schottische—mine, too—and this——” he laughed and scrawled his name boldly the entire length and breadth of the programme.

Bonita's eyes twinkled mischievously as she murmured, “And lo! Abou ben Adhem grabs the rest!”

Laughing, they swung into the dance. His fair head bent over her and a wisp of her dark hair touched his cheek as he said, “Abou is entitled to special privileges to-night.”

She looked up quickly.

“I'm leaving in the morning for Fort Bowie. Have a small detachment of Indians for special duty patrolling the border,” he answered her questioning eyes.

“To-morrow?” Her voice was almost inaudible.

“Yes. Before reveille.”

Again the cloud shadow touched her. She shivered involuntarily and Stanley drew her close. Softly he

sang the words of the music—words they had often sung together—“Our Last Waltz.”

“Only to-night, just for to-night,  
Hark to the old refrain!  
Only to-night, just as of old,  
But never for us again!”

He guided her away from the other dancers, and as they reached the half-opened door he picked up his yellow-lined cape from a chair.

“Come outside,” he said, placing the cape about her shoulders. And they passed from the brilliantly lighted room to the porch.

Across the parade ground and as far as the eye could scan lay dazzling, unbroken snow. After-clouds of the storm scudded across the moon. The sound of music drifting from the hop room became a part of the night. And the night was the universe.

There is a time in every life—a day, a night, an hour—which stands supreme. Though years of sorrow, heartache, and disillusion may pass, that golden memory remains forever undimmed, and the light of its glory touches the stones one sees through blinding tears and treads with bleeding feet.

The soft light of the hidden moon fell upon Bonita's face. The man looked down into her eyes, into her heart. She did not try to hide it. Slowly, strongly she felt herself drawn toward him until his arms held

her in tense embrace. Ecstasy that was almost pain swept over her as his lips touched her own.

“Bonita,” he whispered brokenly, “I am not worthy of your pure love. But oh, my dear, my dear! If you should call me, I would hear you and come, even though I were dead!”

## Chapter XX

### THE CLOD AND THE STAR

**B**ONITA, come in at once!"

Mrs. Duncan faced them with flashing eyes and stood beside the open door until Stanley and Bonita had entered the ballroom. Then the Captain's wife followed regally, intent upon making her ward sit beside her for the rest of the evening.

But the Virginia Reel was already forming, and it was the time-honoured custom of the Tenth that everyone should participate in this dance. The younger people dubbed it the dance of the lame and the halt and the blind, and it always terminated with a few bars of the last waltz—"Home, Sweet Home."

Despite Mrs. Duncan's efforts Bonita slipped into a place between Mrs. Leslie and Mrs. Crane, both of whom sympathized in the rebellion of the young people. Opposite the girl, Stanley edged his way between the men. Very carefully he had selected the middle of the long line, and while awaiting the evolutions of those at the head, he kept slipping away from the men's line to stand back of the girl and talk over her shoulder. Only the cries, "Your

turn next!"—"Come back where you belong, Stanley!"—caused him temporarily to resume his proper place in the dance, then return to Bonita.

Impressively gowned in rich black velvet, her glossy, raven-black hair dressed high, glacial blue eyes and face set in a frozen smile, Mrs. Duncan walked through the Reel with the dignity of a genuine duchess. Her gloved fingers, extended as required to each of the men, adroitly manipulated a lorgnette and evaded contact with Stanley's outstretched hand.

The music ceased and the musicians rose to gather up their instruments, while the dancers skirmished for wraps. In the midst of the laughing group Bonita stood beside Stanley, both strangely silent and with serious faces.

One by one, with merry good-nights, different couples started to their homes. The ambulance was waiting for unescorted ladies. Bonita dallied, hoping against hope that she might be able to walk across the moonlit parade ground with Jerry. But Mrs. Duncan's gesture was peremptory.

Stanley stepped forward with the girl at his side, and said quietly, "Mrs. Duncan, I am leaving for scout duty before reveille in the morning. Might I walk home with Miss Bonita?"

"That is out of the question." The voice was arctic.

"Then might I come in for a few moments tonight? There is something important I would like very much to speak to you about."

“My husband prohibited you from entering our home. I have nothing more to say. Come, Bonita. We are detaining the ambulance.”

But the girl turned impulsively and held out both her hands. He clasped them tightly.

“Good-bye, Jerry. I won’t forget!”

“No—not good-bye, just au revoir, beloved!”

Mrs. Duncan gasped. For Stanley had taken Bonita in his arms. Her head was against his breast and her face was lifted to meet his kiss—the face of a child but the eyes of a woman. Then without a word or glance at Mrs. Duncan, the young officer helped Bonita into the cavernous depths of the vehicle. Somehow the captain’s wife managed to gather her skirts and stumble up the steps and into a seat. She was breathless—speechless.

During the short drive neither Bonita nor Mrs. Duncan uttered a word. The older woman did not pause in the hall for conversation, and Bonita, glad to avoid discussion, hastened to her own room.

Carefully she clipped each tiny bit of mistletoe from her gown and laid the delicate sprays away in a box. What matter that they would shrivel and grow unlovely in a few more hours? She knew that the most exquisite and rarest of flowers would never mean as much to her as the faded berries among broken dead leaves.

In her dimly lighted room she knelt at her bedside,

a white-gowned figure with loosened hair falling over her shoulders.

“Dear God,” she prayed with trembling lips and eyes full of happy tears, “make me worthy of his love and bring him back safely to me!”

And while she slept, outside the hop room, now dark and silent as a tomb, Pacer stood. He was still seeing the girl whose face was alight with joy and whose eyes gleamed with laughter as she looked up at the young officer.

Pacer turned slowly away from the deserted hall, only to pause after he had gone a few steps. Stooping, he picked up a clod of earth that protruded above the snow. His fingers closed tightly and crushed the clod into a broken mass which he allowed to fall from his slowly opening palm as his eyes gazed at a star that gleamed serenely far away.

## Chapter XXI

### AS A VALKYR RIDES

**B**ONITA awakened long before reveille the morning after the dance, and still dreaming, lay quietly until a sudden thought roused her to action.

Slipping into her riding habit she ran through the long hall and into the kitchen, where Aunt Jane was hovering over the stove. Lewis, the striker, was replenishing the wood box. Both of them turned in surprise as she entered.

“Yo’ sut’nly is a yearly bu’d dis mawnin’.” The old woman stopped stirring her buckwheat batter and peered over her spectacles. “Whut yo’ projeckin’ to do, honey-chile?”

“What should an early bird do but fly?” the girl retorted gaily.

Aunt Jane chuckled and the striker’s grinning face appeared like a dark moon above an armful of split wood.

“Bring up my horse, Lewis,” Bonita ordered.

“Yessum.” The soldier dropped the wood with a crash, straightened up and brushed his hands to-



gether above the wood box. "Hit's powerful cold dis mawnin', Miss Bonita," he volunteered as he reached for his cap.

"The sun will soon be up," she replied, "and I want to get a good ride before reveille. So hurry as fast as you can."

The man disappeared and Bonita turned to Jane. "Give me a big cup of coffee, Aunt Jane. It smells good!"

Jane's face was sober as she watched the girl drinking the coffee. Don's hoofs clattered in the backyard, and Bonita picked up gauntlets and riding whip. The old woman followed her to the door and gently laid her work-gnarled fingers on the girl's arm. Bonita paused and smiled down at the black, wrinkled face.

"Looky out an' doan' yo' git hu't, honey-chile," the voice was very earnest. "Looky out an' doan' yo' git hu't!"

"Why, Aunt Jane!" a peal of merry laughter answered, "what on earth can hurt me? I can manage Don."

Jane's head wagged soberly. "When de young bu'd is jes' boun' hit's gwineter fly, dar ain't nuffin de ol' mudder bu'd kin say ter mek hit un'stan' 'bout rattlesnakes an' hawks an' guns, twill hit's done foun' out fo' hitself, an' den heaps ob times hit doan' git no chanst ter use hit's 'speriunce, caze hit's daid!"

“You’re a dear old goose yourself!” cried the girl, turning in her saddle to wave her whip gaily at the bent figure in the door. “Better watch out for foxes. They love geese—and so do I!”

Jane went slowly back to her stove, her eyes dim with tears.

But Bonita sang softly as she started on her early ride, sure that she would be able to meet Jerry as he was leaving the garrison.

The snow had already thawed in many places and she watched closely for fresh hoof-prints in the soft ground. Several horsemen had passed that way, and fearing that Jerry might already have started, she urged Don to a stiff gallop until he reached a bit of high ground which commanded a view for many miles over the flat country.

Nothing moved on the road toward Willcox so far as she could see. It was too late. He had started even more early than she had expected.

Impatiently turning Don’s head toward the heart of the valley, she rode slowly, aimlessly, for some miles, then reined him homeward, following a road that led through the small settlement at the end of the barbed-wire lane.

Just outside frontier military reservations in those days the vultures of humanity waited their prey. During daylight the doors of these places were closed, but at night lights beckoned the garrison.

Bonita, who had heard vaguely of these conditions, instinctively pressed her heel against Don's side, and he galloped past the shacks that straggled on the outskirts. A thick network of willows growing on the banks of a big irrigation ditch screened her from observation, though the branches were leafless. These willows had been planted in order to strengthen the sides of the water course.

Knowing that breakfast would not be ready until after guard-mounting, the girl rode slowly now, noting how the willow roots, like gigantic basket-work, supported the banks of the *acequia*. Her thoughts were interrupted when Don started and flung up his head suddenly. His ears cocked and he twisted his neck so that he could see through the barricade. Bonita leaned curiously from her saddle. Through a thin patch of interlaced twigs she saw another horse—a roan horse—Tiswin!

She jerked the reins so sharply that Don ploughed the moist ground with his front hoofs. The man she loved, the man she had trusted and whom she had believed was now on his way to Fort Bowie, was standing beside Tiswin engrossed in confidential conversation with a woman, and that woman was Juana Gonzales.

Fearing that Don might whinny and betray her presence, she slipped to the ground and caught his nostrils firmly. It was not because she wished to watch the man and the woman, but because she could

not stand the humiliation of being discovered by them.

The Mexican woman laid a familiar hand on Stanley's arm and Bonita flinched as though feeling a blow. Coquetry, entreaty, and demand spoke in Juana's alluring pose. Even when Stanley had mounted his horse, the woman still clung to his stirrup, her face uplifted as he leaned down talking rapidly.

Tiswin raised his head fractiously and gave a shrill call to the horse in the willows. Don pawed resentfully and tried to shake off the slender, tense fingers that gripped his nostrils.

Sick with horror, Bonita saw the young officer hurriedly thrust a roll of money into the woman's extended hand. In another instant he had struck his spurs into Tiswin's sides.

With an angry snort the horse leaped and whirled about and dashed on his way.

But the girl in the willows was silent. She made no effort to mount and ride with him on the road to Bowie, as she had planned so happily before reveille.

She stood immovable among the sheltering branches and watched Tiswin carrying his rider out of sight; then she looked at the woman counting the money, bill by bill.

The greenbacks fluttered in the hand which Juana lifted to wave a saucy farewell, and Bonita saw white teeth gleaming between the woman's smiling

scarlet lips. Then she saw the black shawl fall away from Juana's head and shoulders, revealing the unmistakable outline of approaching maternity as the Mexican walked quickly down the pathway on the opposite side of the big ditch and disappeared in her house.

Bonita stood staring at the closed door. At last her trembling fingers slipped from Don's nostrils and she clutched the horn of her sidesaddle. But when she tried to mount, her relaxed muscles rebelled. Unable to gain the saddle and unable to keep still, she moved along the edge of the ditch. Don obeyed the rein that hung loosely from her hand, but she did not know that she was leading him.

Dazed, disillusioned, crushed by the revelation of Jerry's deception and dishonour, she stumbled blindly over the rough adobe ground and through little pools of water which had been formed by the fast-melting snow.

Then strength returned to her trembling limbs. She was a soldier's daughter. "Head up, eyes front, face the bullets," her father had said to her when she, a tiny child, had run to him sobbing out a hurt or grief.

"Head up, eyes front, face the bullets!"

He seemed to be standing beside her now, repeating the words. Everyone else had failed her, but no one should know the hurt. "Head up—eyes front!"

She gained her saddle, but not yet able to meet the cool, searching eyes of Mrs. Duncan, the girl turned her horse toward the valley. Don jerked stubbornly toward the garrison.

Bonita raised her whip and brought it down furiously. Once, twice, again and again it slashed Don's shining flanks, and the horse leaped with a snort of rage. Maddened by the vicious cuts he tore across the flat unguided by the reins in the girl's hand. She did not care where he went or what might happen. Again the whip slashed.

Above the pounding of wildly racing hoofs rang her laughter—laughter more tragic than tears—the laughter of despair. So the Valkyrs laughed—so the Valkyrs rode when Valhalla was destroyed.

For miles she rode, then almost unconsciously reined Don homeward. When she reached The Folly the horse, worn from the furious pace, stood with heaving sides and flanks crusted with dry lather. On his back sat a girl with pale face and eyes of smouldering fire.

The sun was straight overhead. Only muddy splotches here and there remained of the Christmas snow.

Bonita dismounted and Lewis came from the house.

“Rub Don well and blanket him.” The girl's voice was cool and steady.

“Yessum. Ah'll tek cayah ob him.”

She did not hear his reply as she went up the steps and into the hallway, hoping to gain her own room unobserved.

“Bonita!” Mrs. Duncan spoke from the front room.

The girl’s lips tightened as she turned and faced the older woman who held a letter.

“Yes, Aunt Marcia?”

“I have a letter from the captain. He has obtained permission for us to go to the camp and remain there with him.”

Mrs. Duncan awaited a reply. Bonita had moved across to the fireplace but she did not speak. Her guardian went on reading portions of the letter.

The girl stood looking down at the broken bit of carved ivory which dangled from her wrist. As she recalled the day that Jerry had brought the whip to her, a peculiar smile touched her white lips, and she slowly pulled the fragment from her wrist and let it fall into the open fire.

Then she turned to Mrs. Duncan and smiled brightly. “Won’t that be fine, Aunt Marcia! How soon shall we go?”

And the Duchess complacently accepted the olive branch.

## Chapter XXII

### CAMP BONITA CAÑON

**T**RUE to her stoic determination, Bonita entered enthusiastically into preparations for moving to the camp. Day after day she forced herself to laugh and talk so that none of those about her might guess the aching misery in her heart. But at night she lay staring into the darkness until, overwhelmed by conflicting emotions, she would smother her tears against the pillow and pray for death—death and forgetfulness.

Camp Bonita, which the soldiers of Captain Duncan's troop had named in honour of the girl, was one of the few permanent places established during the Geronimo campaign. Owing to risk of Indian raids, positive orders had been issued by General Crook prohibiting visits of officers' families to any camp. So it had not been easy to obtain consent for Mrs. Duncan, Bonita, and their woman attendant to move to Bonita Cañon.

The drive from Fort Grant to Willcox consumed the first day. Here Captain Duncan met them, and the second evening of the journey brought them to



the entrance of the camp. To the north a road wound through Apache Pass. A place which held record of more murders by Apaches than any other similar area in Arizona. This pass terminated at Fort Bowie, twelve miles from Bonita Cañon, and General Crook, department commander, had established his Field Headquarters at Fort Bowie.

As the ambulance entered the cañon, Bonita leaned from the uncurtained window to look at the high, rugged walls so close together as barely to allow space for the cavalry camp and a roadway past the brown-white troop tents nestling among live-oak trees. Near the tents a stable had been constructed of logs and brush, and facing toward the end of the cañon it afforded excellent protection for the horses during bad weather.

Scarcity of water in Arizona was a serious problem at all times, but especially so during any campaign against the Apaches. So the little stream, rippling from a permanent spring, was of strategic importance; especially as Bonita Cañon was accessible only from its entrance, for the upper end narrowed into an impassable crack which formed what was known as a "blind cañon."

The vehicle rolled past the troop tents, where the soldiers paused to salute the officer. A group of Indian scouts were walking on the roadway. They stepped aside and looked curiously at the women. Bonita's eyes wandered carelessly from face to face,

but as she saw one who had loitered behind the other scouts, her expression became puzzled. The face seemed vaguely familiar.

Pacer looked steadily into her eyes, but his countenance was absolutely impassive. His fingers closed tightly a moment as the ambulance went by, leaving a cloud of dust which enveloped the Indians. Stolidly he followed his comrades back to the tents where he sat down alone while the other scouts began gambling with a pack of Mexican cards, much the worse for usage.

Maco, Pacer's foster brother, had been graduated from Carlisle and stood high in favour with the army officers, for whom he acted as interpreter. It was Maco who had picked up the orphaned Apache, carried him to his own wickiup, and had taught him, as the years went by, to run, to fight, to shoot, to follow a trail, and to speak the white men's tongue.

From Pacer's babyhood Maco had trained him in feats of strength and endurance, and had exulted in each test that had proved the youth could keep the trail for seventy-two hours without water. No other Apache had been able to touch Pacer's record of a hundred and twenty miles afoot in twenty-four hours over the worst mountains of Arizona.

At night, crouched beside the campfire, Maco watched the lights flicker on the lithe, muscular body of the younger Indian, and gloated over its strength and beauty. For Pacer was dearer than an own son

to Maco. Looking into the clouds of smoke from his pipe, the older Indian saw visions of a day when Pacer's name would be known with honour, not only among his own tribe but among the officers and the white people of other places. Pacer should be the one to bring an understanding of the white men's ways to the Apaches and help lead them to the peace and prosperity that would at last make them brothers to the white men.

Pacer, sitting alone, was recalling what Maco had said, that resistance by the Apaches meant annihilation, for the day of the white man had dawned in Arizona Territory, while the sun was setting forever on the Apaches' trails. The young Indian, implicitly accepting Maco's assertions, had felt as proud of his enrollment among the government scouts as a West Pointer of the commission signed by the President of the United States. And Maco had shared that pride.

Assigned to Captain Duncan's troop at Bonita Cañon, Pacer had eagerly conformed to military training, and his superior intelligence won the approbation of the coloured troopers, none of whom guessed his thoughts when he sat apart from everyone else.

Bonita, after the first puzzled glance at the scout, promptly forgot him as Captain Duncan pointed to a tiny two-room cabin back of several tall, wide-spreading oak trees.

“That is our house.” Pride of ownership was in the officer’s voice.

“Thank goodness!” exclaimed his wife. “No one can rank us out!”

He had already explained as they drove from Willcox that a rancher named Erickson had built the house, but agreed to lease it for so long as the troop was in the cañon. Geronimo had acquired the habit of utilizing the cañon as a thoroughfare, and Mrs. Erickson declared she was tired of “picking up and packing” into Fort Bowie in order to save her own scalp and those of her children. The fact that the land was unsurveyed gave Erickson only a squatter’s right, so he dared not remain away himself, for fear of losing his title. Hence the arrangement with Captain Duncan had been satisfactory to all concerned.

Glad to be through with the long, wearisome drive over the monotonous flat, Mrs. Duncan and Bonita hastened to inspect the interior of their new home while the soldiers approached from their own part of the camp to unload the ambulance and a white-topped government wagon which had transported household goods.

It did not require many minutes to explore the cabin. A front room, well built and with two windows, had a fairly good wooden floor and an open fireplace. This room led into a smaller one which had evidently been used as a kitchen. The

floor in the back room was of earth, packed down solidly enough to be swept. A small sliding window and a hole in the roof for a stovepipe, with a door opening from the back, completed the dwelling.

Captain Duncan led the inspecting party to the wall tent pitched beside the cabin and facing the same way. It was the dining room.

Back of the dining tent, but not connecting, two additional tents had been set up. One to be used as a kitchen, the other for Aunt Jane's bedroom.

It was characteristic of Jane that she merely "toted" her bulging carpet bag into her own domicile, then without even a glance about her, trotted to the fully equipped kitchen tent and assumed command of the commissary department.

Aunt Jane's importance was paramount. Had not the Department Commander himself waived an official order in her favour? No other coloured woman had received such an honour.

When Private George Washington, whose teeth made an ivory split in an ebony countenance and presented the weird impression of a two-sectioned head, reported to Jane as first aid in such emergencies as firewood and buckets of water, the old woman's egotism increased to despotism.

Washington servilely accepted her domineering, fortified as he was by visions of "snacks" not included in the troop mess. He had volunteered for the job as striker for Aunt Jane.

But the old woman was wise from years of strikers, and despite George Washington's honourable name and candid countenance, the mess chest, which contained special delicacies for the family, was religiously locked each time Jane's bent back was turned upon the kitchen tent.

Washington looked in vain for the key. It was tucked away in Aunt Jane's "buzzum."

## Chapter XXIII

### “AFTER ME, THE DELUGE!”

**T**HE family in Bonita Cañon were still busy in getting settled when a week of steady rain commenced and confined them to the cabin from which they scurried under dripping umbrellas to the dining tent and back. At intervals Captain Duncan, arrayed in rubber coat and boots, splashed down to the troop to attend to routine official duties. The only diversion was when the courier arrived with mail from Fort Bowie.

“Thank goodness!” Bonita turned from the window the evening of the eighth day. “I saw a star! How on earth do you suppose the Noahs stood it for forty-eight days without throwing each other overboard?”

No one attempted to answer her, and the girl, intent on reading the newspapers which were pasted on the walls, climbed on a chair, standing tiptoe. Captain Duncan’s six-feet-two length was telescoped on the floor at the opposite side of the room, while he perused the print above the baseboard.

The crude cabin had been transformed into a cosy

home, with the front room arranged as a joint sitting room and bedroom. A tall screen concealed the bed during the day.

Curtains of unbleached muslin edged with broad bands of turkey-red calico and looped back with the same bright material hung at the two windows. A lambrequin, matching the curtains, draped the mantel. The rough pine table, constructed by the troop carpenter, was hidden beneath a gay cover and supported a coal-oil student lamp, while cheerful Navajo rugs on the floor and blazing logs in the fireplace lent the final touches to a really attractive and comfortable room.

“Why, this is not a room!” had been Bonita’s exclamation as she entered the house for the first time and turned from her discovery that the grayish-toned walls were neatly covered with solidly printed newspapers. “This is a real literary salon! The papers date so far back that Mr. Noah must have started publishing them on the Ark. Maybe we’ll find housekeeping articles by Mrs. Noah: ‘How I Fed the Animals on the Ark,’ and ‘Washday Afloat on the Ark!’ How do you suppose she managed about the mice, Aunt Marcia?”

Dignified silence was the only reply. But from the hour of Bonita’s discovery, keen rivalry sprang up between herself and the captain in their avid search for fresh news items, of which they kept strict tally. The old cordial intercourse had been



fully reëstablished, as they were eager to ignore former friction.

Mrs. Duncan, in confidential confabs with her husband, was very positive that the whole affair between Bonita and Stanley had been due to propinquity, nothing more. While the officer was equally sure that there would have been no trouble if they had not tried to “boss” Bonita, for otherwise the matter would have died a natural death.

“Here’s a new one, Uncle Jim,” announced Bonita, turning on the chair to look down at him where he was laboriously scanning an item uncomfortably near the floor.

He twisted skeptically. “I have read everything on that side.”

“You missed this one,” she challenged. “You’d never keep a joke like this to yourself. Listen! ‘A civilian visiting a young officer in his quarters of one tiny room, asked how long the lieutenant expected to remain in such a nutshell, and received the prompt reply, “Until I become a colonel!”’”

“Oh, I heard that joke long before you were born,” was the crushing comment. “Too old to even read aloud. But here’s a first-class one. Why is a ——”

“Oh, stop!” wailed Mrs. Duncan, waving her hands hopelessly. “Stop quarrelling over those old chestnuts. It is getting on my nerves. Can’t you two find something else to do?”

The officer surveyed Bonita forlornly, "We've read all the magazines and papers."

"Aunt Jane has a riddle book." The girl's eyes twinkled and she averted her face so that the wink might not be seen by Mrs. Duncan, and that innocent victim at once uttered the anticipated protest.

Bonita jumped lightly to the floor. "All right, Aunt Marcia, we'll have mercy!"

The captain pulled himself upright and disconsolately ruffled his hair as he said, "Oh, well, Bonita, your aunt has no sympathy with our young lives! Let's get desperate and play bezique!"

Mrs. Duncan heaved a dolorous sigh. The ancient jokes were bad enough, but now she was doomed for the rest of the evening to hear nothing but "common marriage, royal marriage, sequence," or possibly a victorious "double bezique!" The game was interminable, but she had provoked the situation.

Resignedly she regained her work, which during the controversy had slid to the floor.

When the last card had been played and Bonita triumphantly tallied another game to her credit, the captain rose and wound the clock, a signal that it was bedtime.

"All of the stars are shining," cried the girl as she peeped through the little window of her room. "Tomorrow will be clear."

The back room had been arranged for her boudoir.

Heavy canvas tightly stretched on the earth floor was practically covered by an enormous buffalo robe, fur side up. A Sibley stove, which was simply a conical bit of sheet iron with its open base planted firmly in a box of solid soil, afforded ample heat.

The window at which Bonita stood slid sidewise when opened, and flaunted a gay cretonne curtain. A packing box, tipped on end and supplied with shelves, made a bureau, also draped with cretonne. Over this dressing table hung a mirror.

The bed was constructed of a wire-spring mattress upon wooden trestles, and again the cretonne hid the crude supports.

But the network of cords strung against the low ceiling was the most important item in the room. From these cords dangled many tin cans. The inventive genius of the girl had overcome the leaky roof after all efforts on the part of the troop carpenter had failed. Whenever a fresh leak appeared, she seized the broom and pushed a can, trolleywise, under the spot. It was a triumph of engineering skill and during the week of heavy rain Bonita had listened complacently to the dripping of the water in the cans.

The family retired and all slept serenely until two o'clock in the morning, when a terrific crash roused them.

“What—what—the devil——” ejaculated the captain as his wife grabbed his arm nervously.

“Oh—oh——” gasped Bonita in the back room.

Mrs. Duncan scrambled hastily from the bed while her husband lit a candle.

The captain’s lady, in classically flowing white gown, candle in hand, reached the doorway between the two rooms and saw Bonita sitting up in bed surrounded by tin cans of assorted sizes, each of which exuded muddy water.

“Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown,” giggled Bonita, tumbling from the bed and seizing a towel. “You see,” she punctuated her words with attacks on her wet hair, “I forgot to empty the cans—and now—they have emptied themselves on me!”

Mrs. Duncan was speechless as she surveyed the bed. She made a step toward it, but the girl, tossing back her long curls and fastening them with a hair-pin, barred the older woman’s way.

“Go back to bed, Aunt Marcia. I’ll fix things in a jiffy. You’ll have another attack of bronchitis if you stand there in the cold.”

The one thing Mrs. Duncan feared was bronchitis, and the mere mention of it was enough to make her disappear. While she was explaining the situation to the captain, interrupted by his chuckles, Bonita industriously collected the cans and piled them in the corner of her room, where they formed an imposing heap.

“I have discovered the pyramids of Arizona!” she declaimed dramatically as she topped the peak

with a can decorated flamboyantly—a huge red tomato and the word, “Excelsior!”

“All this shanty needs now is a goat!” Captain Duncan called from the front room.

“No, it doesn’t!” she retorted. “We have one already. I’m the goat!”

Further repartee was prevented by tapping at the little window, and Aunt Jane’s voice spoke anxiously.

“Whut’s de mattah, honey?”

Bonita replied by sliding back the window. Jane’s black face, framed in white nightcap, frilled and fluted, appeared in the opening. Her eyes rolled like white marbles as she saw the havoc, and her hands were raised in consternation.

“You’s de commotionest chile I eber seen!” she affirmed solemnly. “Fo’ de lan’s sakes, ain’t hit cur’ous dat folkses dat knows so much doan’ know nuffin? Whut yo’ want if yo’ gwineter string up cans, is wiah, chile, wiah!”

Jane disappeared in the darkness, and Bonita, standing at the window, called gaily, “Thank goodness! The sky is clear at last and there is a moon, too!”

Closing the window she turned and faced the pile of cans. “Now I understand it at last. ‘After me, the deluge.’”

## Chapter XXIV

### AN UNEXPECTED UPRISING

**N**EWs by courier reached the camp in Bonita Cañon, telling the many angles of the campaign work. In spite of the energy of the troops, the Apaches managed to elude capture. Messages that Captain Wirt Davis, of the Fourth Cavalry, with his troop and a hundred Indian scouts had surprised the Apache camp near Nacori was followed later by word that Lieutenant Hay, of the Fourth, with seventy-eight scouts, had also discovered and attacked them, but the Indians had fled. Two boys and a woman had been killed. None captured alive.

Then came a letter from Roy, hastily scribbled, to let them know that he was all right, and that Crawford's scouts, led by Chatto, had had an encounter with Chihuahua and captured fifteen women. But so far the results of the hard work were negligible.

Back and forth through the little cañon reached the threads of the great, invisible web, of which no one was more unconscious than the girl who sat on

the low step of the door, intent upon the book in her hand.

A shadow fell across the pages and she looked up quickly. Pacer stood before her, his sombre eyes fixed on her face as he dropped a string of buttons upon the open book and vanished. Bonita examined the gift and cried out in surprise at the artistic workmanship that had converted silver quarter-dollar pieces into exquisitely fashioned buttons. For the milling on the edges and the lettering that showed on the under sides told of the painstaking work that had transformed the coins.

Carefully polished and threaded upon a bit of black velvet, Bonita wore the buttons around her throat, and Pacer, passing her, saw them. A smile lit his dark eyes as he went his way.

And at intervals after that day other gifts were brought. Sometimes they were laid on the door step—a woven chain of horsehair—a beaded buckskin pouch—but the scout never approached the girl unless she was near the cabin door, as though to assure her that he meant no harm.

Mrs. Duncan had listened to the incident, and examined the later gifts with a smile of amused tolerance, but when she discovered Pacer standing with rapt face beside the girl's window, while he sawed on an Apache fiddle, the Duchess decided that she would be justified in having her husband put an end to the matter.

“It worries me,” she said. “Can’t you have that particular scout transferred?”

“Yes, it can be easily arranged. I am not in harmony with Crook’s idea of having so many scouts loafing around camps, where they have nothing to do but hatch up mischief together. A number of the soldiers complain that their cartridges are being stolen. We’re keeping it quiet and watching the scouts. They probably are storing up ammunition in caches for the hostiles.”

He rose and picked up his hat. “I’ll tell Faulkner to keep a close watch on Pacer until I get him transferred. I wonder,” the captain looked thoughtfully at his wife, “whether it is wise for you and Bonita to remain here. Maybe you had better go back to Grant.”

“That is absurd, Jim,” remonstrated Mrs. Duncan. “There is no danger in camp, I just don’t like the familiar actions of that scout, hanging about the house as he does. None of the other Indians ever come up here or pay any attention to us. If he is transferred there will be nothing else to worry over.”

That night Captain Duncan wrote a letter addressed to the Department Commander at Fort Bowie, and the following week, when a detachment of Indian scouts passed through Bonita Cañon on their way to Mexico, Pacer went with them and another Indian remained in his place.

Mrs. Duncan heard the news with a sigh of relief



and turned her attention to household problems, the greatest of which were the bread and the monthly commissary list.

“Dem commissary yeast cakes ain’t no count a-tall, Mis’ Duncan,” complained Jane dolorously, perched on the edge of a chair, while Mrs. Duncan, pencil in hand, checked off the articles required in the kitchen. “Ah done mek up two batches ob braid dis week an’ dey’s both sad.”

“Why don’t you get some yeast from Mrs. Prue?” called Bonita from the back room. “Her bread is simply delicious!”

The girl came through the doorway, dressed for her daily ride, and Jane’s eyes lit hopefully.

“Miss Bonita, chile, cain’t yo’ fotch a starter ob yeast from her whilst youse ridin’, so’s Ah kin set braid to-night?”

“I’ll go there the first thing and bring it right back. I can finish my ride afterward. Tell Finnegan to saddle the horses.”

Jane beamed. “Ah doan’ cayah if de whole United States Awmy is habin’ trouble with braid, so long’s Ah kin git a starter dat’s fit to use.”

And so Bonita went on her mission.

As there was nothing for her to do except ride horseback, Captain Duncan had detailed one of the soldiers, who rejoiced in the name of Michael Finnegan despite his pure African blood, to act as her body-guard. Should danger arise, the Duncans knew that

Finnegan would use his last bullet to protect the girl entrusted to his care.

Making the acquaintance of the ranchers and their families who lived within a radius of ten miles furnished an interest to these rides, and Finnegan's happy-go-lucky attitude did not prevent him from scrutinizing every rock and bit of brush. The sunlight gleamed on the belt of brightly shining cartridges buckled about his waist and supporting a pistol holster.

Each night Finnegan polished and greased these cartridges and saw that the pistol was guiltless of dust or rust. He was not "bucking for orderly"; the reason was that he knew at any moment during those rides the girl's life might depend on him. And Michael Finnegan wanted to be ready for action.

He had heard the Arizona cowboy truism, "You never know an Apache is around you till he's killed you." Silently they came, wrote their story in blood, and as silently went on their way.

So Finnegan scanned each bit of shrubbery until Prue's ranch had been reached safely, and Bonita, without dismounting, explained the dilemma in the camp to Mrs. Prue.

Flattered and frustrated at the compliment to her bread, the good soul hastened to put the yeast into a small lard pail, which she polished with her apron and handed to the soldier.

"The cover's on tight," said the rancher's wife.

“Yessum, thanky mum,” answered Finnegan perfunctorily, watching the girl, who was already on the way home.

Mindful of strict orders never to allow her to get more than fifty feet ahead of him, the Negro spurred his horse and dashed after her. But Don, now in a smart gallop, accepted this as a challenge to race. Knowing that the road was level and camp only a short distance away, Bonita made no attempt to check her horse.

A sharp report sounded back of her. Don leaped in fright. The girl caught her breath. Apaches! How close were they?

She glanced over her shoulder. Finnegan’s horse dashed nearer. The Negro’s face was covered with a thick gray substance that almost obliterated eyes and features. He was leaning low over the pommel of his saddle with one hand lifted toward his face. Without a sound except the pounding of the horses’ hoofs upon the hard road Finnegan reached her and flashed past.

And Bonita, kicking and whipping Don into terrific speed, followed; but the other horse kept the lead into the mouth of the cañon. Through the camp dashed Finnegan’s maddened horse. Troopers popped out of their tents and stood gaping at the unprecedented spectacle of Finnegan racing ahead of Miss Bonita.

Roused by the clattering hoofs, the Duncans and

Aunt Jane ran to the front of the cabin and stared in amazement as Finnegan's horse stopped in front of them.

Bonita, with horror-stricken face, followed. The soldier was rubbing his eyes with his coat sleeve. The sleeve, too, was gray. Gray and wet! Brains!

"Oh, Finnegan! Are you dying?" she cried, aghast, expecting to see him fall to the ground.

The Negro turned his gray-streaked face. Grinning almost from ear to ear he held out the empty lard pail.

"Dat yah east done got 'cited, Miss Bonita, an' de string must of busted. De lid popped off an' scairt mah hawse so's Ah cou'dn't stop him. An' dat east wuz in mah eyes, so's Ah didn't see when Ah passed yo'. An' Ah hopes yo'll 'scuse me dis time, Cap'n, caze Ah thought Miss Bonita's done got inter camp ahaid ob me, an' dat's how come Ah spu'd so libely!"

"Good gracious!" gasped the girl, "I thought the Apaches had blown out your brains." Laughter choked her, and the Duncans joined in her mirth, while Finnegan grinned sheepishly at them all and continued mopping his face with a bandana.

Aunt Jane did not laugh. Her face was grim.

"Brains!" she snorted contemptuously. "Huh! Howcome yo' figger Finnegan's got any brains? He cou'd hab a gatlin' gun p'inted 'terectly at his haid an' if dat gun shoot his haid plumb off'n dat nigger's shou'ders, yo' all'd fin' his haid as empty as a egg-

shell aftah a weasel done suck hit clean! Brains! Huh! His haid's as empty as dis yeah pail!"

She swung the lard pail upside down to prove its emptiness, and marched huffily back to the kitchen tent.

Bonita dismounted, and telling Finnegan to wait, hurried to the kitchen where Jane was muttering like a volcano prior to eruption.

"I'll go back myself and get more yeast," the girl spoke. "You see it really was my fault because I started ahead too soon. I know that Mrs. Prue won't mind giving us more yeast."

"Doan' yo' let dat fool Finnegan go long, Miss Bonita, caze he ain't fitten to be near any libe yeast."

Two hours later Jane lifted a white cloth from a pan on the back of the stove and smiled at the bubbly concoction. Peace descended upon the camp. But the unexpected uprising in Bonita Cañon was not reported by Captain Duncan to the Department Commander.

## Chapter XXV

### GERONIMO'S STRONGHOLD

**W**HILE the days passed uneventfully in Camp Bonita, Roy Duncan, with the rest of Crawford's command, doggedly, wearily, followed Geronimo's elusive trail across the Haros River and headed for the well-named Espinosa del Diablo where the broken country rose to peaks like jagged vertebræ.

The moccasins, which they had all adopted because they could travel more silently in them than in boots, afforded little protection to their feet as they trod the knife-edged rocks. Piercing cold winter winds, augmented by the altitude and with only one blanket for each man, made the nights far from restful. But the hostiles, believing themselves immune from pursuit, had left a distinct trail, and heartened by this, Crawford pressed onward.

Sunset on the ninth of January marked the end of an unusually hard day's march. Noche, the sergeant-major, was some miles ahead, following his regular method of scanning the advance trail, so that the Apaches might not take warning from the too open approach of the command.

Dutchy, who had accompanied Noche, appeared suddenly between near-by rocks and hastened to the officers. The command halted. Every man knew that the scout bore important news.

"Geronimo," he spoke as he reached the waiting officers.

He held up his hand and carefully checked off his fingers, and they all understood that only twelve miles away the hostiles were encamped. Laconically Dutchy gave Noche's message. Geronimo had camped on a high ridge which could only be reached under greatest difficulties. It was practically impregnable.

Crawford consulted with his officers.

"It means another night march," he said. "It will be hard, for we need rest, but we should come up to them at daybreak."

The wisdom of a method learned from the Apaches themselves was apparent, and all were eager to push on as rapidly as possible.

"I wish we could make coffee," the commander continued, "but a fire is out of the question now."

So rations of raw bacon and hard bread were issued to them all during a short rest of twenty minutes. Then the march was resumed, more cautiously and more hopefully.

There was no moon, and heavy black clouds obscured even the stars as the command followed its leader over a trail that only an Apache could have

found under similar conditions. Deep cañons yawned beside them, feet slid on slanting slate rocks, at times a break in the trail halted them and Noche would retrace his steps, followed by the worn-out command.

Crawford, almost too exhausted to speak, kept behind Noche, using a rifle as a cane, and often pausing to lean wearily upon it as he gathered strength for further efforts. Though his feet dragged heavily, he kept his place behind the Apache guide.

Single file they travelled, every muscle strained to the breaking point. Marion Maus, second in command, marched back of his captain, while Roy and Lieutenant Shipp followed them closely. Behind the white officers trailed the companies of scouts, lithe and stealthy as cougars. Back and forth, zigzagging where the incline was too steep to follow directly, thus they had to cover eighteen miles of the worst country in Mexico, though the camp of the hostiles had been only twelve miles distant when discovered.

Silently the Apaches of Crawford's command slipped through the dry grass and crept between boulders in order to form an impassable cordon through which the renegades would be unable to escape.

Dawn was just breaking. Nothing stirred in the camp of Geronimo. The surprise was complete. Those who awaited the signals breathed a little more



hurriedly. Every nerve, every muscle was taut. The end of their work was at hand. The Geronimo campaign would be finished in a few short minutes! Eagerly they awaited the signal.

The geese of Rome will go down in history of all ages, and so should a few scrawny, tiny gray burros in Geronimo's camp. Out of the silence rose stentorian brays that aroused the hostile Apaches.

Crack!

Through the darkness flashed a shot from Geronimo's stronghold. A volley answered.

But the mischief was done. Shadowy figures slipped into deeper shadows between obstructing boulders and vanished like wraiths.

Pursuit was fruitless. Tired, discouraged, thwarted at the very moment of success, the command took possession of Geronimo's camp. But one consolation was theirs. The hostiles had abandoned all their food supplies, ammunition, and the pony herd; and seeing this, the officers and scouts knew that Geronimo and his band were in sore straits.

The dully smouldering fire left by the Indians blazed warmly as fresh logs were tossed upon it. There was no danger from unarmed foes. So while part of the weary command rested, the others prepared meat left by the fleeing renegades, and the aroma of boiling coffee drifted fragrantly as the men drew about the fire.

Crawford, lying in the comforting warmth, awaited

the messenger whom he knew Geronimo would send, according to Apache custom. Though they confidently expected the envoy, the officers concealed their elation when the Indian did appear to say that Geronimo and Natchez wished to talk.

For a talk meant capitulation—the first step to a surrender. Though powerless now, without arms, food, or ponies, Geronimo and Natchez must preserve a semblance of dignity and authority. As usual, a squaw bore the message.

Through the messenger a meeting was arranged to take place the next day, and then, bearing the food which she had begged, the Indian woman hastened back to the hiding place of Geronimo, leaving the officers and scouts to enjoy their hard-earned rest.

The morning was depressing. Clouds hovered low and a gray veil of heavy fog wrapped the peaks of the mountains. Worn by weeks of constant exhaustion and feeling the reaction from the high tension of the last twenty-four hours, even the Apache scouts relaxed their vigilance and slept.

But Noche himself was keenly alert. He stationed sentinels on points of vantage. Aware of the treachery of Geronimo, Noche took no chances of a surprise.

A light wind bore unmistakable sounds of tramping feet. Noche listened, then gave warning. In another instant the entire band of Crawford's scouts were up and uttering shrill calls.

The officers stood in a group peering at the indistinct figures of a body of men who were nearing the camp.

"It is probably Captain Wirt Davis and his scouts, and they have cut our trail," Crawford suggested to Maus who was beside him.

So with no thought of danger the officers ascended rocks which would give them clearer view of approaching comrades.

A fusillade of shots astounded them. Three scouts fell wounded. The others hunted cover and at once fired in retaliation.

"Stop firing!" shouted Crawford.

Maus repeated the order. Both officers were now sure that the Apache scouts of Captain Davis's command, following hot on Geronimo's trail, had mistaken the Crawford scouts for the hostile Indians.

Silence followed Crawford's order.

Then out of comparative safety a party of thirteen Mexican soldiers separated from the main command and drew nearer Crawford's position.

"Tell them who we are." Crawford turned to Maus, for the older officer, unfamiliar with Spanish language, relied upon the lieutenant in the absence of Tom Horn, the interpreter. Horn and Doctor Davis, ill and worn out, had been unable to keep up with the rest of the command during the last few strenuous hours of the march to Geronimo's camp, and had been left behind to follow more slowly.

Lieutenant Maus, closely followed by Crawford, moved forward until they faced Major Corredor, the Mexican commander. Powerful in build, he stood over six feet tall, and back of him was the boyish Lieutenant Juan de La Cruz. The main body of the Mexican force remained some distance away, but the detachment of thirteen grouped together not far from their officers.

Here and there the red head-band and black hair of Crawford's scouts lifted cautiously above protecting boulders. They were ready for action, but obeyed the command and withheld their fire.

"We are American soldiers," Maus explained in fluent Spanish, addressing the Mexican major. "Geronimo has abandoned his camp. We have all his supplies and ammunition. He has agreed to talk with us to-day."

"Have you made it clear?" Crawford asked anxiously as the young officer ceased speaking.

"Perfectly, sir."

The sharp snap of breechblocks sounded ominously. Crawford's scouts had detected another party of Mexicans creeping through a ravine that would lead to a position overlooking the American camp.

Crawford grasped the situation at once.

"Don't let them shoot! For God's sake, don't let them shoot!" he called sharply.

Major Corredor's voice blended with Crawford's; "*No tires! No tires!*"

“Don't fire!” shouted Maus again and again in both languages.

But one shot crashed!

It reverberated through the cañons, it was caught by the bending peaks, then its echoes mingled with other volleys that poured from the guns of Crawford's command in reply to a fusillade from the Mexican soldiers.

The rifle of Major Corredor jerked from his hands as though he had flung it away. For an instant he stood erect, staring with startled eyes. Then he fell heavily to the ground. A bullet had found his heart.

As Corredor fell, Lieutenant de La Cruz turned to run for shelter. Thirteen bullets from carefully aimed Apache rifles flew on their mission of death. He crumpled on the earth and did not move again.

Back of a young tree a small bunch of Mexicans sought safety; but the hail of bullets from the now infuriated Apache scouts riddled the sapling and not one of the Mexicans escaped alive.

The firing ceased, and the silence that followed was even more oppressive than the noise had been. Out in the open were men who lay motionless. The air waves vibrated tremulously, stirred by the quick breathing of those who crouched behind sheltering rocks.

Maus looked about for Crawford. He was nowhere in sight.

Filled with foreboding, the young officer went in

search; and there, behind a group of boulders, he found his commander and friend.

A red handkerchief had already been spread upon Crawford's face. It was a scout's handkerchief—the sign of a loyal Indian.

With arms folded and face stolid in spite of his grief, Dutchy, the scout, stood on guard beside his fallen commander.

Lieutenant Maus stooped and gently lifted the handkerchief from Captain Crawford's still face. A hole in the head told where the ball of a rifle had entered.

Believing that Crawford was dead, Maus, heart-sick and helpless, gently laid the handkerchief over the pale face, and with a gesture of despair, rose to his feet, forgetful of all else but the loved friend.

But fresh volleys roused him to his responsibility, and with one glance backward at the motionless form, Lieutenant Maus turned to assume the command that had fallen upon him with the death of Captain Crawford. Too well the young officer realized his position, and the possibility of international complications for what had already occurred, besides future difficulties unless he could prevent further fighting between the Mexican soldiers and the Apache scouts.

He knew that the Mexicans outnumbered his own command two to one, and that they were armed with .44 calibre rifles, while his own men had practically

used up their ammunition in the fight with Geronimo, followed by that with the Mexicans.

The situation was acute. The Mexicans had lost no time in strongly entrenching themselves in advantageous positions commanding the American camp. Back of the American officers and their Apache scouts watched Geronimo and the hostile Indians.

Would the scouts remain loyal? Or would they turn against the three American officers, slay them, and then unite forces with Geronimo's band? No one could tell.

While the young officer was trying to adjust his plans and solve some of the problems thrust so suddenly upon him, Doctor Davis limped painfully into the camp and was told of Crawford's death. Together the doctor and Lieutenant Maus went to the side of the officer, and Doctor Davis lifted the red handkerchief to study the wound.

An exclamation of surprise startled Maus.

"My God!" cried Davis, incredulously, "he is still alive!"

"Is there any hope?" asked Maus eagerly, as he knelt beside his unconscious friend.

"None. The end may come at any minute. It seems incredible that he has lived so long with such a wound."

There was nothing to do but await the end. Sadly the officers sat through the night, but when dawn

crept over the mountains, Crawford was still breathing.

Clinging to the last straw of hope, Maus told the doctor of his determination to try to get his loved comrade and friend across the border.

Doctor Davis shook his head. "The end may come soon. It is a miracle that he still lives!"

"As long as there is breath in his body"—Maus spoke doggedly—"I shall not give up trying to get him there. "And even if he should—die"—the young officer paused and his voice trembled—"I shall carry him back to his own country. He has given his life for it—and it owes him a grave!"



## Chapter XXVI

### THE STORM

CAPTAIN DUNCAN settled in his easy chair with his pipe and a magazine. As he cut the pages his wife near the table worked at her usual bit of sewing. Mrs. Duncan had been reared in the days when idle hands were taboo, and the early training still governed her spare moments.

Bonita came from her room and stood beside the table, absently fingering a book. Outside raged the worst storm of the season. The wind howled and sleet rattled against the windows, like the tapping of skeleton fingers. It was not a local storm, for word had been brought by couriers that it had swept over Mexico, too.

“We are lucky that the house is so comfortable,” observed Mrs. Duncan complacently.

“Yes, but it’s pretty hard lines on those not under shelter,” replied the officer. “Glad my men and horses are so well protected.”

Mrs. Duncan bent her head lower as she threaded a needle. It took her much longer than usual to

adjust the thread. Her husband glanced at her, then went on cutting the unopened pages.

Bonita turned soberly and sat down in a rocker before the fire. Her eyes gazed into the red-and-gold flames and her hands were clasped tensely in her lap. Like winged things her thoughts flew through the darkness, escaping the barriers that she had believed so strong. Somewhere the storm was beating down on Jerry Stanley. All the mother instinct that is a part of every woman's love for a man forgave him, but hurt pride and the knowledge of his deception beat back the tender mood. Her hands tightened and her lips formed into a firm, straight line. She turned toward Mrs. Duncan.

"Let me hem some of those napkins, Aunt Marcia. I cannot find anything else to do."

For some time silence reigned in the room, and the women stitched while Captain Duncan at intervals read aloud from his magazine. But the forced interest was apparent, and it was a relief to them all when the officer rose and said, "Time to wind the clock."

"It has been a tiresome day," his wife spoke as she folded her sewing. "I am glad it is over."

Above the confusion of the storm sounded galloping hoofs. The family started and listened. Nearer and nearer came the clatter, past the stables—past the troop tents—to the cabin door. Then silence.

Those in the house waited. There was no knock.

“I’ll find out which of the men has been sneaking off without permission,” snorted the captain wrathfully, jerking open the door and peering into the storm.

Only darkness met his eyes. He closed the door to keep out the beating rain.

“But wouldn’t a troop horse stop at the stable if it had broken away from its rider?” questioned Bonita.

He nodded assent, then picked up a glassed lantern and lit it. “I’m going to the troop and have a check roll-call. When I find out which man is absent, I’ll put him through a course of sprouts that he won’t forget in a hurry. Probably some of these ranchers are selling liquor on the sly.”

His words were interrupted by the shrill whinny of a horse. “It’s in front of the house!” Duncan handed the lamp to the girl. “Stand back of the door, Bonita, but if there is any trouble don’t expose yourself. If the man is drunk, he may be ugly.”

Pistol in hand he opened the door. The rays from the lantern flashed on a riderless horse. The officer hastened outside.

“Bonita!” he called sharply.

She ran out to him, carrying the lantern. He was leaning over a figure huddled on the ground.

“Sergeant!”

Lights appeared in the troop tents and moving shadows told that his voice had roused the men. They came double-quick, but before any of them

had reached the cabin, Captain Duncan, aided by the girl, had carried the unconscious man into the house and laid him on the couch.

Only the dull glow of the fire and the flickering light from the lantern swung on Bonita's arm relieved the gloom, for the wind had blown out the flame of the lamp on the table.

A knock sounded on the closed door and they heard Sergeant Faulkner's voice. The officer bade him enter, and the old soldier, bareheaded and dripping from the rain, stood inside.

"Take care of the horse," was the brief order, "and tell Finnegan to wait in the kitchen tent. The rest of the men may return to camp."

Faulkner disappeared. Mrs. Duncan had re-lighted the lamp, and, trained to resourcefulness, hastened to the medicine chest which was equipped for emergencies in the absence of any doctor.

Captain Duncan began unfastening the yellow oilskin slicker, while Bonita was pulling at the rain-soaked gauntlets.

"Roy!" The girl's startled cry reached the others, and Mrs. Duncan ran to the couch and dropped on her knees beside her son.

The girl stepped away and the mother slipped her arms under his shoulders; drawing him against her breast she looked into his face. Her lips were white. Bonita saw Roy's mother turn an agonized face toward the father, but her lips did not move.

“It’s just a collapse, Mother. Don’t worry.” Duncan’s voice was unsteady as he reassured his wife, whose face was pressed tightly against Roy’s cheek, while her stifled sob brought tears to Bonita’s eyes.

The girl moved nearer, longing to help in some way yet feeling that the father and the mother had forgotten everything but their son.

Roy opened his eyes and tried to rise, but fell back as his father’s hand pressed his shoulder.

“Lie still, Son.” The voice was very tender, and the captain’s relief showed in his face. “You’ll be all right in a few minutes.” Turning he spoke: “Get some brandy, Bonita.”

Glad to be of use, she hurried to the medicine chest and measured the stimulant into a glass, which she carried to Roy’s mother. For a few seconds after Roy had drained it he rested with closed eyes, then he looked up at them.

“Dad,” he said brokenly. “Crawford’s dead!”

The news stupefied them. Silently they awaited his words.

“I’m taking the news to General Crook. Had a man from Lang’s ranch, but he played out two hours ago.”

He struggled up and tried to stand on his feet, but slumped down again on the couch.

“I must go on,” he spoke as though to himself.

“You can’t!” his mother answered decidedly. “You must stay here to-night. You are in no condi-

tion to travel. Your father will give the report to the First Sergeant. He will carry it all right."

Roy shook his head. "That won't do, Mother. I promised Lieutenant Maus that I would deliver the message myself to General Crook. He trusted me with it."

"Was it Geronimo or the scouts?" asked Duncan.

"Neither." The young officer looked at his father. "It was Mexican soldiers. It is liable to make trouble down there for us all."

"You are right," Duncan nodded gravely. "This is serious business. No one else can carry your message."

"Well, if you will go on," his mother spoke with aggrieved resignation, "at least you must take time to change to dry clothing and have some hot food."

"I'll tell Jane." Bonita was on her feet, eager to do something.

Taking the captain's rubber coat from its peg, she slipped it around her shoulders and drew the cape of it over her head as she ran out. Mrs. Duncan had already opened her husband's trunk, and after selecting necessary articles, she went into the back room, followed by her son.

When Bonita returned Captain Duncan and his wife, side by side on the couch, were talking in subdued tones, though they were not conscious that they had lowered their voices, as one does in a house of the dead.

The girl went softly back to her chair before the fire and the memory of the dinner came back to her. Again she heard the toast, "Here's to the ones who are gone, and here's to the next one to go!" Who would be next?

In the leaping flames she saw a slender figure in cavalry uniform lying motionless on the ground while the storm beat down furiously. "If you should call me, I would hear you and come, even though I were dead."

Unable to endure her thoughts, she rose quickly. The burning log broke. The fire picture vanished. With misty eyes she looked up at Roy, who stood in the doorway.

Then Jane bustled in with a covered tray and arranged steaming food upon the table.

## Chapter XXVII

### IN DAYS OF PEACE

**R**OY put down the empty coffee cup and, rising, went over to the fireplace where he stood looking silently into the flames.

Captain Duncan held out a cigar, but the young man shook his head and the captain left his own stogie unlighted. No one spoke for several minutes. Their thoughts were on the tale they had just heard of how Captain Crawford had been shot.

Mrs. Duncan pushed a chair beside her own, and her son, in answer to a gesture, sat down. His mother laid her hand on his and let it rest there. The simple act of tenderness meant much, coming from Mrs. Duncan, and all of them knew how deeply her emotions had been stirred that evening.

From where the young officer sat he could see Bonita's bent head and the firelight playing on her brown curls and pale cheek.

Seated around the fireplace, they waited for Roy to continue his narration.

"After Crawford was shot," he went on slowly, "Maus took command, and the fighting kept up for



two more hours before we drove the Mexicans away. It was all we could do, for they had every advantage, with plenty of arms and munitions, while we were without rations, short of ammunition, and in the heart of an unfriendly population in a foreign country. Our safety depended on the loyalty of our scouts, and just a short distance away Geronimo's band—kin to our scouts—watched and waited. Our pack train was somewhere back of us, unprotected."

Roy struck his clenched fist on the arm of his chair and his eyes blazed as he said vehemently, "Dad! I don't know what darned skunk was responsible, but we found out before we left Faison and the pack train that the ammunition they had didn't fit their guns. The packers had all been armed with Sharps' carbines—.50-calibre guns—and someone has issued .45-calibre ammunition! Do you all get that?" He flung out his hands and looked from one startled face to the other as he repeated emphatically, "Fifty-calibre guns with forty-five ammunition down in the heart of Mexico!"

The older man nodded slowly as he looked into the young officer's angry eyes. "When you have been in the service as long as I have been," he said heavily, "you'll find other things as bad. Politics and government pigeonholes have been the tomb of many a brave soldier's conscientious career. The army is comprised of heroes while there is any fighting to be done, but in times of peace the very same

men are treated as criminals who have forfeited all human or civil rights! That is the acid test of a man's patriotism."

"But men like Crawford stand it," Roy added quickly.

"And so will you, my son," the father answered.

"How soon did Doctor Davis reach him?" asked Mrs. Duncan.

"Not until late that afternoon. Crawford was still breathing, but unconscious, and Davis expected his death at any moment. There was nothing that could be done for him. After Davis had cared for our own wounded, Maus had him look after the wounded Mexicans. We gave their dead to them and turned over some of the captured Indian ponies to carry their dead and wounded. They seemed to feel pretty badly over the affair and claimed that it was all due to a mistake. So we did not anticipate any further trouble with them and turned our attention to our own command.

"We stayed in the Geronimo camp site until morning. Crawford was still living and Maus and Davis decided to get him back to the border if possible. But with such a wound as his, it was miraculous that he had lived even an hour.

"Every minute counted; and we worked like beavers, making a travois of canes cut from the willows in the river bed and binding them with strips of canvas. While we were making the litter some

Mexicans asked Maus to talk with their party. No one suspected treachery when he went with them.

“The storm had begun, and the rain was falling. They asked Maus to take shelter with them under an overhanging ledge, which was out of our sight. Well, he found fifty armed Mexicans awaiting him there. They demanded his official papers, his commission as an officer, called him a marauder who had no right in their country, and heaped insults on him and his uniform. You see, sir, Major Corredor and Lieutenant Juan de La Cruz had been killed. If they had lived there would have been no second attack; but their lack of a responsible leader left us to contend with a bunch of ignorant Mexicans mixed in with a lot of cut-throats.”

“But he told them about the understanding between our country and theirs?” questioned the captain, who had risen to his feet.

“Yes; you know Maus speaks Spanish fluently. There was no chance of misunderstanding. No telling what the outcome would have been if our scouts had not started to yell and raise the devil. And then, what do you think? Old Geronimo’s bunch signalled us that they would pitch in and help us lick the Mexicans to a finish!”

“Humph!” grunted Duncan. “That would have raised a fine mess!”

“Well, the Mexicans decided to turn Maus loose

after that demonstration. So we started early the next morning, with Crawford on the travois, which we took turns in carrying. The trail was terrible with the rain and soft mud, and we barely made three miles the first day. Crawford still lived when we camped that night.

“And then a squaw came from Geronimo, asking Maus to come unarmed into their camp, to talk. He went. Only two Apaches were there, but they promised that the next day Geronimo, Natchez, Nana, and Chihuahua would meet him.

“Again he went, unarmed, and found the four chiefs and fourteen bucks fully armed, in direct violation of their agreement. Every Apache in the circle that squatted about Maus held his rifle upright, ready for trouble. But they finally agreed solemnly that they would meet General Crook near San Bernardino in two moons to talk about final surrender.”

“It was a severe test for a young officer like Lieutenant Maus.” Mrs. Duncan spoke warmly.

“Yes, Mother.” Her son turned. “He showed himself worthy to assume the command after Crawford fell. For we practically fought our way back to the border. More than once we faced armed Mexicans in small towns, who refused to let us pass on the only available road.”

“And Crawford?” asked Captain Duncan.

“Lived six days in spite of his wound. On the

sixth day after he had been shot he opened his eyes for the first time and looked straight at Maus, who was sitting beside him. When Maus tried to get him to speak, there was a slight pressure of Crawford's hand. Then Maus leaned nearer and told him that he would take care of his property and see that justice should be done his memory."

Those who listened to Roy's words understood what had been in the thought of Lieutenant Maus, and what the promise meant to the dying man. Someone would have to shoulder the blame for the whole affair when Mexico should present its side of the case in Washington and report the deaths of the Mexican officers and men.

"We knew that he was fully conscious then, for as Maus ceased speaking, Crawford smiled faintly. Dad, it was a smile that I will never forget so long as I live! We saw him gather his last bit of strength and lift his arms about Maus's shoulder. Then, with his head against Maus's breast, he lapsed into unconsciousness."

Roy's voice choked. Captain Duncan's hand shielded his eyes, but Mrs. Duncan and Bonita made no effort to hide their tears. The clock on the mantel ticked noisily and the fire crackled on the hearth. Outside the wind shrieked and the sleet tapped on the window.

"That's all! He died the next day—the eighteenth of January. The end came so silently that

none of us knew the exact moment. He passed away as though in sleep. We wrapped his body in canvas and placed it on a pack mule and went on. The Satachi River was high and we had to swim across it, carrying his body with us; but when we reached Nacori we had to bury him there. Maus got some rough boards and we made a coffin, for there was none in the town and no one to make it but ourselves, and so we left him to his rest."

"One of the finest, bravest, and gentlest men God ever made!" said the officer who had been Crawford's comrade and friend for a lifetime, and the tears that were on Captain Duncan's cheeks were no dishonour to a soldier.

The shuffle of horses' hoofs outside the cabin door caught their ears, and Roy rose, picking up his slicker.

"I must go on now," he said.

His mother stood in front of him and fastened the buttons of the raincoat, one by one, very carefully. He smiled down at her then stooped and kissed her gently.

"Oh, I hate to have you go!" she sobbed, clinging to him tightly.

Moved by her unusual display of emotion, her son patted her cheek tenderly. "I'll be back again, Mumsy," he promised, using the almost forgotten pet name of his childhood's days.

Father and son gripped hands but neither of them

spoke. Then Roy turned to the girl, whose eyes were dark with tragedy.

“Good-bye, Nita,” he said. The cheek that he touched with his lips was icy cold.

As he reached the door, Bonita seized the still burning lantern from the table.

“Wait, Roy!” she cried. “Let me hold the light!”

As he rode into the wild night with two soldiers as escorts, Roy turned in his saddle and looked back where a slender girlish figure, misty through the rain, was outlined against the dull glow of the room. Her hand, lifted high, held the lantern, and its rays shone about her head like a nimbus. Then he noticed that the light stretched out toward him and made a golden path.

## Chapter XXVIII

### NOT ON OFFICIAL RECORD

**T**HE news of Crawford's death intensified the danger to any American forces in Mexico; and when Roy stopped for an hour at Bonita Cañon, the family, with unvoiced forebodings, watched him start on his return trip to Lang's Ranch. He carried orders to Lieutenant Maus to turn back to Mexico and await the signals of the hostiles, as agreed.

Then life at Camp Bonita slipped back to its usual routine of official duties for Captain Duncan and small household responsibilities for the women.

"I wish we had fresh cream for your coffee," remarked Mrs. Duncan at the breakfast table, passing the can of condensed milk to her husband.

"Bad off as the Ancient Mariner," he commented dolefully. "'Cattle, cattle everywhere and not a drop of milk!' But I'll see if I can't buy a milch-cow from Riggs or Prue."

"They must have plenty," his wife answered positively.

"No, that's the funny part of Arizona ranches.



They nearly all use condensed milk. Can't milk a wild range cow, you know."

"Riggs doesn't use canned milk," asserted Bonita. "They have lovely cream and make butter, too. I forgot to tell you that the last time I was down there old Mr. Riggs said that he would let us have a cow to use—a real, gentle milch cow—provided I would drive it from their ranch to the camp without any help. It's only five miles, you know."

"I would be glad to pay for the use of the cow while we are here. I'll send Finnegan down for it to-day."

"He won't rent it," the girl explained, "but he will let me have it—not you—and I must drive it alone to our door. Then another part of the contract is that I am to pay for it in music each time I go to their ranch. You see"—she turned to Mrs. Duncan—"they have a melodeon coming from a mail-order house in Chicago. All of them are crazy about music but none of them can play or sing."

"That's a fine bluff he put up to you!" the captain said as he pulled out his pipe and filled it preparatory to what Bonita called his smoke of peace.

"It wasn't a bluff," she defended. "He really meant it, and you know I don't mind singing and playing for them. I'd do it anyway, cow or no cow!"

"Oh, the singing is all right"—Captain Duncan rose from the table—"but I guess it's 'good-bye,

Bossy,' nevertheless. You couldn't drive the cow down here alone, and Riggs knows it."

Bonita's eyes snapped. "I couldn't, eh? You just watch me! I am going after it right away."

Captain Duncan looked at his wife in consternation as the girl hurried from the dining tent.

"By Jove, Marcia! You don't suppose she will try such a crazy thing?" he appealed.

"You ought to know by this time," she retorted, "that nobody ever knows what Bonita will do next."

Jane paused at the tent door, balancing platters, but whatever she intended to say was confined within her wagging grizzled head. Others might doubt Bonita's ability to accomplish any purpose whatever, but to Jane it was a sure bet. She repeated the conversation to Finnegan in the kitchen tent, and he puffed up like a pouter-pigeon.

"Huh! De cap'n doan' know us! Caze we'll git dat cow down yeah!" he bragged.

"Caze nuffin'! Yo' ain't er gwine. Miss Bonita she's gwine fotch dat yeah cow all alone by herself, 'thout any one else a holpin' her a-tall! Yo' heyah me talkin'?"

Captain and Mrs. Duncan, standing at the cabin door, watched Bonita mount her horse and ride off alone. Through the looped-back flap of the kitchen tent poked Jane's nodding head. Above and back of it loomed Finnegan's speculative countenance. Bonita turned in her saddle and looked back at them

all. Her waving hand was a final challenge as she urged Don into a gallop.

The Riggs's ranch was one of the many places where Bonita always found a hearty welcome from the rancher as well as his wife and daughters. It was a family joke that the father had told Rhody and Marthy they could have all the calves they could rope unaided. As the two girls used sidesaddles and long skirts, he felt very safe in his proposition. But their tallies, and the freshly cut ear tips of calves which they showed as proof, became too serious an inroad on the calf crop, and the old man called a halt.

Rhody, the oldest daughter, gave such strict care to her little herd that it had crept almost to the point of equalling her father's at the time Bonita had met the family.

And the joke was intensified when the old man, losing money on a beef contract, had sold it to Rhody, expecting to see her make a fiasco of it, and had watched with amused chagrin while she doubled her profits.

The shrewd good-humour of the Riggs girls and their parents had appealed to Bonita, while her gay laughter and music sung to a wheezing, dyspeptic accordion played by one of the Riggs boys, had completed her conquest of the entire family.

The men of the family were working in the corral, and Bonita, slipping from her horse, tied it to a post

in front of the house. Then the women discovered and welcomed her noisily. Talking together they entered the big room which was the sitting room of the ranch.

They had not been there very long before Riggs wandered in and joined them, remarking that he had noticed her horse. Bonita lost no time in announcing her mission.

“Oh, Mr. Riggs, is that cow ready? I’ve come after her, and I want to get back to camp by lunch time.”

The old rancher chewed his tobacco more rapidly and stared with unblinking, faded blue eyes, but the gray beard quivered on his chest.

“Aimin’ to take her with you?” he inquired casually.

“Yes, right away,” was the brisk and businesslike reply.

“You know the terms of the contract?”

“Certainly. I am to drive her from your corral to the door of our cabin without any help from any one.”

“So fur so good. But what else?”

“Pay with music once a week.”

“That’s right. I’ll turn her out when you’re ready to start if you’ll give your word on it.”

“My word and my hand!”

The rancher gripped the soft white hand in his horny palm. Solemnly up and down, like a stiff

pump handle, he moved his arm. Riggs was a game old fellow, but it was a notorious fact that where a contract was concerned he had never been known to give or take. To him a contract was a contract, nothing more.

He ambled out of the room, and Rhody turned to Bonita, saying:

“Paw is putting up a bluff on you. He thinks you can’t do it alone.”

“That’s what he tried on us,” chuckled Marthy, “but we called his bluff pretty quick.”

“I’ll get that cow to the camp alone if it takes the rest of my life!” Bonita’s eyes gleamed determinedly.

“Good for you!” encouraged the other women, as they followed her to the corral.

When she had mounted her horse, the corral gate was swung open by the rancher and a roan cow dashed out with a snort. Then it whirled and bellowed back at a three-months-old calf in the corral.

Old Riggs stroked his beard to hide a smile, but Bonita caught the twinkle in his eyes and reined Don toward the cow.

For some distance all went well, then the cow twisted and raced in the direction of the ranch and her calf. Bonita circumvented the scheme and after several dizzy circles had been described, the cow’s nose again was pointed toward the cañon.

From that moment until the edge of the mountains had been reached the contest was unabated. The cow was determined to return to its calf, and the girl was equally determined that it should go to the cabin. One who could win such a fight would be qualified to lead a forlorn hope on any battlefield.

The climax came when the cow, assuming docility, reached the mouth of the cañon, and then suddenly darted up the steep, overhanging cliff. Horse and rider scrambled after her, though it was no easy matter for anything but a goat to follow. Full tilt she raced along the edge of the cañon wall above the camp, and Bonita, with hair streaming loose and horse on a mad run, kept closely at her heels.

Leaning forward in her saddle, the girl lashed the flanks of the cow with her whip. The whip snapped and doubled limply. The cow galloped gaily onward, headed again for the ranch. Don shook his head stubbornly and fought to reach the camp in the cañon below them. He balked and he bucked, and while Bonita struggled with him, the cow was losing no time on the home trail.

Tears of vexation filled the girl's eyes. All of them had said that she couldn't do it. They would never forget it. Anger grew. She looked at the useless whip, and then Don cocked his ears, for the words Bonita Curtice was saying emphatically were very familiar to Don, albeit he had never before heard his young mistress talk that way. Soldiers

did it, and Don knew that when those words were uttered, trouble loomed for him unless he behaved. Bonita was swearing.

Don turned and followed the cow.

Down in the cañon Sergeant Faulkner coming out of his tent caught a fleeting glimpse of a racing cow, a running horse, and a figure with long hair. It disappeared immediately. Remembering that Bonita had ridden off without any escort, Faulkner's bandy, rheumatic legs accomplished a Marathon miracle to the cabin.

"Cap'n Duncan, sah!" The salute was forgotten. The old soldier's voice trembled and the whites of his eyes gleamed conspicuously. "Ah jes' done seen a 'Pache chasin' stock up yondah ober de camp, an'—an'—Miss Bonita—she ain't comed back yit——"

"Saddle up!" Duncan turned into the house, buckled on belt and pistol and slung the strap of his field glasses over his shoulder. His wife watched him with terrified eyes, but did not speak. It was no time for words.

A troop of the famous Fighting Tenth Cavalry made a record in saddling on that day. As Captain Duncan led his men up the sheer slope of Bonita Cañon, scrambling hoofs dislodged stones that crashed down into the gully. Grim-faced, heavily breathing, the troopers, with pistols drawn and cocked, gained the top of the cliff.

An instant they paused, listening. Captain Dun-

can lifted his glasses and scanned the mesquite-dotted flat. Nothing met his view. There was no sound. Breathlessly they all waited.

In the silence they heard Bonita's voice; clearly and furiously it came. The men glanced at each other.

"Oh—oh—you beast!"

Following the captain the troop dashed toward a thick growth of high mesquite. Out of it darted a snorting cow, head down and tail switching high, and back of the cow, on a lathered horse, rode Bonita.

The troop halted without any order from its commander.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" he ejaculated in disgust. "It's Bonita and that damned cow!"

Like a gigantic jackrabbit, with a hop, skip, and jump, the cow dodged the troop, passed it, and was homeward bound. Captain Duncan, realizing that cream—real cream—was evaporating before his very eyes, spurred his horse and shouted to the men, "Head her off! Don't let her get away!"

They started en masse, white teeth gleaming in their grinning black faces.

"No! No! Keep back! Let her alone!" screamed Bonita, flashing past in the wake of the cow.

The men hesitated, and the officer remembered that interference would mean no cow—no cream.

"Halt!" he called sharply. The men obeyed.

Sitting on their horses they watched Bonita force



the cow to the edge of the cañon, where with a loud snort she struck down the steep decline; Don, like Nemesis, kept at her heels, his nose resting on the cow's broad back.

Back of the girl rode Captain Duncan; and back of him in single file rode a fully armed troop of the famous Indian-fighting Tenth Cavalry which formed a guard of honour to the cabin door.

Tired, but triumphant, Bonita watched Finnegan tie a rope about the cow's neck and lead it toward the troop stables. Then she gave a deep sigh of satisfaction.

She had called Riggs's bluff!

## Chapter XXIX

### THREADS OF THE WEB

**D**OCTOR EAGAN drove into camp for his monthly inspection of health conditions, and, official duties completed, he and Captain Duncan lingered in the dining tent after luncheon. Mrs. Duncan and Bonita had left the men enjoying cigars.

“The last letter we had from Roy,” the captain said as he flicked the ash from cigar tip into a tray, “stated that the entire band of hostiles had camped at a point only half a mile from Maus, near Fronteras. They refuse to surrender, but are making no effort to move away from the Cañon de los Embudos.”

“Maus did good work in getting that agreement out of Geronimo, to meet Crook.”

“Yes, but will Geronimo keep his word?” questioned Duncan tersely. “I have no faith in Geronimo’s pledges. This uncertainty from day to day is getting on my nerves.”

“You are not the only man who feels that way. But of all the disgusted men I know, Cooper is the worst.”

“What is his special kick?”

“You know his troop was over in the San Simon?”

Duncan nodded and the doctor went on: “I was over there inspecting and he told me about it. He received positive information that the hostiles were just back of Doubtful Cañon. In fact, he saw their signal lights from his camp, notified General Crook, and asked permission to go in pursuit. The order came for him *to take his troop across the San Simon Valley during daylight and make no effort to conceal their movements. Once in Doubtful Cañon they were to stay concealed, and under cover of darkness return to their former camp site. These tactics were to be repeated daily until further orders.*

“You may judge the effect of travelling day and night. Horses and men were played out,” growled the doctor, and his red hair bristled belligerently.

“What the devil is Crook driving at? Maybe he thinks that Geronimo will believe that the whole United States cavalry is en route to Doubtful Cañon!”

“Cooper said he felt like the leading man in a farce, marching the soldiers off the stage to scurry behind the scenes, enter from the opposite side, and so impersonate a tremendous army. But the audience that watched from behind the rocks was no more deceived than people who are in a theatre.”

“These Sunday-school tactics are demoralizing us all!” the captain struck the table with his fist.

“We can’t put our true opinions in reports, and the authorities in Washington seem to be deaf, dumb, and blind. The Lord knows that the Arizona newspapers make clamour enough to be heard, even back there.”

Eagan smiled grimly. “Cooper’s report would read, ‘Off again, on again, going forever.’ He made that trip for three solid weeks, and by that time Geronimo had travelled elsewhere. Cooper says that the only information of military value he gathered was that the ranch hens in Doubtful Cañon never lay fresh eggs.”

Duncan found his usual expletive, “Damn,” totally inadequate to express his feelings. He chewed the end off his stogie and spat it out, then holding the cigar in his hand, he looked at it in disgusted silence.

“It’s a rotten mess,” he grunted at last, not referring to the stogie, “and it’s getting worse every day.” He rose. “Let’s go to the cabin.”

As they entered the room where Bonita and Mrs. Duncan were sitting, Washington was putting a fresh log on the fire and the pitch-pine kindling snapped and spluttered like miniature artillery. Since the day when prehistoric man built the first fire, none of his masculine descendants have been able to resist the temptation to poke a burning log, even though that log is impeccable.

Captain Duncan was true to the type of his

ancestors, and as soon as Washington had vanished, the officer, armed with the poker, made furious assault.

“It’s a nice dry log this time,” Mrs. Duncan addressed the doctor, laughing. “It won’t smoke us out as it did during your last trip.”

“It’s really a mere matter of form, my coming to inspect this camp,” the doctor said, “but the visit with you folks makes up for the long trip. They’re not so well-off in other places. A number of sick men have been sent in to the hospital at Bowie. By the way”—he turned to Duncan—“a young officer of your regiment—Stanley—had a pretty close shave.”

Bonita rose to her feet, her face was averted, and her hand reached out until it rested on the mantel-piece. She stared into the blaze. The keen glance of the army surgeon could not read her face, but he noted the white knuckles of her hand, and he stroked his short pointed beard thoughtfully. The silence in the room was marked.

“Ah—what was the trouble—with Stanley?” Duncan’s voice was forced.

“Pneumonia and a ‘don’t-give-a-damnness’,” replied the doctor brusquely, indignant at the apparent indifference of them all. For he, himself, in spite of his reputation as a grouch, had formed a strong affection for Gerald Stanley.

“Well”—he rose to his feet—“I must be going

along now. Is there anything I can do for you, Mrs. Duncan?"

"Nothing, thank you, Doctor," she shook his hand. He looked deliberately across her shoulder into Bonita's eyes and saw a look of appeal that reminded him of the hand on the mantel.

"Is there anything that I can do for you in the garrison, Miss Bonita?" he spoke very slowly.

For an instant her lips parted as though to speak, then her lowered lids hid her eyes, the lips closed, and she shook her head. He turned away and mounted the light buckboard. But as the mules trotted briskly toward Fort Bowie, the doctor scowled. "Nigger in the woodpile somewhere," he commented, "but I'll be damned if I am going to meddle in family affairs."

The doctor would have been surprised if he had known that at that very moment Bonita, back in her room, was writing a message which was likely to mix him up very much in a family affair. It read:

DEAR JERRY:

You said that if I called you, you would hear me and come, even though you were dead.

I am calling you now. Oh, Jerry, Jerry, please come or write me one word.

BONITA.

The sealed envelope she addressed to Lieutenant Gerald Stanley. Then, after some hesitation, she

enclosed it in a larger one on which she wrote the name of the doctor.

A few minutes sufficed to slip into her riding clothes and with the missive tucked out of sight, she hurried through the back door of her room and waited impatiently until Washington brought her horse.

Riding around the cabin she paused at the door and called out, "I am going for a ride!"

Mrs. Duncan appeared. "Where is Finnegan?"

"I don't need him. I'll be home soon."

Along the road toward Fort Bowie she urged her horse at rapid gait for several miles. Then guiding him up the side of a hill she reached a point where she could look some distance toward the garrison. But the buckboard was gone. It would be impossible for her to overtake it now.

She had thought of such emergency, hence the second envelope. No one but the doctor must know that she had written to Jerry.

Don snorted and leaped at the sharp dig of her heel against his side as she reined him toward Prue's ranch, which was a mile from the entrance of the cañon.

"Evenin', Miss Bonita!" sounded a voice from on high.

She halted and looked up at Prue who was tinkering at the machinery of the windmill.

"Aimin' to light?"

Bonita shook her head. "No, I just wanted to

find out whether you are going to Fort Bowie soon? I was going to ask the doctor to attend to something for me in the garrison, but I forgot to mention it while he was in camp. I tried to catch up with him, but those mules of his are too fast for Don!" she finished with a laugh.

The rancher caterpillared down the framework of the windmill and wiped his greasy hands on his overalls, while he beamed upon her.

"Well," he drawled, "I kinder thought I'd go in soon. But if it's any accommodation to you, I'll make it to-morrow."

"Oh, that will be fine!" she cried in delight. "All I want is to get this letter to the doctor."

The man accepted the missive. "Better light and set," he urged, "or the old woman will think you've slighted her."

"I must get back to camp, but tell her I will be down and see her soon."

"All right. I'll take care of your letter," he called after her.

She smiled her thanks as she looked back at him, confident that her letter would be in Jerry's hands the next day.

But an invisible thread wrapped tightly about her as she rode toward the camp. For shortly after she had disappeared in the cañon, a cowpuncher dismounted at the Prue Ranch with news of vital importance. A cattle buyer, the first of the season, was in Willcox



contracting steers at higher prices than for several seasons. And Prue, eager to make a sale at such figures while the buyer was in that section, started before daylight the next morning for Willcox.

Bonita's letter was crammed into the pigeonhole of a badly littered desk, and there among a mass of paid and receipted bills, it lay forgotten while the dust of months gathering upon it turned into the dust of passing years, and prairie grass was growing upon Prue's grave.

In the garrison of Fort Bowie Lieutenant Stanley fingered a package of letters that had been returned to him unopened and bearing the endorsement, "Further communications will be destroyed unread."

Grimly the young officer determined that as soon as he was able he would obtain twenty-four hours' leave of absence, so that he could go to the camp and see Bonita in the presence of her guardians and give her those letters himself.

But before he was able to gain strength enough for the journey events below the Mexican border stirred the entire population of Arizona Territory, both civilian and military, and every officer and soldier, as well as every Apache scout, was pressed into service.

So Lieutenant Stanley, in charge of a small detachment of scouts, was ordered to patrol the Mexican border until further orders, taking the train at Bowie station and starting immediately for Mexico, via Willcox instead of the usual trail past Bonita Cañon.

## Chapter XXX

### GERONIMO CHECKMATES CROOK

**A**S DAY followed day, Bonita watched the arrival of each courier from Fort Bowie, and lingered in the room while Captain Duncan sorted the letters for the troop and for the family.

Though she turned away without the one letter for which she prayed, she was still confident that Jerry would send her word when he would leave Fort Bowie for the camp. She even planned what she would say to the Duncans when the note arrived. Just a casual remark that he was joining his troop and would pass Bonita Cañon on a certain day and hour and that she would ride down to meet him. If they objected, she would defy them and tell them that Jerry meant more to her than the whole world, and that she would be loyal to him, no matter what he had done.

Day after day, Don was led to the cabin door and Bonita, thrilled with expectation, hastened to a high ledge out of sight of the camp, where she could sit on her horse and watch the road that led through Apache Pass to Fort Bowie. There was a curve in

the road where she could see Jerry long before he would know that she was waiting.

But the only riders who passed during the weeks she kept her vigil were occasional cowpunchers or the couriers who reached camp at two o'clock with the mail. Always she followed them into the camp, and waited patiently for the expected note—in vain. But hope is hard to kill.

If Mrs. Duncan noticed the girl's abstraction, she made no comments to the captain, and Bonita spent many hours perched on a board seat that Finnegan had placed in a fork of the trunk of a newly leafed oak tree which grew halfway between the cabin and the road; but the girl's wistful eyes more often watched the road than the pages of her book as she sat hidden by the thick branches.

A big open wagon, drawn by four mules and filled with singing soldiers, came creakingly up the cañon bound for dry wood for the troop cook and for the great open fire around which the men gathered in the evening.

Many times Bonita and the captain had gone quietly through the brush to listen to the untrained but musical chorus of the soldiers, who could not have uttered a note if they had been aware of their audience. Camp life was a joy to the enlisted men of the Tenth, and their laughter and singing, accompanied by the plunking of banjos and thrumming of guitars, nightly woke the cañon echoes until

“tattoo” sent them into their tents to wait for “taps” and darkness and silence.

The men passed out of sight and up the cañon, singing:

“See dat watermillyun  
Smilin’ on de vine!  
How Ah wish dat watermillyun  
Hit wuz mine,  
Oh, gimme, oh, gimme,  
How Ah wish yo’ wou’d,  
Dat watermillyun smilin’ on de vine!  
Ham-bone am sweet,  
Chicken am good  
Possum meat am bery, bery fine,  
But gimme, oh, gimme,  
How Ah wish yo’ wou’d,  
Dat watermillyun smilin’ on de vine!”

The last notes mingled with the sound of a galloping horse. Bonita leaned forward. The name ever present in her thoughts sprang to her lips—“Jerry!”

But it was not Jerry. It was a courier. And as Bonita descended from the tree and ran toward the cabin, the rider had reached the door. He leaped from his horse, saluted the captain who had come out on the steps, and delivered a letter. The soldier rode to the stables.

“For me, Uncle Jim?” cried the girl.

The light of expectancy was in her eyes. “For me?” she repeated, breathlessly.

Captain Duncan was tearing open the letter.

“By Jove! Listen to this, Marcia,” he ejaculated,

as Mrs. Duncan came out and stood close to his shoulder.

Bonita was swept into a whirl of uncertainty. Was the letter for her? were they going to read it? Or——

But it was no love missive in the officer's hand.

“Geronimo is off again!” he exclaimed. Then he read aloud:

DEAR DAD:

Hell is loose again. At least Geronimo is and that means about the same thing, so far as I can see.

Crook got here ten days after Maus had asked him to come, and between the risks of attacks by pursuing Mexicans, the restlessness and suspicions of the hostiles, and the sale of *mescal* to them by a lot of dirty little scoundrels who are worse than the Apaches themselves, we have been standing on the edge of a volcano that we knew might get busy any moment.

The worst of it all was that if anything had gone wrong, Maus and the rest of us would have had the whole responsibility dumped on our shoulders. And if any row with Mexico had developed, maybe you can figure just where we would have stood officially, but I own it's a sight more than I can.

Geronimo came into our camp every day. He seemed to think that we were going to trick him, or possibly surround him when other forces should join us. Crook's arrival was tardy, but after all it happened in time to save our bacon, on the 25th.

The conference was held on the 26th, and Geronimo's attitude was positively impudent. The old devil made it very plain that the only conditions on which he would surrender would be: that the band of hostiles be sent east for a period not exceeding two years, and that they should take with them only such members of their families as elected to go, and leave Nana, who is too old to be any factor, at Fort Apache.

The other proposition was that the whole bunch of them return to Fort Apache, just as before, without losing any privileges or plunder, or being subjected to any discipline.

Geronimo stated flatly that if neither of these terms was ac-

cepted then and there, he and his band would go on murdering and pillaging.”

“Heavens!” Mrs. Duncan interrupted.

I don't know what the authorities in Washington will say when they learn that Crook has accepted Geronimo's first demand—to send them east for two years. But it is easy to guess what the people of Arizona will think about it.

The conference was on the twenty-sixth. Crook left the 28th. He planned to push through to Fort Bowie in two days, so must have been in the garrison the night of the twenty-ninth.

But, get this, Dad. On the night of the twenty-ninth, Geronimo and Natchez picked twenty of their best bucks and thirteen of their strongest women and beat it. The Lord only knows where they've gone and we are guessing what will happen next.

The fat is in the fire now. Ulzahney, Nana, Catley, nine other men and forty-seven women and children have been left behind. So you can see that Geronimo simply rid himself of those who impeded his movements. He is better prepared now to keep us jumping, for he has plenty of ammunition and can buy or steal food and horses in any part of Arizona or Mexico.

Maus has ordered Faison to escort the Chiricahuas left on our hands into Bowie, and a heavy detail goes with them. Shipp and I, with the balance of our scouts, under command of Maus, like Little Bo-peep, will take up the trail of “Crook's Lost Lambs.”

Our scouts are openly averse to going back over the same ground again. Really you can't blame them. I don't mind saying to you, Dad, that the effect of this fiasco of Crook's is already in evidence among our scouts. They are on the verge of mutiny. Their term of enlistment expires next month and they know they can quit then and have money to burn.

But the rest of us are just commissioned officers of the U. S. Army, so like Tennyson's Brook, will probably go on forever, and someday we will wake up and discover that the rest of the world has been dead and buried for years, and Gabriel is blowing reveille. The only satisfaction we have is that we have rounded up seventy-nine of the hostiles—the larger part of Geronimo's band.

Maus ought to have a medal for the way he has handled a mighty ticklish situation ever since poor Crawford was shot. Well, the

First Infantry and our own Tenth won't be ashamed to meet the Third and tell them about Crawford.

Good-bye. Faison is ready to start now, so adios and good luck to you all. Love to Mother and Bonita. I'll write when I get a chance.

Affectionately,  
ROY.

(Headed for God-knows-where.)

“What do you suppose will happen now?” demanded Mrs. Duncan.

Her husband folded the letter slowly and looked at her. “You said ‘Heavens’ a little while ago, Mother. I’ll go you one better—‘Hell’!”

## Chapter XXXI

### GENERAL MILES TAKES COMMAND

**T**HE telegraph wires between Fort Bowie and Washington fairly sizzled during the forty-eight hours after Geronimo's escape had been reported. But as official messages were transmitted over military lines, their purport was known only to Lieutenant-General Sheridan and Adjutant-General Drum at the Washington end, and General Crook and the telegraph operators in Arizona.

Three days after Geronimo had broken his pledge and stampeded, the official communications became public news.

General Crook, stung by the tenor of official telegrams, which were thinly veiled reprimands, had asked to be relieved from the Department of Arizona, which he had commanded for eight years. The very same day, General Nelson A. Miles, who was then in command of the Department of the Missouri, received a telegram at Fort Leavenworth, ordering him to proceed immediately to Fort Bowie to relieve General Crook.

The selection of General Miles had been logical,



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in view of his brilliant record with the Sioux Indians in 1877, while he was colonel of the Fifth Infantry. During that time Sheridan had been in command of the Department of the Missouri.

Still further back in Sheridan's memory was the splendid work of Miles in 1874, when he had led the expedition against the Comanches, under Chief Quannah Parker, and their Kiowa allies. The final proof of Miles's executive ability tempered with justice had been his adjustment of serious conditions among the Cheyennes and Arapahoes in Indian Territory, when he first assumed command of the Department of the Missouri in July, 1885.

Sheridan, now promoted to Lieutenant-General in command of the army, based his choice on his knowledge of Miles as man and officer.

General Miles arrived at Fort Bowie on the twelfth day of April. The garrison was located in an arena-like space in the Chiricahua Mountains. On all sides rose precipitous slopes covered with immense boulders which afforded hiding places for outlaw Indians.

Apache Pass, which led from the little fort toward Bonita Cañon, had been the scene of more atrocities than any other place except Fort Apache in the White Mountains. The toll of lives could be partially reckoned by inscriptions in the military graveyard. Men, women, children, ranchers, miners, travellers, stage-drivers, cowpunchers, and soldiers,

they had come from widely distant places and walks of life to lie down side by side in the little patch of ground enclosed by a white picket fence.

Beneath nearly every name and date three words told the common fate—"Killed by Apaches."

Into this terrific condition of affairs now stepped the gallant and experienced officer, a man of heart as well as of invincible purpose and military science.

By an extraordinary example of misapplied strategy General Crook had pushed soldiers and horses to the limit of their endurance, and his misplaced confidence in the promises of Geronimo and Natchez, which had enabled them to escape, had nullified everything that had been accomplished.

Arizona was a new section to Miles, geographically, and he was not personally acquainted with the men under his command—a matter of vital importance in the successful conduct of military operations. The people of Arizona Territory had lost faith in the desire or ability of the troops to capture the Apaches, and the temper of the citizens had been evinced by their petitions to Washington.

There was no time for the new Department Commander to sit down and study the situation.

While yet the troopers were spurring their jaded horses over mountain peaks and down deep cañons, Miles started his campaign by dismissing all of the Apache scouts who were in the least tolerant of the hostiles. In this process of elimination he found

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many who had taken a tribal pledge, or were closely connected by kinship to those with Geronimo.

This was diametrically opposed to Crook's methods, for the latter had employed as scouts members of the same tribes which were being pursued.

The next step was an investigation regarding the ammunition issued to the scouts. Officers were convinced that missing munitions were concealed in caches established by the scouts and visited by the hostiles.

A limited number of White Mountain, Tontos, and San Carlos Apaches, whose tribal animosity to the Chiricahuas was well known, were employed as guides to the regular troops, but not to act in bodies composed entirely of Indians.

These things accomplished, General Miles gave his attention to forming a second expedition into Mexico along the lines of the one formerly commanded by Captain Crawford, but this time with soldiers, while Indians acted merely as guides. To this end he studied the men in his department, and Captain Lawton, of the Fourth Cavalry, who had a fine record in frontier Indian campaigns, was given command.

Lawton was a man of Herculean strength which enabled him to pick up a man of ordinary size and hurl him fully fifteen feet. An accomplishment valuable in close fighting, but not demonstrated under ordinary circumstances.

With Lawton was associated a young doctor stationed at Fort Huachuca, Captain Leonard Wood. General Miles's ability to size up a man was not at fault when he decided that the twenty-four-year-old Assistant Surgeon would be a valuable person in the expedition. Wood, a graduate of Harvard, was an athlete and a student, one whose keen observation of white men, as well as red men, working under the same conditions, would be of real scientific importance to army officers.

But not even Miles's perspicacity suggested to him then that one day the whole American nation, and even Europe, would be familiar with the name of the fair-haired, blue-eyed young doctor. A name that America has written on pages of her history—Leonard Wood.

In addition to Lawton and Wood, Johnson of the Eighth Infantry, Benton, Brown, Walsh, and Smith of the Fourth Cavalry, and Lieutenant Leighton Finley of the Tenth Cavalry completed the officers of the second expedition into Mexico.

While this command was pressing after the fleeing hostiles, Washington authorities were aware that General Miles was perfecting plans to surround all of the Chiricahuas who had remained on the reservation at Fort Apache. That place was their home in conjunction with their allies, the Warm Spring Apaches.

*General Sheridan's letters emphasized President*

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*Cleveland's opinion that the Chiricahuas should be removed from Arizona Territory, but that when such action was taken, not one Chiricahua Apache should be allowed to remain there, for if only a few escaped they would become a serious menace and incite other tribes to join them in future warfare.*

General Miles had determined to utilize his knowledge of the then unknown heliograph, which he had seen in the office of General Myer, chief of the signal corps, twenty years previously. It was a novel idea in Apache warfare, but the Department Commander had to some extent experimented with the instrument in Montana and later between Vancouver Barracks and Mount Hood for a distance of fifty miles.

The heliograph was the invention of a British army officer and had been used successfully in India. Arizona's atmospheric conditions were similar to those in India, with inaccessible mountains, lack of communication between far-distant sections and the intensely hot sun.

Twenty-seven stations were established on mountain peaks from twenty-five to thirty miles apart. The mirrors with which the little instruments were equipped were mounted on tripods and the flashes of sunlight were interrupted to make them long or short. The Morse code was used, but where the telegraph gave its message of dots and dashes audibly, the heliograph sent its message to the eye.

So simple was the method that an enlisted man of

ordinary intelligence but with no previous knowledge of telegraphy could qualify as a heliograph operator in two or three weeks, and in four hours a message could be transmitted over inaccessible mountains for a distance of eight hundred miles.

While General Miles was perfecting his plans, the people of Arizona Territory watched with little hope of relief from the intolerable conditions with which they had been harassed for thirty consecutive years.

But it was not known that the new Department Commander, though he had never served in that section, had constantly watched the Apache problem. Whenever a raid had been reported, General Miles, in a far-distant place, had studied the Apache trail on maps.

In this way he learned their favourite mountains, trails, places most favourable for their hiding, the permanent water holes or springs, and as far as possible, the habits of the Apaches in peace and on the warpath.

And now in the very heart of the Apache country, he strengthened this knowledge by a practical personal survey, while cowboys on lonely trails, officers in garrisons and camps, and women living in small, isolated ranches where children played unaware of constant menace, all asked the question:

“What will Miles do?”

In Washington President Cleveland and Lieutenant-General Sheridan voiced the same question.

## Chapter XXXII

### BONITA DECIDES

**I**T WAS the second evening in April. Almost a year had passed since the beginning of the Geronimo campaign. The Duncans, weighing the probabilities of changes when the new Department Commander should arrive at Fort Bowie, were surprised to see Roy ride up to the door and dismount.

“Well, what’s the news?” asked his father after the welcomes had subsided.

“I don’t know,” Roy answered, pulling off his gauntlets and leaning over to flick his boots with them. “We’re going to Bowie to wait for further orders. Tagged after old Geronimo’s bunch until they split trail and that settled us. We hadn’t much chance at the beginning for they had ten hours’ start. Our scouts lost interest in the chase. Their only thought was to get back to their reservations and draw their pay. They were ripe for mutiny.” He turned toward his mother. “How’s dinner? I’m starved for a home meal.”

“I’ll run out and hurry Aunt Jane,” Bonita volunteered.

Roy watched the girl as she passed through the doorway, and his mother read his thoughts. Then he rose and sauntered over to join his father. Mrs. Duncan's eyes were meditative. She realized that the experiences of the last year had altered him in more ways than one. His shoulders were held more squarely, there was a touch of self-reliance that had been lacking, his face had lost its latent weakness, and his eyes were those of a man. The thrill of mother pride that she felt was mingled with regret for the boyhood that had vanished forever. No one, not even her husband, had ever guessed the intense, repressed affection of Mrs. Duncan for her son.

"Dad," Roy asked, "had you heard anything about the leading citizens having sent a big petition to Washington demanding that someone else be sent here in place of Crook?"

"Yes; and at the same time another bunch of leading citizens were getting up a banquet in honour of Crook's capture of Geronimo," commented the older man caustically. "No human being can please all of the people all the time. But if any man in the army can handle this mess, that man is General Miles!"

"Well, I don't want your job," says the shave-tail to the brigadier," retorted the young officer. "If Geronimo realized the commotion he has caused two brigadier-generals and the Commanding General of the army, the old reprobate would puff up to beat the band. Think of it, Dad! Almost a year's



work—and hard work at that—with forty-three companies of infantry and forty troops of cavalry. Just a joke for a bunch of Apaches. Makes me mad as the deuce!”

“Wait until you see Miles work.” The captain spoke between meditative puffs on his pet meerschäum, which Bonita called his pipe of peace. “He’s like an expert civil engineer. Makes his plans quietly, sizes up the material, and each tiny rivet, each screw, each girder, slips into place as though by magic and the bridge that has been pronounced impossible is accomplished.”

“He has done some pretty fine bridge-building in his time,” Mrs. Duncan spoke. “Bridges leading to civilization.”

“As an officer who has served under him, my son, I want to tell you that the big thing about him is that the human material coöperates with him, and credit is given by him where it is deserved—not made into a halo for his own head. But he will never get credit for his work while he lives. Too much politics in the army, my boy. Too much politics!”

“Unless the people will build a monument to him after he is dead,” Mrs. Duncan said bitterly, “he will be forgotten.”

“The West is his monument,” replied her husband. “He needs no other!”

Light steps approached the cabin, and Roy turned expectantly.

“Hoo—hoo!” Bonita called from outside.  
“Chow!”

Roy led the advance.

The April day cooled perceptibly with nightfall, and Finnegan laid fresh wood on the fire when the family returned to the cabin. Roy glanced about the room and at those who gathered around the cheerful blaze.

“Gee! This home business is all it’s cracked up to be, Dad!”

“Nothing like it, Son,” the captain answered, smiling back at his wife.

Bonita did not speak. She was gazing at the flames which threw ruddy lights on her dark hair. Home! Roy’s words woke memories of a dream home. Her home and Jerry’s! But her quivering lips whispered, “He did not answer my letter. He was just playing with me!”

The girl was not aware that Roy was regarding her intently.

“Say, Mother, do you remember the time I kidnapped Nita at Shipp Island?” He spoke abruptly.

Mrs. Duncan laughed and the captain chuckled. “That’s regimental history,” the mother replied. “Everybody remembers that!”

“Well,” Roy continued deliberately, “I’m going to do it again.”

Bonita looked up with a light laugh which died upon her lips as she met his eyes.

“Why—why——” she stammered in sudden confusion.

“Is this a proposal, Roy?” his father asked jokingly.

“Yes, sir,” was the grave reply.

Roy looked at his mother, who nodded her head—at his father, who eyed him humorously, yet with a serious pucker between his heavy brows.

Bonita shivered and drew her chair nearer the fire. Pathetic appeal was in the hands she held out to the blaze. Her fingers curled tensely against her upturned palms as she remembered the night of the Christmas dance.

Roy flushed and cleared his throat.

“I want to marry Nita, if she’ll have me,” he said blunderingly, but he looked his father squarely in the eye.

No one spoke, and Roy turned to the girl.

“Will you, Nita?”

The curving fingers pressed tightly. “Why—why—of course not!”

Mrs. Duncan counted her stitches. Captain Duncan puffed silently on his pipe. Bonita turned again toward the fire, that no one might see her quivering lips. Roy sighed as he walked over to the window and stood twitching the curtain cord with little nervous jerks while he stared out into the darkness. There was no ray of light now making a pathway to the girl who held a lantern.

His parents glanced at him, then at each other. Captain Duncan rose and went to Bonita's side, looking down at her with serious, kindly eyes.

"It would please us very much if you could say 'yes,' Nita, my girl," he said gently. "But we will not urge you now."

She lifted her eyes to his, then to Roy's mother.

"You've always belonged to us, dear," the older woman spoke with unwonted tenderness, "and we hoped that you always would."

"But I do not love Roy—that way."

"Many of the happiest marriages are built on friendship at the start," Roy's mother affirmed. "The love that comes after marriage is more lasting."

Roy turned suddenly. The curtain rolled up with a snap. Bonita started and faced him.

"Oh, come on, Nita. Be a sport and take me!" he blurted out.

Torn by conflicting emotions Bonita looked silently at those who had shared their home with her and had filled the places of her dead parents ever since she was four years old. Outside of their home she had no place in the whole world. The memory of Jerry's disloyalty and deceit, his neglect even to answer her letter, stung and humiliated her. Harassed and desperate, like a wounded animal seeking a place to hide, she rose to her feet and faced them all.

"If it will make you happy——" she spoke with white lips, but her voice was firm, "Yes!"

## Chapter XXXIII

### “BOOTS AND SADDLES”

**T**HREATENED and harried by hidden foes, over mountain trails and through menacing cañons, relay couriers rode from camp to camp, bearing messages which outlined the plans formulated by the new Department Commander.

Captain Duncan glanced hastily over the order and expressed his satisfaction by an emphatic bang of his fist upon the table. His wife looked up inquiringly.

“This hits the nail on the head at last!” he exclaimed. She laid aside her own letters and turned as he began to read, unconsciously assuming his official voice.

HEADQUARTERS DEPARTMENT, ARIZONA,  
IN THE FIELD, FORT BOWIE, A. T.,  
*April 20, 1886.*

General Field Orders No. 7

The following instructions are issued for the information and guidance of troops serving in the southern portions of Arizona and New Mexico.

The chief object of the troops will be to capture or destroy any

band of hostile Apache Indians found in this section of the country, and to this end the most vigorous and persistent efforts will be required of all officers and soldiers until the object is accomplished.

To better facilitate this duty and afford as far as practicable protection to the scattered settlements, the territory is subdivided into Districts of Observation as shown upon maps furnished by the department engineer officer, and these will be placed under commanding officers to be hereafter designated.

Each command will have a sufficient number of troops and the necessary transportation to thoroughly examine the district or country to which it is assigned, and will be expected to keep such section clear of hostile Indians. The signal detachments will be placed upon the highest peaks and prominent lookouts to discover any movements of Indians and to transmit messages between the different camps.

The infantry will be used in hunting through the groups and ranges of mountains, the resorts of the Indians, occupying the important passes in the mountains, guarding supplies, etc.

A sufficient number of reliable Indians will be used as auxiliaries to discover any signs of hostile Indians, and as trailers.

The cavalry will be used in light scouting parties, with a sufficient force held in readiness at all times to make the most persistent and effective pursuit.

To avoid any advantage the Indians may have by a relay of horses, where a troop or squadron commander is near the hostile Indians he will be justified in dismounting one half of his command and selecting the lightest and best riders to make pursuit by the most vigorous forced marches, until the strength of all the animals of his command shall have been exhausted.

In this way a command should, under a judicious leader, capture a band of Indians or drive them from one hundred and fifty to two hundred miles in forty-eight hours through a country favourable for cavalry movements, and the horses will be trained for this purpose.

All the commanding officers will make themselves thoroughly familiar with the sections of country under their charge and will

use every means to give timely information regarding the movements of hostile Indians to their superiors or others acting in concert with them in order that fresh troops may intercept the hostiles or take up the pursuit.

Commanding officers are expected to continue a pursuit until capture, or until they are assured a fresh command is on the trail.

All camps and movements of troops will be concealed as far as possible, and every effort will be made at all times by the troops to discover hostile Indians before being seen by them.

To avoid ammunition getting into the hands of hostile Indians every cartridge will be rigidly accounted for, and when they are used in the field the empty shells will be effectually destroyed.

Friendly relations will be encouraged between the troops and citizens of the country, and all facilities rendered for the prompt interchange of reliable information regarding the movements of hostile Indians.

Field reports will be made on the tenth, twentieth, and thirtieth of each month, giving the exact location of troops and the strength and condition of commands.

By command of BRIGADIER-GENERAL MILES.

WILLIAM A. THOMPSON,

*Captain Fourth Cavalry, A.A.A.G.*

Mrs. Duncan did not speak, but watched her husband pick up his pipe, light it, and then sit silently smoking.

“You and Bonita had better go back to Grant the first of May,” he said at last.

The announcement did not surprise her. They had discussed such a possibility when it had become known that General Miles would take command of the department. The wedding of Roy and Bonita had been set for early September, and Roy’s application for leave had been granted. Captain Duncan,

too, hoped to obtain permission to go to Grant for the ceremony. So the change of plans merely hastened matters a few weeks.

Mrs. Duncan and the captain had so happily entered into all the arrangements for the wedding that Bonita, whose resolution had failed many times, and whose heart had grown faint at the prospect of the marriage, could not bring herself to disappoint them and break her engagement.

She wanted to remain in camp but apathetically resigned herself to any readjusting. Every detail had been planned by the captain's wife, and the girl agreed docilely with each suggestion. The managerial spirit of Mrs. Duncan had decided that the two months' trip to California should terminate in the young folks making their home with herself and the captain. Roy, being merely a junior second lieutenant, was entitled to only one room and a kitchen as a domicile.

Apart from advantages to Roy and Bonita in comfort, the lady pointed out, it would totally relieve the bride of any responsibilities of a home. Bonita, who had dreamed of a far different home with its sweet joys and happily accepted sacrifices, now made no protest as her future was arranged for her. She had no plans, no desires, often she compared herself to a leaf tossed to and fro on a swift current that in the end would drag her beneath its dark, rushing water. Numb as from many bruises, she helplessly drifted.



One week in camp still remained when news was received that Geronimo, who had remained hidden, had again started his carnival of slaughter below the Mexican border. However, in emerging from obscurity he had given General Miles opportunity to strike without loss of time or waste of energy.

The Department Commander, astute strategist that he was, concluded that the hostiles, heading north in Arizona, would probably work up through familiar trails in the heart of the Chiricahua Mountains. It was quite possible that they would endeavour to reach the Apache Reservation to obtain recruits, supplies, and ammunition from friendly Indians.

Troops in the vicinity of these trails were ordered out immediately to frustrate such plans, and within an hour after the order had reached Bonita Cañon Captain Duncan and his troop were on the jump. No one could foretell how long they would be gone; but the officer impressed on his wife the necessity of carrying out the plans to return to Fort Grant on the first, whether the troops got back or not.

The flaps of the empty tents had been tied down and the long shed that had stabled the troop mounts now sheltered one pack mule, which had been too sick to be used on the scout. Sergeant Faulkner had been left behind in charge of the camp property and to doctor the sick animal, as well as to keep an eye on the comfort of the women.

Evening came. Aunt Jane was clearing the supper table in the dining tent while Mrs. Duncan and Bonita lingered. A hand scratched at the tent flap, then lifted it, and Sergeant Faulkner appeared, campaign hat in hand.

“’Evenin’, Mis’ Duncan,” he began hesitatingly. “Ah jes’ wuz cogitatin’ ’bout totin’ mah blankets up yeah into de kitchen tent fo’ de night, so’s Ah cou’d be neah if yo’ all needs me. Hit’s er moughty stiff step down to de camp an’ I’s e a pow’ful soun’ sleepah, I is.”

“We’ll be perfectly safe, Sergeant,” assured the captain’s wife, whose fear of danger had been minimized by her years of frontier hazards. “Aunt Jane is going to sleep in the house. You may carry her cot and mattress into the back room. If we need you in the night, one of us will fire the pistol.”

“Yo’ go scuttle er long,” admonished Jane with superior mien and tone. “We all kin tek cayah ob ourselves. Yo’ look out fo’ de mewel, dat’s all yo’ got ter tend ter.”

Faulkner knew that protests would not avail, so he gave his attention to aiding Jane literally to take up her bed and walk.

“Is deyah anythin’ else Ah kin do?” he asked, pausing in the front room and looking anxiously at Mrs. Duncan.

“That is all.”

But he still lingered as though reluctant to leave.

After some hesitation, during which the old soldier shifted from one foot to the other, he turned toward his captain's wife an oddly appealing glance, as though he wished to convey to her mind something for which he had no words.

Failing this, he drew a deep breath, straightened his bent shoulders, then resolutely went over to the table and laid his pistol and cartridge belt upon it.

Mrs. Duncan understood the faithful old man's anxiety for the safety of the women who were practically in his care.

“Why, Sergeant,” she smiled, “I have my pistol.”

“Yessum, Ah knows dat, ma'am. De capt'n, he'd see ter dat, but in dis yeah country whar dar's—whar—whar dar's rattlers an' Gila monsters an' cemtumspeeds—yo' cain't hab too many guns!”

Jane snorted audibly, Bonita laughed outright, and Mrs. Duncan said tolerantly, “We'll be all right, Sergeant. You go and turn in.”

He backed to the door, still hesitating, and went out. They saw his slouch hat as he passed the window, but he came back.

“Miss Bonita,” he said, poking his gray head in at the door and looking at the girl, “when yo' fiahs dat pistol, ol' Faulkner's suah gwineter cum a-runnin'!”

## Chapter XXXIV

### WHERE GERONIMO RODE

**D**ESPITE Sergeant Faulkner's anxiety a week passed uneventfully in the camp after Captain Duncan had ridden away at the head of his troop, and those who remained in Bonita Cañon settled to a daily routine.

Jane tended her chickens and bustled importantly about the cabin and household tents, Faulkner alternated attentions to the family with ministrations to the sick "mewel" which was showing symptoms of convalescence, and Mrs. Duncan found her usual occupation with her needle. Bonita, deprived of her daily ride, spent her time wandering about the cañon, but out of deference to the fears of Mrs. Duncan and the two old Negroes, she kept within sight and hearing of the camp.

Faulkner took his responsibilities much to heart, and Jane's comments were caustic.

"Mis' Duncan," she sniffed, leaning on her broom, "Faulkner's gittin' crazy in de haid. He min's me ob de woman dat wuz allus huntin' ol' Man Trubble, an' when she seen him comin' erlong de road, she

cain't wait fo' him to git to de gate, but she done go scuttlin' down de road to meet him. An' den she cotch holt ob his han' an' drug him inter de house an' sot him down by de stobe an' gib him fry chicken an' hoecake. An' ol' Man Trubble he sot dyah a-eatin' an' a-eatin' 'twill he's fit to bust. An' dat fool nigger woman she's suah he's gwineter git up an' git an' neber come back no moah. But ol' Man Trubble he squinch up hes eyes an' says, 'Mis' Smiff, Ah wuzn't projeckin' none ter stop heyah, but yo' treat me so fine I'se gwineter stay heyah right erlong wif yo'!' An' he suah done hit."

Night, like a tender mother, spread her starry veil over the mountains, plains, and cañons.

Those in the cabin slept, and an old Negro soldier kept guard over them. His tired eyes closed often, but he did not sleep.

After his one talk of possible danger from Apaches, he had not referred to the subject, but unknown to the women he had found a small, natural cave, the front of which was concealed from below by brush. Here, during the night hours, he had carried all the ammunition and extra guns, and he had not forgotten food and canteens of water. So long as the troop was absent, Faulkner determined to have this natural fortress ready. That accomplished, he had no further anxiety or responsibility, except to patrol the camp. Dawn was the danger time; and in those hours he doubled his watchfulness. Not a sound in

the quiet cañon escaped his keen ears as he lay rolled in his blanket a short distance from the cabin.

Jane wakened. A hand was tapping on her window.

“Whut’s dat?” She was out of bed and by the window.

Faulkner pressed his face against the pane.

“’Paches!” he whispered hoarsely from outside. “Come quick! I’s e got er place raidy fo’ yo’ all. Don’t bring nuffin’ but yo’ guns!”

No need of further speech. Jane gave quiet warning. The three women hastily slipped into shoes and long coats and stepped cautiously outside, where Faulkner awaited them. He did not speak as he reached in, took the key, and locked the door after them.

There was no light to illuminate the dark face of their guide as they followed him, testing each step that no loose rock might betray them, or outreaching brush snap noisily.

In absolute silence they gained the cave, and one by one, guided by Faulkner’s hand, they crept through the narrow aperture. Breathlessly they crouched behind him, holding their firearms. His body formed a barricade between them and unspeakable danger.

“Yip—yip—yip,” came the quavering call of a coyote—or was it an Apache?

Silence. Darkness. Minutes seemed hours.

The ominous sound of unshod hoofs on slanting slate and the unmistakable rattle of fine gravel reached their strained ears.

“They’re coming!” Bonita whispered.

Mrs. Duncan touched her arm and patted it very gently. Jane pressed against the girl.

“Sssh!” breathed Mrs. Duncan. Jane stiffened into stone.

So they waited until dawn, like something gray with fear, crawled over the mountains and into the cañon.

The Apaches were in the camp.

From his lookout, Faulkner in the half light could discern them looting the place noiselessly. His grim face relaxed. Maybe they would believe that the women had gone! So far as he knew, even in the hurried flight, they had left no sign by which the Indians might trace them to their hiding place.

A wild yell broke the silence.

Faulkner drew a slow, deep breath between his closed teeth. He knew that they had found a trail—a print of a woman’s foot among their own moccasin tracks.

The soft breathing in back of him quickened.

The grip of his black wrinkled hands tightened on the stock of his gun. His muscles bunched under his rough blue blouse.

Like bloodhounds on a scent, the Apaches raced around the cabin and scattered in a wide semicircle. With heads bent, bodies forward, sinister, certain, they slipped silently between the boulders and converged toward the cave.



## Chapter XXXV

### A BLACK HERO

**R**ES' yo' guns on mah shoulders. When Ah tells yo'—fiah!"

The women could not see, but they could hear the rocks that rolled down the cañon as the Indians scrambled toward the cave. The tracks had indicated that there was only one man to protect three women. This certainty made the Apaches less careful. The fugitives' footprints became plainer as the Indians followed them.

Two of the hostiles deployed higher up the cañon's side. They signalled back that the tracks had not gone beyond that point.

Inside the cave Faulkner crouched like a statue carved from granite. Back of him waited the three women. Death hovered near. Death, but not captivity. They all understood that.

Outside the cave the leader of the Apaches, concealed by the thick brush, wriggled closer. A twig snapped. An ear-splitting crash from Faulkner's gun deafened those inside.

A puff of smoke. A death scream.

Faulkner ejected a smoking shell from his gun.

“Ah got him,” he said quietly.

“Let me fire,” Bonita spoke tensely.

“Wait!” was his order. She obeyed.

From that time on Faulkner’s gun spat defiance. Other guns barked back, and Apache bullets spurted dust as they struck against the rocks at the mouth of the cave, but so far the fortress had proved impregnable.

“Gimme yo’ gun!”

Bonita slipped her gun under his arm and dragged his smoking rifle back. The hot steel barrel burnt her flesh, but she did not know it. Immeasurable time seemed to pass, marked off by heavy heartbeats. The Apaches were saving their fire. Suspense coloured every moment.

“If dey heyah us down ter Prue’s, somebody will come ter help us,” Jane spoke hopefully.

“There are no men there——” Bonita began.

“Sssh! Dey’s a-comin’ in a bunch!” warned Faulkner. “Git raidy now and fiah wif me.”

Steadily the three gun barrels pointed over the shoulders of the crouching Negro. Through the narrow entrance they could see the Indians gathering for the attack. On they dashed, yelling as they came—foot Indians—the most elusive infantry in the world.

“Hold your fire,” Bonita said to herself. “Wait till you see the whites of their eyes,” came back to her memory. Her pulses steadied.

Faulkner spoke under his breath: "Ready—Aim—Fiah!"

The four guns crashed as one. The reverberation filled the cave. Smoke smarted in their nostrils.

The Apaches broke for cover.

Bonita was on her feet trembling with excitement. All fear was forgotten in her wild desire to run from the cave and fire again and again at the fleeing Indians. But Faulkner's voice centred her thoughts. He knew Apache stratagems too well to be deceived.

"Dey's gwineter try sneakin'. Lay low now."

Faulkner, the black sergeant, had become for the moment the calm commander. The army women waited for his word. His piercing glance swept every clump of grass, every shadow of a rock, but the cañon appeared deserted of life. Not even a leaf stirred.

A shower of gravel and small stones fell. The Indians were on the slope above the cave, dislodging large rocks.

"Gawd!" the word was moan and prayer as it fell from Faulkner's lips.

Down came the boulders. Only the hand of the Divine Engineer could divert them from closing up the entrance. Faulkner, from his place, saw a huge rock gaining velocity as it crashed down the side of the cañon toward the cave.

"Gawd!"

As if in answer to his cry, the boulder struck a sapling, breaking it near the base. A screen of April green fell across the opening of the cave.

The Indians gave a howl of rage, for the slender trunk of the young tree had fallen in such a way as to carry the stones away from the cave and down into the cañon.

But Apache ingenuity was not yet exhausted, and in a short interval blazing faggots fell in front of the aperture so that the smoke began to drift into the cave.

“I’se gotter git out ob heyah,” the old man spoke. “Ah kin hide in de rocks an’ pick ’em off up deyah!” His bloodshot eyes met Mrs. Duncan’s.

“If dey gits me, yo’ all keep on a-fightin’——” he did not finish, but they knew that the pistol at which he glanced carried a bullet for each of them, if need be, at the last.

Faulkner wormed his way from the cave and through the brush. Bonita moved to the entrance and sat in his place, cool and ready. She could see distinctly a quiet human form huddled between two rocks some distance down the cañon.

That had been an excellent shot. She felt a moment of pride over it. Her gun had been sighted at four hundred yards.

The quiet now was ominous.

A puff of smoke. Faulkner’s gun. Another shot! Another—another!

Then came a new sound. Galloping horses!

Mrs. Duncan touched the girl's shoulder.

"That may be the troop," she whispered with white lips, "or maybe——"

The women strained forward. The sound came nearer and nearer. There was a clang of steel on the rocks.

"Shod hoofs! Shod hoofs! Thank God! The soldiers!" sobbed Bonita. Her left hand flew to her throat, the gun slipped from her right hand down beside her.

Mrs. Duncan crowded into the open space.

"Jim!" she cried.

Aunt Jane turned her black quivering face to Bonita, her old arms went around the slender figure and held it close to her breast.

"Hit's all right now, honey chile! De cap'n's come!"

And the captain had come. His quick glance saw the women as he passed—saw that they were safe; but he went on with his troop up the heights after the Apaches, firing as they rode.

Faulkner stood on a rock beside their way, waving his arms and yelling cheers at the top of his quavering voice.

His captain paused a moment as he reached him and leaned down from the saddle.

"Good work, Faulkner!"

Then he rode on, and back of him Sergeant Faulk-

ner stood with twitching face and tear-brimmed eyes.

Squirring back of protecting boulders, slipping between clumps of tall saccatone grass, or lying motionless against the ground, the Apaches with wisps of grass about heads and shoulders evaded detection.

Silently, invisibly, during the night they flitted like shadows away from Bonita Cañon and across the broad Sulphur Springs Valley to the Dragoons, then over the San Pedro River they turned into the Santa Cruz Valley.

In that valley was a ranch, where dwelt three men, a mother and her two children—one a babe in arms.

Geronimo knew the Peck Ranch, and there he planned to stop.

When he and his band mounted their ponies and went on their way again, there was a record written in blood for those to read who followed Geronimo's crimson trail.

Two ranch hands had made the fight of their lives to protect a woman and children—in vain. The mother had been tortured with indescribable fiendishness, while her husband, securely bound, had been forced to witness it all. Death was merciful to her. The tiny mangled form of the babe had been tossed across its mother's body.

The man who stood helplessly watching had cursed, prayed, and pleaded until something snapped

in his brain. Then he laughed and laughed. At that strange laughter the Apaches cautiously cut his thongs. Whom the Great Spirit has touched with madness the Apaches dare not harm. Geronimo and his followers rode hastily away, with fearsome glances backward.

The man did not notice their going, nor did he hear the imploring cry of his twelve-year-old daughter, who, held firmly across a saddle, was being carried away by an Apache.

Men who rode to the ruined home later saw the wandering trail of one man. It circled aimlessly around the outside of the ranch house, then led zigzagging here and there. When those who followed the footprints found him roving in the hills, he did not recognize friends who spoke to him with gentle voices and looked at him with pity.

He laughed. And as he rode with them, he still laughed. God was merciful to him for those first few weeks. He laughed. Later he wept.

And Geronimo kept on his way toward the border of Mexico, making for a range of mountains so wild, so rough, so inaccessible to white men or coloured soldiers, that he believed he would be safe. With his band was a little white girl.

News of the murder of the Peck family and ranch hands spread over the territory by telegrams, by messages, by letters; and by those who met and talked for a space on lonely trail or road.

The heliographs flashed the news to a man who made no comments, but his lips tightened as he watched the flashes of sunlight on small mirrors.

Geronimo was heading for a network of concealed troops. The day of reckoning was drawing near.



## Chapter XXXVI

### PACER

**H**ALT!"

Captain Kern's command rang above the monotonous shuffle of the horses' hoofs in the sand and the men drew rein. All of them watched a figure which had stepped suddenly into full view. It was an Apache scout. His uplifted hand held a red headband.

Kern signalled reply and the scout approached with a peculiar gait that was at once swift and graceful.

"It's Pacer," the captain spoke to his lieutenant. "No other Indian runs that way. Fastest runner among the scouts. He's all right."

The Indian reached them and thrust his hand into a buckskin pouch which, with the inevitable Apache medicine-sack, hung from his belt. He handed several letters to Captain Kern. Stanley's eyes were eager. Kern glanced at the envelopes and opened an official communication.

The older officer was too intent to notice the keen disappointment in the face of Lieutenant Stanley, who sat on Tiswin's back and stared at the barren,

sun-baked expanse. The sight of the Indian coming with the mail had wakened hope, but there was no letter from the girl he loved.

Stanley's intention of going to Camp Bonita as soon as the doctor would permit had been frustrated by urgent orders to proceed immediately with a detachment of scouts and patrol the border, and from that point he had been ordered to join his captain. Unable to see Bonita or in any way communicate with her, it seemed as though they were parted by the grave, but he knew that she understood and would be loyal to him.

Kern, on his little buckskin pony, his long, thin legs swinging free from the stirrups, scowled at the official document in his hands and chewed the end of his faded yellow moustache.

"Hell's popping!" he spoke sharply, and read aloud the news of the Peck tragedy. "They've got the little Peck girl. Geronimo and his whole bunch went right through Bonita Cañon while Duncan and his troop were out scouting, then the Apaches cut over to the Santa Cruz Valley and attacked the Peck ranch."

"Did—was any one—in Camp Bonita?" Stanley's lips framed the words with difficulty.

Kern understood. "The family. There was a fight, but old Sergeant Faulkner stood off the Apaches and Duncan came back in the nick of time. I don't see why the devil Duncan took those women out there, anyhow."

Stanley made no comment, but the hand that patted Tiswin's neck was trembling. Even the desert tan could not hide the pallor of his face. The Apaches had captured the little Peck girl. What if it had been Bonita? Kern was right. Duncan had no business to take such chances.

Forgotten by both officers, Pacer stood, a bit of living bronze. His head was held high and his face devoid of expression, its intelligence veiled by passivity. Only the closest observation could detect even his breathing. His magnificently muscled arms were folded across his broad chest. A loin-cloth was wrapped about his hips and flint-hide shoes tied with buckskin thongs covered his feet, which were unusually small even for an Apache. The red handkerchief he had replaced about his forehead confined his blue-black hair which fell straight and heavy to his shoulders.

During the months in garrison and camp since his enlistment as a scout, Pacer had come to realize his position—a man who belonged neither to the white man's race nor to that of the Apaches; something lower in grade than even the Negro soldiers, for each of them—Negro, Apache, and White—had his own place, but Pacer, the scout, had none. When his work was done he was a thing apart from all of their lives and ways. Bitterly he recalled his faith in Maco's dreams.

Pacer looked steadily in front of him. Not a quiver

of a muscle betrayed the passion which gripped him, but he suddenly felt the shackles that had been welded upon him by the white man fall away. He drew a deep breath.

The mountains were his heritage. Hidden in them he could, like Mangus, Geronimo, Cochise, and Natchez, live. He, too, was an Apache. His hand should be against every man.

He heard his name and turned slowly toward the officers, who stopped talking, and awaited his approach.

“Pacer, you sabe American?” Kern fell into the Mexican-English jargon of the border.

The Indian’s eyes were inscrutable. He nodded.

“*Bueno!*” commented Kern. “You stay—guide us. Find water?”

The Indian turned and surveyed the peaks that seemed to stretch endlessly north and south. He pointed where a deeper shade of purplish-blue on a slope indicated one of the thousands of cañons that gashed the mountain range. As he looked at it his eyes lit fiercely. The soldiers would find water there, but he would find freedom.

He glanced up at the sun and turned an impassive face toward the officers, holding up three fingers to indicate three hours’ travel. At a nod from the captain, the scout swung around and, leaning forward, ran lightly over the heavy sand. Though the cavalry horses followed at a brisk trot, the

Indian, without apparent effort, kept well ahead of them.

An hour before sunset Pacer led them to a spring that formed a silver ribbon edged with green.

The camp cook—read this in capitals, for he is as important as the colonel and frequently much more popular—was getting his outfit in shape to prepare supper, while a detail of men dug mesquite roots for the fire. Everyone was ready to enjoy a hot cooked meal where the protecting walls of the cañon permitted a campfire. They had ridden, with short intervals of rest, for two hundred and fifty miles with only raw rations and water from canteens in place of coffee for fear that smoke might warn the Apaches that troops were near.

The horses, cared for and staked out with picket ropes, were cropping the green clumps near the spring. Many soldiers had flung themselves on the ground, talking and laughing like irresponsible children.

Pacer stood apart. His eyes shifted imperceptibly from group to group and finally rested on Lieutenant Stanley who was giving Tiswin a lump of sugar. Across the scout's memory drifted the vision of a girl standing beneath a silver-roped tree, a star above her head, while her laughing eyes were raised to the face of a young officer.

The Indian's steady gaze, like a magnet, drew the glance of Lieutenant Stanley, and for a brief space

each man strove to read the other man's thoughts—in vain. A puzzled frown was on Stanley's face as Pacer turned slowly away with indolent grace that savoured of insolence. The Indian stretched lazily on the ground, and rolling a cigarette, he watched the smoke-rings float away and dissolve.

The cook lifted a large saucepan from the fire to adjust the mesquite clumps more evenly. The utensil dropped with a crash and the liquid contents hissed on the flames, while the cook leaped to his feet shaking his tingling hand and looked around with furiously blinking eyes.

“Who—who—who done dat?” he stammered beligerently.

Shots answered him.

Men scrambled to their feet. They knew that their first duty was to get their horses and protect them. No order was needed for that work. The jagged cliffs gave no sign of Indians but easily afforded shelter for enough to many times outnumber the troopers.

The horses, though trained to the sound of fire-arms, lunged and reared, struggling against the ropes that held them. Some uncanny instinct told them that this was not drill. Nothing was visible to the soldiers who hastily scanned the cliffs except the boulder-strewn cañon and the low-hanging Arizona sun that had shone on so many grim tragedies of Apache warfare. But bullets from unseen guns spat with vicious rapidity and accurate aim.

Corporal Owen reached for the iron picket pin while he held with his other hand the halter of his frightened horse.

“Tepee, ain’t yo’ ’shamed ob you’self, lungin’ dat way lak yo’ neber heeard a gun in yo’ life, an’ yo’ a corporal’s hawse!”

He freed the rope and leaped on Tepee’s back. The horse pranced as bullets kicked up puffs of dirt about his hoofs. “What——” Surprise was on Owen’s black face as he swayed and fell to the ground. The rope slipped from his relaxed hand and Tepee, with a shrill neigh, raced after the other horses which were galloping to the entrance of the cañon.

The old corporal tried to struggle to his feet but fell back moaning, “Dey done got me dat time.”

He made an effort to drag himself to the shelter of a boulder, but the agony of his wound was too great. Half conscious, Owen knew that the captain had given orders to retreat from the cul-de-sac in which the troop had been trapped. Through pain-filmed eyes he saw his comrades pick up saddles and fire-arms and leap to the bare backs of their mounts, as obeying orders they raced toward the mouth of the cañon. Some of them were carrying wounded or unmounted men. Then Owen’s eyes closed.

Lieutenant Stanley, intent upon helping the wounded troopers to mount, had not noticed when Tiswin, wild with excitement, broke his picket rope

and took his place at the head of the retreating troop. The young officer grasped the situation at the same moment that he realized the Apaches were making a target of him. Behind a rock he found shelter, but as he gained it he saw Owen making a vain attempt to drag himself to safety. The Apaches, too, understood the soldier's desperate plight, and their bullets sang in fiendish, staccato glee as the Negro paused and weakly fumbled with a cartridge, then collapsed.

Stanley dashed to his side. Owen looked up at him.

"Neber min' me, Lieutenant," gasped the wounded man. "Doan' let 'em git yo'!"



## Chapter XXXVII

“GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN——”

STEADY, Corporal!”

The old soldier's eyes filled with tears—not tears of pain or fear. He could stand pain and he had never flinched from danger in twenty years' service against the Indians.

“Fo' God' sake, Lieutenant, git ter de troop. Ah cain't git up. I'se plumb par'lyzed. Neber min' me!”

Both men knew that the bullets that fell so thickly now were not aimed at the Negro soldier.

Then Owen felt hands thrust about his body and he was dragged upright on his hips, but his head sank forward and his eyelids closed. Sick with agony he heard a voice as though from a long distance, speaking: “Put your arms about my neck and hang on.”

Somehow, Corporal Owen obeyed that voice, but he did not know that he obeyed.

Down the ravine the troop swept to the rescue. Howling, cursing, firing at rocks where a puff of smoke or Apache appeared. And riding at the front

of the troop, Captain Kern on his buckskin pony, stood high in his stirrups and yelled like an Apache gone mad. His yells and commands were punctuated by vivid oaths and his face was maniacal.

“Damn the boy—I’ll court martial him for being such a fool! Lord, what pluck!”

Twisting in his saddle he shouted back, “Ride, men! Ride like hell! What are you loafing for? Ready and Forward!” The familiar cry of many fights stirred their blood.

And how they rode that day! Thundering hoofs, screams of rage, pistols cracking, like a black tornado they rushed through the narrow defile, each man ready to help form a human barricade with his body to protect the young officer who had risked his life for “ole man Owen”!

Kern leaned down as he reached Stanley, and seeing that he was unharmed, waved for his men to follow the Apaches, who were already writhing snakelike between masses of yuccas or lying motionless between the boulders. Each soldier began an individual search with pistol cocked for close fighting.

Above them all on the cañon’s side Captain Kern scanned the lower boulders for sign of hostiles, motioning or calling to the troopers. His keen eyes detected Pacer worming his way cautiously toward the hiding places of the hostiles.

“By God! He led us into this!”

Pistol in hand Kern spurred his pony to get within shooting range.

“Get that scout!” he yelled. “He’s deserting!”

Some of the men heard, but from their positions could not see Pacer as he writhed between two huge boulders. Kern raced nearer. A long shot, but he might make it. He lifted his pistol and cocked it; his eye squinted deliberately, but he did not pull the trigger.

The glistening barrel of a gun protruded from the back of a boulder—the gun was aimed steadily at Stanley—only the tip of the barrel was visible.

From the opposite side of the boulder Pacer arose, unarmed. With a stupendous bound the scout reached the gun and gripped it with both hands.

Another Apache appeared in full view as both Indians struggled fiercely for possession of the rifle. One shot rang sharply.

Pacer, holding the gun by its barrel, lifted it high, like a club, and brought it down with terrific force on the skull of the hostile Indian, who stumbled from the rocks, doubled convulsively, then stiffened out. His body shot forward and rolled swiftly down the side of the steep cañon.

Pacer stood erect.

Captain Kern spurred over to him.

But Pacer, like one who has run a hard race and lies down to rest, slipped slowly to the ground, and those who stood beside him with the captain un-

derstood what the gaping wound in Pacer's breast meant.

The scout's eyes, brilliant with agony, looked into Stanley's face, and the bronze, muscular hand was pitifully feeble as it plucked at the sacred, beaded medicine sack. Kern understood and unfastened the pouch, but Pacer motioned toward Stanley.

Captain Kern handed the bag to the young officer. "It's hoddetin—their medicine. Some religious belief. I've seen it done. Put it on his forehead and chest for him."

As Lieutenant Stanley knelt beside the Indian and shook the sacred yellow powder from the sack into his own palm, a vague memory of childhood came to him. A quiet Sunday morning, a man in white vestments speaking—"Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." Friends?

Death sweat was gathering on the Indian's forehead as Stanley, very gently, placed a pinch of the pollen upon it. Then he laid the powder on the scout's chest, near a spot where the blood ran in quick spurts from a bullet hole.

Something like a faint smile was on Pacer's lips as he pressed the little bag into the young officer's hand.

"Good medicine." The words were faint and the scout's massive chest rose and fell in rapid, laboured breathing. His eyelids closed wearily, then lifted,

and the eyes, filmed by approaching death, looked past those who were gathered about him, and gazed steadily at the setting sun.

With a final effort Pacer drew a deep, slow breath then clearly, almost triumphantly, he chanted the death song of his people.

None of his own people were near. Even in that last moment Pacer was alone. But those of other races who heard knew that a passing soul was reaching out for its Creator, and in the Universe of the Great Unknown that cry of the dying scout would be understood.

The last ray of sunset faded from the iridescent peaks, and with the fading light, Pacer's soul went on its way, free from restraint or orders from any man.

They wrapped him in a gray government blanket, and upon the cañon's side the soldiers dug a rude grave and laid him to rest. The bugler, standing beside the open grave, lifted his bugle and the message of farewell—taps—echoed softly through the gathering stillness of night, as though unseen buglers were repeating the call; but the echoes mingled with the muffled thud of falling earth.

Upon the newly made grave each trooper placed a stone, and every stone was a monument of honour—a tribute from the brave to the brave—from men to a man.

Long after the weary men were sound asleep and only the sentinels on picket duty paced their beats,

Kern, stretched on the ground a short distance from Stanley, propped himself up on an elbow and squinted through the dimness at his lieutenant.

“By the way, Stanley, did you notice that those carbines we captured to-day all have pistol grips on the stocks?”

“Yes, I did.”

“Well,” commented the captain with a dry chuckle, “do you happen to remember that Hatfield’s troop was the only one that had those guns at the time of the Guadaloup fight?”

“Yes. They had just been issued to them to try out, I was told.”

“Well, it’s a damned good joke on Hatfield. He’s been knocking the Negro soldiers’ work in the campaign. So I guess I’ll just notify him officially that if he will make out a requisition for the guns he lost at Guadaloup Cañon, I will turn his property over to him!”

Still chuckling, Captain Kern settled back to sleep.

But Stanley, as he lay staring up at the stars, had a vision of a laughing girl beside a Christmas tree. A group of smiling black faces peered through a window, and back of them he saw the face of an Indian scout—Pacer—whose eyes were watching the girl by the tree; Pacer—whose eyes held the look of one who knelt at a shrine.

And Stanley understood.

## Chapter XXXVIII

### “CHECKMATE!”

**M**AY, June, and July passed by and August was almost gone when news came that Lawton and Wood had surprised Natchez and Geronimo on the Yaqui River in a location that was almost impassable. The Indians' camp had been established on a flat beside the river bed, and high bluffs surrounded it except where the water cut through to form a channel. Cliffs towered two thousand feet, and below them dense canebrakes and immense boulders afforded additional protection to the hostiles against any sudden attack.

Lawton's conference with the other officers resulted in a plan to send scouts to close the upper approach through the river opening, while the infantry was to attack the camp from below. But one of the outlaw Apaches, catching a glimpse of the red headband of a crawling scout, gave alarm.

Though the scouts fired on the stock of the Indians, the renegades escaped before the infantry could reach and block the north opening, as planned.

Geronimo and his followers, glad to escape in

breech clouts and moccasins, abandoned their supplies, provisions, horses, guns, and ammunition, and evaded capture by their usual tactics. Later reports proved that the entire band had rounded south of the Yaqui River where they had captured a Mexican pack train which furnished them with food, horses, and munitions, after which they started north, pursued by the forces under Lawton and Wood.

Captain Duncan's troop, relieved from permanent duty at Bonita Cañon, was in the field, and Roy had been assigned to Lawton's command at his own request and with his father's approval.

So severe had been the work done by those under Lawton, that more than once it had been necessary to replace the officers. Only two men had been able to stand the terrific test of physical endurance, and those two were Captain Lawton and Doctor Leonard Wood.

Sitting against a boulder in a cañon devoid of vegetation, where the command halted for the night, Roy pencilled a letter to Bonita at Fort Grant, which read:

DEAREST NITA:

Just after my last letter started to you things began to happen fast and furious. But the real news is that we got the little Peck girl, safe and sound, at last.

The Apaches had carried her three hundred miles and we were after them as fast as we could travel. The hostiles ran into sixty or seventy Mexicans and had a fight. The Apache who held the child on his horse was wounded and the horse killed. The rest



of the hostiles vamoosed, but this one got behind his dead horse and stood off the entire band of Mexicans, killing seven of them. Each one got a bullet through the head. Some marksmanship, I say.

Later, the same day, we got within six miles of them, almost close enough to fire, but it was too dark to be accurate. And the next morning a guide returned to us and reported a band of Mexicans ahead, so we had to be careful they should not mistake us for enemies. Finally Captain Lawton, Doctor Wood, and Lieutenant Finley pushed on afoot, and we followed more slowly. The Mexicans were glad to turn the little Peck girl over to Lawton. So everyone is happy—especially the kid. It was an awful experience for a child, and it's darned tough about the rest of her family.

Now here is the very latest, and we are all taking off our caps to old Gatewood. One of our men is a Mexican, José María, who had been captive of the Apaches for seventeen years, so he knows their trails and speaks their jargon. Two of Geronimo's women came to José's shack on the outskirts of Fronteras, and told his wife that Geronimo wanted to see Gatewood and talk about surrendering. The hostiles evidently were well posted, for Gatewood had only joined us ten days before on the Yaqui River.

Anyway, Gatewood went to the hostile camp to size up the situation, but according to agreement he was to go alone and unarmed. Luckily he found Geronimo friendly.

But meantime Captain Lawton, with our scouts, pressed ahead of our command, in order to be as near to Gatewood as possible, in case of treachery. Not one of us really expected to have Gatewood return unharmed. We all knew as well as he did the risk he was taking in going alone and unarmed into the camp of Geronimo and that bunch.

At last he came back. But he was thoroughly discouraged. The hostiles had flatly refused to recognize him, even though they had sent for him themselves. Gatewood had no faith in any intention on their part to surrender.

But Lawton insisted that the hostiles would not be hanging around so near our command unless they really intended to make

definite overtures to surrender. Lawton was right. This morning Geronimo, Natchez, and a dozen more bucks came into camp without warning. Geronimo dashed up to Lawton and flung his arms about the captain's neck, hugging him as warmly as though they were David and Jonathan.

I felt sorry for Lawton at that minute, but, by Jove! Nita, he never even blinked. He sure deserves a gold medal from Congress for standing a hug from Geronimo! So say we all.

The entire bunch of hostiles are now camped only half a mile from us and have agreed to march with us to Skeleton Cañon and meet General Miles at that point. Of course, Lawton has full authority from General Miles to accept Geronimo's surrender, but Geronimo's egotism and love for the spectacular make it necessary, in his own opinion, that no less personage than General Miles himself shall be tendered the surrender.

Lawton is sending word to General Miles, and that is how I am getting a chance to write you. We all believe, and hope and pray, that the end of the campaign is in sight at last.

Roy.

While Lawton had been pressing after the Chiricahuas, General Miles had been perfecting other angles of his campaign, and letters, as well as telegrams, had passed between Washington and Fort Bowie.

The question as to the removal of all the Chiricahuas was the subject of a conference between President Cleveland and General Sheridan in Washington; but the one thing upon which President Cleveland was emphatic was that when the Chiricahua Apaches were removed from Arizona Territory, not one of their tribe should remain there.

With this understanding General Miles was given

full authority to round up and remove all the Chiricahuas from their native place.

It was no easy problem. Part of the Chiricahuas had remained peacefully upon the reservation at Fort Apache, while the balance of the tribe roved at large. The least fiasco would result in those who were apparently peaceful becoming openly hostile and joining Geronimo.

It was a civilian idea that if a body of Indians proved troublesome to one community, they should be moved to another. Simple enough!

But all military men, rank and file, realized fully the gravity of such an undertaking at Fort Apache. This garrison was manned by troops of the Tenth Cavalry under the command of their lieutenant-colonel, James Franklin Wade. It was a hundred miles from any settlement and located in the heart of the wildest mountains. The least bungling of plans would mean more Apaches on the warpath—fresh reinforcements for Geronimo.

Sunday morning after inspection was selected as time for the round-up, for the Apaches then would assemble on the parade ground to be counted.

The troops, apparently drilling, manœuvred into a position surrounding the Indians, who were absolutely surprised and unprepared to resist. They leaped to their feet, but even before their wily minds had devised a stratagem, Colonel Wade walked down among them, and demanded their surrender.

Not a shot was fired. The Apaches laid down their arms.

But it was not until that moment that the danger of a general massacre of the whites was averted.

The closing scene of this, one of the most tremendous epics of American history, was accompanied by a sudden and terrific storm—the worst ever known in that section.

Thunder crashed and reverberated again and again in the mountains; blades of lightning slashed the sky; guards and captives alike bent under the beating torrent; but one figure stood erect. A white-haired Apache stood with wrinkled face upturned to the storm. His thin arms were held toward the hidden sky, and in a lull of thunder his quavering voice rose in a cry of despair:

“The Great Spirit weeps! His children are captives!” The lean arms fell slowly, the white head bowed, and an answering wail from the other prisoners blended with the rolling thunder.

This American drama had its comedy part. The officers' wives, who had watched from their porches, uncertain of the outcome and knowing the danger to their husbands, their children, and themselves, were recalled to prosaic matters by the storm, and hastened to grapple with the perennial problem of army housewives in frontier garrisons of those days, a problem as involved as that of any itinerant Methodist preacher's wife. They needed as much strategic

ability to manœuvre wooden washtubs in order to circumvent leaky roofs, as their husbands needed to overcome the hostile Apaches.

All told, it was a busy day at Fort Apache as they mopped up the hostiles and the houses. But the part the women played was not on official reports.

Knowing that Colonel Wade had the situation in hand at Fort Apache, General Miles gave his attention to the final move against Geronimo, and in response to Lawton's message, started to the place of meeting. The first day's ride terminated at Rucker Cañon, where the gallant young son of General Rucker, Lieutenant John Anthony Rucker, had been drowned in a cloudburst while scouting with his troop of the Sixth Cavalry. The second day's travel brought the Department Commander to another tragic spot, Skeleton Cañon—for no man ever identified the white bones lying there—a place well known to the Apaches. This historic location would be described by a cowpuncher as “heading up Stein's Pass Mountains and running west into San Simon Valley; south of Rucker Cañon and about sixty-five miles south of Fort Bowie on the San Simon side; near the San Bernardino Ranch.”

General Miles had barely reached the place when Geronimo entered Lawton's camp. It was a dramatic meeting of the two men who had played against each other the great game of civilization against savagery. Geronimo strode forward until he was

face to face with the Department Commander. The Apache war chief was a reader of men's faces, and as he looked at the keen, dark-blue eyes of his conqueror, Geronimo knew that he faced a man who would dictate terms, not accept them.

Though the Chiricahua leader realized this, he bade the interpreter make an offer of surrender under identically the same terms which had been accepted by General Crook. He was prepared for a refusal, but not for the calm reply which was repeated, word for word, by the interpreter.

“Why should you wish to go back to Fort Apache?”

“My people are there,” answered Geronimo, buoyed by the hope that the request might be granted.

“None of your people are at Fort Apache.” Miles spoke again. “They have been sent over a long trail to another country. They will never come back. You and your band are all who are left. You have murdered, stolen, and you have broken all your promises. That is why the Great Father in Washington has said that no Chiricahua Apache shall be allowed to remain in Arizona!”

As the interpreter spoke the words Geronimo's head sank on his chest. He understood fully in that moment that his ambition and treachery had ruined his entire tribe. When he raised his head there was no defiance in his look. The Apache leader who had never granted mercy to the helpless knew

that he deserved none. His shoulders sagged, the shrewd gleam faded from his eyes.

“Spare our lives,” he pleaded, “and we will do whatever you say!”

General Miles stooped and took three pebbles which he arranged apart upon the ground, then he moved them until all were together.

Geronimo nodded. He understood that the scattered bands of his tribe were destined to meet at a given point.

“I will bring in the others,” he announced to the interpreter.

So he rode away, and true to his pledge he returned the next morning accompanied by the rest of the band. But Natchez was not with them.

Patiently the Department Commander, through the interpreter, explained to the Apaches the uselessness of attempting to combat the soldiers who had the advantage of railroads, of telegraph, and of the heliographs. Geronimo listened incredulously until a demonstration of the heliograph convinced him that these things had made the flashes which he and the other Chiricahuas had seen on distant mountain heights and which they had ascribed to spirits. Now that he realized their true origin and purport, he grasped their importance in Apache warfare—an enemy with which the Chiricahuas could not cope.

He turned to one of his warriors and spoke earnestly, and the man to whom he spoke walked

quickly to where he had staked his pony. General Miles watched the Indian leap to the animal's back and ride hastily away toward the mountains from which the Apaches had come.

"What did Geronimo say to him?" the Department Commander inquired of the interpreter.

"Geronimo told him to go tell Natchez that there was a power here which he could not understand, and to come in, and come quick!"

Anxiously the officers waited. An hour passed—a second hour—and the third hour was almost spent when over the top of the mountain appeared a cavalcade. Natchez rode at its head. Behind him followed his entire band of warriors with their families and camp paraphernalia.

They reached the camp and dismounted.

Natchez, still conscious of his dignity as hereditary chief of the Chiricahua Apaches and son of the great Cochise, moved deliberately forward to meet his conqueror face to face and surrender.

Back of Natchez stood Geronimo; a crushed and broken old man.

Four times had he surrendered, but at that moment he realized that he had made and lost his last fight.

The trail over which the Chiricahua Apache tribe had ridden unchecked for three hundred years was wiped out forever, while they themselves were now doomed to depart from their native haunts, never to return.



## Chapter XXXIX

### THE SPLIT TRAIL

**U**P AND down, back and forth, far and near flew the shuttle in the hand of Destiny. Sometimes a thread of the great web seemed to snap, but with infinite patience the ends were woven together again.

Mangus was making desperate effort to reach Fort Apache and his trail down in Mexico was being hotly pursued by relays of commands, crossing and re-crossing each other in divers directions. All were eager to gain the distinction of capturing Mangus.

Great was the elation of Kern's command when they "cut sign" of twenty Apaches whose trail was fresh. Filled with new energy they followed until the trail split and darkness overtook them. The entire section was new to Kern, and after a supper of issue bacon, hardtack, and coffee, he sat talking with his lieutenant.

Since the encounter with the hostiles the two officers, in spite of the difference in their years and experience as soldiers, had been on very informal terms, and a deep friendship was developing.

“I have an idea that the two bunches of hostiles are going to join forces at some point west of here. The best move will be to split the troop. You can take Pancho. I was told that the Apaches did not work so far west as this,” commented Kern, puffing on his pipe. “None of our field maps touch this section and settlements are as scarce as hen’s teeth. We are on the edge of the Sonora Desert. Someone called it the Maw of Hell, and that just about describes it.”

The two officers glanced up as a stoop-shouldered Mexican slouched across the camp and hobbled his scrawny *palomino* pony, whose buckskin coat and dirty white tail and mane harmonized with its peculiar light eyes.

“I don’t like that fellow,” spoke Kern. “But he was the only guide around. Too bad about Pacer. Well, this chap evidently knows the country, and he will have to find water for himself, unless he’s a camel.”

“Self-preservation will make Pancho and myself Siamese twins,” commented Stanley lightly as he rolled his blouse in the hollow of his saddle for a pillow. “Oh, by the way, Captain, did you ever hear how some jokers filled up the temperance one of those twin chaps—I don’t remember whether it was Chang or Eng—with soda, and the other with whisky straight, and got them both gloriously drunk?”

Kern was still chuckling when Stanley stretched on the sand and laid his head on the "cavalryman's pillow," watching his commanding officer make similar preparations for the night's rest on the edge of the Sonora Desert.

But the younger man did not sleep. He lay staring up at the stars, hoping that the speedy capture of Mangus might end the Geronimo campaign and let the troops return to their garrisons. If he could go back knowing that he had helped capture Mangus——

He knew that it would make no difference to Bonita, but he wanted to do something worthy of his troop and of the regiment, and above all something worthy of her.

"If we can capture Mangus it will be a proud day for the regiment, and a prouder day for our own troop," said Kern the next morning, standing beside Lieutenant Stanley, who, mounted on Tiswin, was ready to start on the split trail.

"I'll do my very best, sir."

"I know you will, my boy. Follow General Miles's orders to the letter. If the trail holds out and you find yourself near the hostiles, push on without regard to anything else."

"Anything more, Captain?"

"Our reports must be in Bowie by the tenth, you know. Keep that date in mind—the tenth."

"And if the trail peters out?"

“Go to Sasabe, or send word by courier where I can connect up with you best.”

Kern's voice was lowered, “Don't trust that greaser too far. We're in Mexico now. He may be all right and he may not. Good-bye, Jerry, and good luck. I'd rather have you catch Mangus than do it myself! I'm trusting you with the honour of the troop, and I'm not afraid to do it, by Jove!”

The eyes of the two men met. In that glance was the look of father and son, not commanding officer and subaltern. Their gripped hands parted, but Stanley held Tiswin back.

“Good-bye, Captain. You've been mighty fine to me, and I'll do my best to make good!”

The rattling of accoutrements, the creaking of saddle-leather, the champing of bits, then a cloud of fine white dust told that the detachment was on its way.

Captain Kern mounted his buckskin pony while the balance of the troop awaited his order to march. But when he did so, he twisted in his saddle to squint back where the cloud of alkali dust was growing rapidly more indistinct.

“What a damned old fool I've been all these years!” he growled. “Thought I was so smart saving up my pay by not marrying, and now that I'm ready to retire for old age, every time I look at that boy I know how I've cheated myself.”

## Chapter XL

### MANGUS, THE BIG ONE

**T**HE tenth of the month came and went.

But there was no report from Lieutenant Stanley's detachment, nor was there any word by courier at Sasabe.

Kern's anxiety increased when he learned that authentic reports showed that Mangus was not in Mexico but had dashed over the border from western Mexico and was riding the Apache trails of northern Arizona, while the heliographs flashed the news to all the troops in that vicinity.

The silence of Stanley could mean but one of two things, either of which would be equally serious: the detachment might be lost on the Sonora Desert without food or water, or it might have been surprised and wiped out of existence by the Apaches in their flight.

Arizona and the bordering sections breathed more freely when the two trains bearing Geronimo and also the Chiricahuas from Fort Apache met on the trip which was destined to end at Fort Marion, Florida. There the entire band of Chiricahua Apaches were to be held as permanent prisoners of war.

But by that inexplicable method of communication, known unofficially in army circles as the "grapevine telegraph," it was rumoured that President Cleveland and General Sheridan were far from satisfied with conditions and did not consider the campaign a success so long as Mangus and his band were still at large.

A letter written the latter part of August by General Sheridan to General Miles had stated that the President's only hesitation to the plan of shipping the Chiricahuas to Fort Marion arose "from his desire to be assured by General Miles that all of this dangerous band could be secured and successfully conveyed away; for if a few should escape and take to the warpath the results would be altogether too serious."

And Mangus was still at large.

This knowledge created intense rivalry, not only between the different regiments engaged in the campaign, but even between troops of the same regiment. Each one hoped to have the honour of capturing Mangus and thus actually terminating for all time the problem of warfare against the Chiricahua Apaches, who had been a constant menace for thirty years.

Mangus, unaware of the fate that had befallen Geronimo, Natchez, and also the Chiricahuas at Fort Apache who had not joined the war party, headed for his native haunts near that garrison.

He hoped to find temporary asylum and succour among the members of his tribe, whose age or weakness had caused them to remain on the reservation at the time of the outbreak.

His face was careworn and haggard, for Mangus realized that his ponies were footsore and weary, supplies of food could not be replenished without risk of encounter with large forces of soldiers, and game was scarce. What cartridges still remained were too valuable to be used except in dire necessity, and the firing of a single shot might mean annihilation of all those who had followed him so loyally.

As he reached the peak of a mountain which they had scaled laboriously, the Apache chief lifted a pair of field glasses. They were excellent glasses of a fine French make and the filed mark enabled instant focussing to suit his vision. Circling his pony slowly, Mangus surveyed the adjacent peaks.

Nothing moved except shadows of passing clouds and an eagle silhouetted against the sky.

Carefully Mangus studied the cañons that gutted the mountain slopes. Trees formed natural parks and small streams flashed in the bright sunlight. Up from the cañons, tall and straight like a marching army at rest, rose stately pines. As he gazed at it all, tales of the wickiup and campfire and open trail were in his mind.

For so many moons that no one could now count this had been the home of his forefathers. Doggedly

they had fought to hold it from many who had tried to wrest it from them. Far, far back there had been strange men who had worn metal clothes. But they had soon gone away and had never returned. There were strange patterns copied even now on many pieces of pottery and woven in beads, and of these the squaws related vague stories to the children; there were immense ruined walls of houses near the Pima and Maricopa reservations, which had been built by some unknown vanished race. They had come and gone; but the Chiricahua Apaches had remained unconquered.

Inch by inch they had fought for more than three hundred years. Inch by inch the white men had encroached, through Mexico on the south and from some unknown place toward the morning sun. The white men had built towns, made roads of shining steel, stretched wires that talked across lonely places, had brought cattle to eat the grass that belonged to the Apache ponies, and had killed the antelope, deer, wild turkeys, and quail that the Great Spirit had given the Apaches for food.

Slowly the glasses were moved from tip to tip of the high range. The pony circled. Then to be sure that nothing had been overlooked, Mangus once more scanned the entire country.

His body became rigid. The powerful glasses revealed a man sitting on a horse, and that man's field glasses were focussed on the Apache chief.



Mangus could see yellow stripes on the man's dark-blue trousers, and the riders back of the man had black faces. The sunlight glinted on gun-barrels. Mangus counted them. Then he whirled his pony and signalled his followers.

The Apaches raced down the steep declivity, and back of them, from the opposite mountain peak, scrambled a detachment of twenty Negro soldiers of H Troop, Tenth Cavalry. They had not needed the incentive of their captain's shout, "Don't stop for anything! We must get them! It's Mangus!"

Over peak after peak of a range that rose two thousand feet from its base, the grilling pace was kept.

A mule with its canvas-covered pack slipped on the narrow foothold of the unbroken trail. It rolled a short distance downward, then as though impelled by a great, invisible hand, it was flung out from the ledge, turning and twisting like a brown-and-white striped ball, until it crashed to the bottom of the rocky cañon far below. At any moment the same fate might befall the men who rode that trail.

No one spoke. Horses panted heavily, men's breaths came in quick gasps in the dry altitude. They understood that if Mangus should elude them now and learn that Geronimo and all the other Chiricahuas had been banished, the lives of many settlers would pay the toll of the Apaches' vengeance.

One thought was written on each grim black face:

“We must get them. Not one must escape! For the honour of the regiment—the honour of the troop!” Then it was “Ready and Forward!” The slogan of the Tenth.

Their eyes strained after the desperately fleeing Chiricahuas, whose ponies climbed those terrific mountain-sides only to slide and slip down the next treacherous slope by the time the soldiers had gained the top. The Indian ponies, bred to mountain trails, were light and sure-footed as wild goats; the cavalry horses were heavy and more accustomed to working on the flats; but the ponies had been without rest for many moons and had fed on scanty wisps of dry, wild grass. The frogs of their unshod feet were tender and torn where rocks had worn their hoofs to the quick, so they stumbled at each step. The pace was telling cruelly on them.

For fifteen miles, over five precipitous mountains that were almost impossible to scale, the mad race was maintained. Ahead of the worn-out Apaches and all around them rose other similar mountains in seemingly endless repetition. No place offered asylum.

Mangus knew that the ponies must be sacrificed to save his band. His order to abandon the ponies and seek safety in rugged crags was obeyed at once, and the triumphant shouts of the troopers told Mangus that the pursuers recognized the Apaches' serious predicament.

The cheers still sounded as the Chiricahuas squirmed between huge boulders and clumps of tall, dry grass. Some of the Indians snatched grass and bits of brush which they twisted deftly about heads and shoulders until it was almost impossible to detect them as they waited, expecting that the troopers might be over-confident and ride within range of concealed Chiricahuas.

Lying hidden they could not see the officer in command halt the soldiers, who dismounted cautiously. Two guards held the cavalry horses. The rest of the men separated, and flat on the ground, they, too, writhed out of sight between the boulders.

“Each man pick an Indian and keep after that one. Don’t let a single Apache escape!”

That had been their captain’s whispered order, and as he lost sight of the last of his men, he knew that they would obey or die in the effort.

Then he dropped to the ground and wormed his way through the thick brush.

## Chapter XLI

### THE LAST OF THE CHIRICAHUA APACHES

**W**HILE the Indians waited, watching the point where they expected the troopers would appear, the soldiers, lying flat on the ground, writhed slowly nearer along a point just above the Apaches. There was a sudden rush, and the Chiricahuas, taken completely by surprise, leaped to their feet and fled.

One by one the soldiers met them, and one by one the Negroes fought and held the Apaches until only one Indian had escaped.

But that one was Chief Mangus.

Ensnconced between projecting rocks which prevented any attempt to dislodge or disable him, he was in a position to hold the soldiers at bay so long as he had food and ammunition. To rush his impregnable position would result only in unnecessary deaths of soldiers with no possibility of gaining any advantage. So while part of the detachment watched Mangus's hiding place, the rest of the men continued the chase, which had its humorous aspect.

A squaw, racing as fast as her horny feet could

scurry, had, like Lot's wife, turned to look back. She had failed to observe a small pool of water. Two soldiers rescued her gasping and spluttering from the involuntary bath. A latent sense of humour caused her toothless mouth to expand into a responsive grin at the laughter of her captors. Meanwhile, another squaw, more observant of the scenery, had shoved herself bodily into a hole burrowed by some wild animal, where ostrich wisdom made her believe she was completely concealed. Achilles's heel proved his undoing. The soldier who scrutinized a wriggling object which protruded from solid earth had never heard of the Greek hero. Nevertheless, he stooped and grasped a muscular ankle. Then, despite vigorous kicks and struggles accompanied by muffled squeals from the interior of the burrow, the squaw was dragged into full view.

The soldiers' guffaws met her ears as she sat up and blinked about her, until she spied the dripping figure of the other squaw. A few guttural words were exchanged by the sisters in captivity, then both of them rolled on the ground in paroxysms of uncontrollable mirth, in which those who guarded them joined spontaneously.

After the "round-up" had been completed, tally taken, and the excitement had subsided, soldiers and captives sat amicably side by side enjoying a hot supper, which no doubt was observed by Mangus from his point of vantage. Mangus was without food.

When Captain Cooper ascertained that condition, he dispatched a squaw advising Mangus to surrender, as it would be useless for him to attempt escape, and that the soldiers would camp where they were until he surrendered or died.

The woman returned, asking that food and tobacco be sent to Mangus. It was given her. She did not come back that night.

Through the night the guard was doubly vigilant, but dawn was a relief, and at dawn they saw the woman on her way to camp.

“Mangus says if the captain will send all his soldiers away and wait here in camp, alone and unarmed, he will come to talk.”

It was a critical moment. No one but Mangus could tell whether the proposition were a trap or made in good faith. To refuse the risk would incur possibility of losing Mangus, the Big One, and give good grounds for accusations of cowardice against the officer and his men. To accept meant sacrifice of the captain's life should Mangus meditate treachery.

Though the officer and every man of his detachment fully understood the chances, all of them knew that there was only one thing to be done, and that thing was to agree to Mangus's terms.

Reluctantly the soldiers obeyed the order to mount and ride away with their captives. Sergeant Casey elbowed Trumpeter Jones and leaned low to tighten the saddle of his own horse:

“Be slow!” he did not move his lips as he breathed the words to Jones. “Keep yo’ eye peeled. If Mangus gits de cap’n, yo’ git Mangus. Dat’s all.”

Casey swung on to his horse’s back and rode off at the head of the soldiers and Apaches. He gave a grunt of relief as he glanced back and saw Trumpeter Jones lingering, apparently unable to adjust his stirrup strap, while his big white horse pawed the ground and whinnied after the disappearing troopers.

Jones was not too busy with the strap to scrutinize different approaches to the campfire. His gun was in its scabbard, but not buckled according to regulation. Jones was deliberately violating orders and regulations. It was a very obstreperous stirrup strap.

“Jones!”

“Yes, sah, cap’n.”

“Never mind that strap.”

“Yes, sah, cap’n!”

Jones rode off, wishing he had eyes in the back of his woolly head. But he rode very, very slowly, and when he was hidden from the officer’s view behind a huge boulder, Trumpeter Jones again disobeyed orders and halted. Flat on his stomach he lay, his bridle rein caught in his crooked arm, and his eye squinted along the barrel of his gun. Jones held the record among the sharpshooters in the regiment.

His hand was steady now.

He saw his captain lean down to the campfire and lift a live coal from the smouldering oak log to the

bowl of his pipe. After drawing a few long puffs, he dropped the coal into the embers and rose to his feet.

As he rose, somewhere, apparently from the solid earth, an Indian confronted him. Of equal height, shoulders the same width, face to face they stood and looked unflinchingly into each other's eyes.

Jones gripped his carbine more tightly, for his captain's hands were empty, the closely buttoned blouse proved that no pistol was concealed. A blanket was wrapped about the form of the Apache Chief and between the folds of that blanket protruded the barrel of a gun.

Not a sound broke the silence. Face to face they stood for a few seconds. Then with a quick movement Mangus laid his gun at the feet of the officer.

Rising full height the Chiricahua Chief threw back his blanket and held out his two hands. The officer grasped them. Then without speaking one word, they sat down together before the campfire and smoked.

It was Mangus who finally broke the silence, speaking in fluent Spanish, "You are a great Nan-tan—a better soldier than I am. You are a brave man—you kept your promise. I am not ashamed to surrender to you, but it humiliates me to be a prisoner. Will you grant me one thing?"

"What is it?"

"Let me ride beside you to Fort Apache, not as one of the prisoners among your men?"



“Yes,” was the hearty response, “we will ride side by side.”

And so Mangus, the Big One, the last Chiricahua Apache Chief in Arizona, rode the trails that his tribe had ridden unrestrained, unconquered for generations past. He knew that never again would a Chiricahua travel those mountains, for the officer had told him of Natchez and Geronimo; and Mangus understood that with himself would depart the last of his race from the land of his forefathers. But his head was held proudly and his eyes looked straight ahead as Mangus, the last Chief of the Chiricahua Apaches, rode into Fort Apache—rode as a chief should ride—beside his conqueror, not back of him.

The military wires clicked off a message to General Miles in Washington. A message that lifted the heavy burden of responsibility he had borne without shrinking even in the face of unjust criticism. There was no sign of triumph in his eyes or voice as he held out the telegram to General Sheridan in the War Office.

Sheridan read:

FORT APACHE, *October 19, 1886.*

Chief Mangus captured by Captain Charles L. Cooper, Tenth Cavalry, after five days' hard chase. Unconditional surrender. Arrangements being made to transport entire band to Florida, probably October thirtieth.

J. F. WADE,  
*Lieut.-Colonel, Commanding.*

The Commanding General of the Army stood up and held out his hand.

“General Miles, in the name of President Cleveland and of the United States of America, I congratulate you upon the successful termination of the Geronimo Campaign! This will end the Apache troubles in Arizona.”

## Chapter XLII

### THE LOST TROOP

**U**NAWARE of the capture of the last Chiricahua Apaches, Lieutenant Stanley, followed by the lightest and best riders of the troop, stuck doggedly to the split trail. At times it scattered, then again converged; often it was entirely lost in soft, shifting sand, but Pancho, like a bloodhound, picked it up.

The section in which the detachment travelled was below the Mexican border and southwest of Sasabe. Sand draws between hillocks, dotted at rare intervals by scrubby mesquite and sparsely growing salt grass devoid of any nutriment and as tough as wire, formed the landscape.

Far away to the west lay a range of mountains and around the riders was a desolate stretch of arid land. This barren waste started southwest of Tucson and continued down and below the Mexican border through the greater part of the State of Sonora and was known as the Sonora Desert.

Camp had been made at a small, half-dried lake of stagnant water, but Pancho had assured Stanley

that they would reach a permanent spring the next day by noon. The distinct trail of the Apaches corroborated the guide's statement that the hostiles, too, were heading for the only permanent watering place in that vicinity, and the chances were that a surprise could be effected.

For five days the detachment had been suffering from the intense heat, travelling slowly during mid-day to save the horses as much as possible. Water was scarce, and only to be found at widely distant places even in ordinary seasons, but the past six months had brought little rain, and many of the pools were dry.

Long before ten o'clock that morning every canteen had been drained. No one had doubted Pancho's ability to find water by noon. But noon passed and afternoon waned.

The Apaches' trail lured them on; doubling, scattering, converging, the unshod hoofprints beckoned, and the detachment followed them with grim tenacity until darkness made it impossible to discern any signs in the soft sand.

Stanley realized the heavy responsibility as he sat on his horse and studied the dim desolation.

"It will take as long to return to last night's camp," he reasoned, "as it will take to go on to water. I can't turn back. Miles's commands were peremptory: 'Make pursuit by the most vigorous forced marches until the strength of all the animals

in the command shall have been exhausted.' And we've not reached that point yet. Besides, this trail is plain."

The men dismounted at his order.

There was an abundance of dry rations, but food went untouched because of thirst. The horses pawed and whinnied as the troopers unsaddled them. Stanley, standing beside Tiswin, saw the question in the horse's eyes, and unable to stand the unspoken plea, the young officer poured the few remaining drops of tepid water from his canteen into his hollowed hand and held it so that Tiswin could lick the moisture with his hot, dry tongue.

The act roused Stanley more keenly to the serious situation. He faced the Mexican guide.

"How much farther to that water?" he demanded.

"*Quien sabe?*" Pancho's drawling whine replied. "Eet is dark—the trail vamoose—maybe five miles!" he shrugged his shoulders and pointed the direction.

"Forward," ordered the lieutenant. The men mounted their weary animals and swung on.

They travelled through the night, making such speed as they might while the awful sun was below the horizon. A respite all too brief. It rolled up over the plain, a consuming flame; and swung above them like the clapper of a brazen bell tolling the desert tragedy. The heat was so intense that the metal of accoutrements blistered wherever it touched the men's flesh, and horses were covered with

dry lather. Silence of the desert gripped each man as he rode scanning every elevation of sand in the hope that in some hollow place might be a pool of water. A vain hope; and now all signs of the Apaches' trail had vanished; many horses were dead.

Again night fell. Too exhausted to continue farther, they made a dry camp.

In the silence of night Pancho rose on his elbow and furtively scanned the men who lay in stupefied weariness. His eyes narrowed vindictively as they rested upon the officer stretched slackly on the sand.

Inch by inch, Pancho neared a gaunt, white horse, but Blake lifted his head and listened. With a suppressed oath the guide dropped on his face and remained motionless until the old soldier had relaxed his vigilance. Pancho crawled to another horse, but another soldier lay beside it. Then the Mexican realized that, each man, despite his own plight, had tied the halter rope of his horse around his own arm, to keep it from straying in search of water. To persist in efforts to steal a horse meant loss of precious darkness and possible detection and death at the hands of the soldiers. So the guide sneaked out of the camp.

He had told the truth when he had said that he knew every inch of the Sonora Desert and where to find water each day. Only a few miles distant a permanent spring bubbled from a flat rock. He could have reached it by sunrise if his horse had not died.

The exhausted soldiers would not bother to follow his trail, even if they should notice it. Later, weeks later, he and his compadre, Sanchez, would come and collect rich booty of pistols, ammunition, saddles, and bridles from among the bleached bones at this part of the desert.

He crawled silently, with infinite patience, wary of rousing the broken but faithful guard. He emerged from the circle and crawled where the white sand ran smoothly under the stars. But he was not alone.

As silently as he, a sinuous, crawling evil thing—venomous companion of his spirit—crept beside him. Pancho's hand touched it and jerked back; but not quickly enough. A whirr of rattles. The snake struck and glided on its way, but the Mexican guide stayed where he was, clutching the sand, and he did not return to his compadre, Sanchez, who waited in Sasabe.

Through the night Stanley had been tortured by dreams in which he thought he was standing with Bonita beside a sycamore tree, while cool water rippled at their feet—water which turned to dry, hot sand when he knelt to quench his maddening thirst. And then he had risen to see the girl across an impassable cañon filled with flames, and in her outstretched hand was a cup of water.

Someone spoke his name.

He started to his feet and stared stupidly at Sergeant Blake. Gray dawn was crawling sluggishly above the horizon, as though shuddering to look at the things on the sand, and the sun leaped after it. Stanley pressed his shrivelled hand against his blood-shot eyes, to shut away the torturing light.

“I’se done saddled Tiswin, Lieutenant. De men’s raidy.” The old soldier’s reddened eyes were sunken deeply in the parchment-dry skin, which was a queer gray hue, not black. His clawlike hand lifted in salute and fell heavily.

Stanley rose to his feet and looked around at the men who awaited his command. Men whose lives depended upon him.

A deep feeling of hopelessness was settling upon the officer. Many of the horses had already been left behind, dead or dying, thus making it necessary for the dismounted soldiers to ride double; and the few surviving horses were now barely able to carry the burden of one rider. But they must go on.

Tiswin braced himself when the officer mounted him.

“Ready. Forward.”

The familiar words came from Stanley’s cracked and swollen lips, not the ringing command but a hoarse whisper. But the men heard it and obeyed.



## Chapter XLIII

### THE SILENT CALL

**I**T WAS reveille.

The cannon roared its salute to the morning sun. The flag fluttered to the top of the tall staff and the bugles rang in unison.

Golden warmth streamed through the white curtains that billowed softly in the breeze. Bonita listened dreamily:

“Though scorning the warning,  
Sun climbs adorning  
Clouds that will soon be slain,  
    Whate'er it may presage,  
    I read its message,  
Each morning on the plain.  
And rise to follow, follow,  
    Where duty calleth me,  
To life in hill or hollow,  
    Or Death with Life and thee.”

So often she and Jerry had sung those familiar words! Somewhere he was answering that call. The ache still tore her heart. Her quivering lips whispered his name. She opened her eyes and her heavy glance rested on the half-opened closet door which

revealed her wedding gown. Bonita turned her face and closed her eyelids to shut away the sight of the soft white folds, while slow tears wet her cheeks. Other scenes came back—scenes that she never would forget.

Unable to stand the torture of her thoughts, she dressed hastily and ran out on the porch until Finnegan brought her horse. Mounting, she turned Don's head toward the valley. She longed to ride away from everything and everyone she knew—to ride far across the desert to the world's end and never come back. Like some wild thing trapped, her spirit was bruised, for she had beaten against the bars.

Far away the amethyst mountains loomed against the turquoise sky. Desert and mountains were calling. Desert, mountains, and Jerry.

## Chapter XLIV

### A HOUSE OF GLASS

**A**N HOUR before noon Roy ran up the front steps of The Folly and hurried into his mother's room. She rose in surprise at the expression of his pale face.

"Mother, a telegram has just come that Jerry and a detachment of Kern's troop are lost on the Sonora Desert. I'm going to help find him. Where's Nita?" He glanced about quickly.

"Out riding," replied Mrs. Duncan, then she added sharply, "Why should you go after him?"

"Good Lord, Mother! Why shouldn't I? He's my chum. I am starting at once. I want to tell Nita."

"Don't tell her about this," commanded his mother, placing her hand on his shoulder and looking into his eyes. "You must not."

"Why not?" Amazement was in his face and voice.

"Because there is no telling what she may say or do," asserted Mrs. Duncan vehemently. "We had trouble enough with her about him before we went to camp. Your father forbade him our house and

commanded Bonita to cut him. She refused to do it——”

“But, Mother—Mother——” expostulated Roy.

The tide of her speech was not to be stemmed.

“Stanley encouraged her in her infatuation,” she went on.

“Infatuation?” Roy exploded. “What——”

His mother nodded violently.

“And now that he is lost, she’ll probably want to go and find him.”

Roy caught the back of a chair as though to steady himself.

“Mother,” he spoke in a voice that she had never heard before, “will you cool down and tell me what the devil you mean?”

The Duchess stamped her foot, her eyes flashed, and a deep flush covered her cheeks.

“I am telling you,” she retorted furiously. “Your father threatened to kick Stanley out of the house, and then he had the impudence to write to Bonita in the camp. But that’s all the good it did him. She didn’t get a letter. Not one!”

“Oh, I see!”

With a long sigh, Roy dropped heavily into a chair and buried his face in his hands. Mrs. Duncan stared at him and bit her lips. She had said too much. Roy looked up at her. She felt that a stranger looked at her with condemning eyes.

“Where are those letters?”

“Your father returned them unopened to Stanley and let him know that further communications would be destroyed unopened. That put an end to his writing.”

“Why did you do it?” the coldly accusing voice questioned.

“Roy Duncan! You certainly must have known about that Gonzales woman and him! Everyone was talking about it.”

He started to his feet and caught her wrist violently, “My God, Mother! What are you driving at? What about that—that—woman and Jerry?”

“You are hurting me, Roy!” Her voice trembled. He released his grip. They faced each other tensely.

“You certainly must know that he is the father of her child!”

Roy fumbled at the collar of his blouse and went over to the table where he stood with his back to his mother.

“And you told Bonita—that?” he asked, without turning.

“I certainly did not tell her,” snapped Mrs. Duncan. “I don’t think she knows anything about it.”

Roy wheeled about. “It’s a damned rotten mess!” He flung up his hands and laughed. “Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord!” but there was no mirth in his laughter and tears were on his cheeks: “Poor old Jerry! That’s what you get for shielding me!”

“You?”

“Yes.”

He saw her eyes harden into stone.

“Mother.” He spoke pleadingly, holding out his hands.

She turned and walked away from him after one scathing glance.

Roy caught up his cap and opened the door into the hallway.

“Well, I’ve got to face the music,” he called back to her over his shoulder.

“You are going?” she demanded without looking around.

“I am going to find Jerry. Find him—dead or alive!”

She did not reply, and Roy slammed the door. Bonita in her riding habit stood beside him. Her tortured eyes were lifted to his face. “Where is Jerry?”

Roy knew that it was the time for honest speech. “Off the trail somewhere. He hasn’t reported. The troops are scouting for him and I am going out to help find him.”

She did not flinch or speak but moved swiftly ahead of him to the front gate where a soldier, who had just led up Roy’s horse, was unfastening Don’s reins.

“Wait!” she said very quietly. “I need Don.”

The striker moved off and Roy reached her side.

There was no concealment in the eyes she lifted to his as she said, "Help me up, Roy. I'm going with you."

"Nita, you can't stand such a trip!"

"Yes, I can. Let me go with you or I shall go alone!"

"We'll go together," he said gently, and he swung her to her saddle.

Mrs. Duncan started toward the door as she heard the clatter of hoofs on the roadway. She had heard Bonita's voice in the hall and had waited for Roy to come back. The hoofbeats were growing fainter. She ran out of the house and stood staring after two riders.

"Roy!" she cried. But her call was lost in the noise of hoofs that pounded on the ground.

Blindly she turned back into her room and fell sobbing across the bed, still hearing the pounding hoofs on the ruins of her cherished little house of glass.

## Chapter XLV

### WATER!

**A**CROSS the sand in silence rode a troop that had been a part of the Fighting Tenth—rode like ghosts that had risen from their graves. And beside the staggering horses walked Despair.

The moving column resolved itself into separate vertebræ like a disintegrating serpent as the men and horses crawled listlessly along. The horses were pitiful caricatures of the beautiful, spirited animals of which the troopers had been so proud. Now with flanks drawn, heads swinging low, bodies gaunt, and legs trembling, they stumbled on. The eyes of the poor brutes were like the eyes of wooden horses and their dry tongues lolled from their open mouths.

On their backs huddled mummy-like figures whose tongues protruded between cracked lips covered with dry froth, while other men clung weakly to the stirrup straps, swaying as they moved.

At noon a ray of hope dawned as they saw black clouds gather on the horizon. Praying, hoping, they watched the moisture-laden masses drift slowly



toward them across the brazen sky. Their sufferings were almost forgotten. Relief seemed so near.

For two hours the clouds banked heavily above their heads, and they spread saddle blankets and coats, that the rain might saturate the fabrics. Then the clouds floated away, holding the precious moisture as greedily as a miser clutches his gold.

Wearily they toiled on again. Hours went past unheeded. The sun beat down upon them, the reflected heat from the sand formed into a quivering haze. Step after step they plodded mechanically, hopelessly. Thought was deadened by physical suffering that was beyond description.

“Water! Water! Water!”

The hoarse cry did not rouse them. Too many times had they heard it from men who screamed in a delirium of thirst.

Then another took up the cry, and still others reiterated it, but this time it was a cry of joy, while they halted, spellbound at the sight of a beautiful lake a short distance away. There were green waving trees on its banks and the water lay placidly, coolly, and deeply blue. The men staggered toward it, with rasping cries of delight, unheeding the officer who rode after them.

“Stop! For God’s sake, stop. It’s a mirage!”

They struggled frantically toward it, feasting their eyes on the lake and the shadows that dipped into it. Men fell, and unable to regain their feet, weakly

dragged themselves along the ground. No one stopped or gave heed to their pleas for help. One man grasped another's ankle, imploring aid to reach the water. They had been bunkies for years, but the stronger man pushed the other away with a curse and hastened forward leaving the prostrate man whimpering weakly on the sand.

One by one they halted and stared at an endless stretch of sand. Like an unfinished negative, the vision of water and cool green places had vanished, and they understood at last that a mirage—the wanton of the desert—had lured them with its false promises.

Some of them fell limply, others threw themselves on their faces and bit and clawed the sand in frenzy of despair. A few howled curses and shook their puny fists in defiance of the Omnipotent. And Stanley, realizing his utter helplessness, watched with dull eyes the fighting, screaming, cursing men who had once been the best-disciplined troop of the regiment.

One by one they turned their hopeless eyes toward him and obeyed his voice. On and on, mile after mile, they staggered and stumbled until sunset. Then they fell wearily to the ground.

Stanley dismounted stiffly from Tiswin's back and stood beside the horse, looking at the sprawling inert figures that seemed to be those of men who were dead. Loud buzzing oppressed him and sharp pains in head and ears were almost unbearable.

How much longer could any of them hold out? Most of the horses were already dead.

His hand rested heavily upon Tiswin's neck. A tremor of the animal's body grew more pronounced. Stanley turned and looked into the imploring eyes. He touched the hot nose gently. Then the horse swayed and slipped slowly to its knees. Still the pleading eyes watched his master.

Weakly the horse's head drooped to the ground and it rolled over on the sand. A deep breath that was almost a sob—a convulsive shiver—then Tiswin was still.

Stanley stood looking down on him until a touch on his arm roused him and he turned to face Blake.

“Lieutenant”—the man's broken articulation was marked—“De men—Tiswin is daid—hit won't hu't him—we's got ter keep de res' ob de hawses so long as we kin—hit's de onliest chance fo' de men dat cain't go no furdah——”.

Stanley looked into the old man's eyes—looked at those who lay almost lifeless upon the sand—and remembered those who, farther back on the trail, had been unable to rise and go on.

So as the horses played out, the men gained fictitious strength from the blood; but always came the reaction.

By superhuman will power, Stanley held aloof, knowing that only by controlling himself could he hope to keep his control over the men.

“De hawses is all daid, Lieutenant, an’ yo’ gotter ride Lill,” Sergeant Blake half-ordered, half-pleaded. “Caze if yo’ plays out, we all cain’t go on noways.”

“We’ll all take turns riding,” the young officer answered, and aided by Blake he struggled to mount the mule’s back.

Once more Stanley roused the men, and what was left of the detachment dragged apathetically after him until Blake, trudging feebly behind his lieutenant, fell and did not rise.

Stanley dismounted and with help of the others lifted the old sergeant to the mule’s back. For a while the officer and one of Blake’s comrades supported the unconscious soldier, but the additional tax on their strength soon made itself felt.

They halted. Stanley tore the yellow stripes from the sides of his trousers. There was no need for the insignia of an officer of the cavalry. The desert recognized neither rank nor race. Blake’s arms, extended along either side of the mule’s lean neck, were bound at the wrists, while the Negro’s head sagged heavily against Lill’s withers.

Lill was an institution in the regiment. She had been captured during a fight between Indians and two troops of the Tenth Cavalry in 1871 near Camp Supply, and for fifteen years she had been the pride and the pest of the troop to which she had been assigned. And now she bore the old sergeant as the command went on its march of death.

They halted to rest at sundown, and Stanley, lying on the sand, noted with bloodshot eyes a distant peak. It seemed familiar. Like a fog lifting, his vague thoughts grew more clear. As he studied the peak he suddenly remembered it. On the way toward the desert he had turned in his saddle to look back at the detachment and had noticed that same peculiar contour directly in line with the water hole at which they had spent the night. But he dared not tell this new-born hope to the men until he was sure that he was right.

A full moon rose in the cloudless sky. For the past few nights it had been obscured by storm clouds which had drifted over their heads, only to evaporate in the strong rays of the morning sun. Without the stars to guide, the officer had not dared to march at night for fear of missing some landmark. But to-night the moon's rays were bright and he could watch that peak—the only clue to their former camp.

Drearily they trudged through sand that like the strong tentacles of an octopus clutched their feet. As Stanley watched the peak, the stars above it seemed to turn to balls of fire that grew steadily larger and hotter, swirling furiously until they melted into a blazing sunrise that like a white-hot iron seared his inflamed eyeballs.

He pressed his hand across them as he plodded along leading the mule on which Blake was tied.

His hand dropped to his side, and he walked with bent head, dreading to face the glare. The ground grew solid now, and there at his feet he saw distinct tracks—shod horses—horses that had travelled toward the heart of the Sonora Desert—their own tracks from the water hole.

They had circled their trail!

The men crowded eagerly about him, and the sight of the hoofprints, like wine in their veins, inspired them to more desperate efforts. Their drawn faces and bloodshot eyes were lifted to the distant peak.

Five miles away was water! Five miles. They crawled on.

At last they reached it and fell on their faces. In the life-saving fluid they laid their parched lips.

“Drink only a mouthful when I order,” Stanley commanded.

They understood and obeyed. And no man may say what obedience meant on that day.

The water was hot, strongly alkali, and stagnant. A famished coyote's carcass rested partly in the pool. One of the men dragged it back. In the shallow places the water was thick and jelly-like; but to those who lay prone, moistening their swollen lips, the viscid liquid was purest nectar.

The tissues of their skeleton moisture-starved bodies were almost as dry as the flesh of mummies; and through the day they rested by the pool, laying

their hands in it, laving their shrivelled faces in it, moving only when permitted to relieve the constant demand of thirst.

Stanley restrained his own craving in order that he might safeguard the others. He had explained that over-indulgence now meant as much danger as their previous lack of water. Blake had been cared for, and now helped to encourage the men to obey the lieutenant's commands.

So the night passed.

At dawn Stanley ordered that canteens be filled and, tying them to the mule's saddle, he started back over the trail to find and succour those who had been unable to keep up with their comrades.

Though the men had water, they were without food, and the plight of those beside the water hole was grave. Stanley knew that it would be impossible for them, in their weakened condition, to hold out until they could march to any place where food might be obtained. But his first duty now was to find those who had been left behind, and, if possible, get them also to the water hole.

Exhaustion, dizziness, blindness almost overcame him, but he fought determinedly on and kept his aching eyes upon the trail that led back to where men lay dying or dead upon the sand.

The sun rose higher.

A dust cloud darkened the distant horizon. Stanley did not notice it.

It thickened the air and the hot wind licked his face. His head sank down until it rested on the mule's neck. Then his shrivelled hands that clutched the pommel of the saddle relaxed and his body slid to the ground where he lay with face turned upward. His eyes were closed.

Lill waited. But he did not rise.

So, carrying the canteens of water, she trotted on her way.



## Chapter XLVI

### THE LAND OF LOST TRAILS

**A**CROSS the gray stretch of desolation known as the Sonora Desert three people rode.

The town of Willcox, where Roy and Bonita had halted to make arrangements for their journey, lay many miles behind them. The full realization of what they must confront and the risks to the girl had filled the young officer with anxiety. It was not his own safety but hers that counted. So when he met Ramon, a Mexican desert rat, ambling along the uneven boardwalk that masqueraded as a pavement in front of the Willcox stores, he engaged the old man to act as guide at quadruple the usual price, and in little over an hour's time they started on their way with a pack horse fully equipped for the journey.

Before they left the town Roy had learned that detachments of cavalry were scouring in different sections adjacent to the last known location of the lost men, and Captain Kern, with his part of the troop, was already out of communication somewhere in the heart of the desert.

During daylight and until late at night Roy and Bonita rode without halting. Ramon mapped out short cuts which would bring them to permanent water each night, though the camps were far apart from each other. Only the need of resting their animals made the riders halt, for all of them were eager to avoid losing one precious moment.

Bonita, continually watching for some object, either moving or motionless on the sand, forgot those who rode with her—forgot there was any other world than the gray desert. Its brooding silence wrapped about them and its vastness melted into the pale horizon as though Life and Eternity blended there.

Two days had they ridden where even the Papago Indians, when assigned to the section as their reservation, had refused to remain and face its indescribable desolation.

Roy anxiously watched a faint haze to the front of them. It slowly became more opaque. Ramon, too, watched as he trailed behind them with the pack horse. The young officer twisted in his saddle and the two men exchanged meaning glances. The Mexican shook his head. He had been in more than one desert sandstorm, but never had a young girl been among those he had guided.

How would she be able to face it when men—strong men—lay down and died?

A faint sibilant sound, like myriads of whispering

voices, drifted across the silent places. Here and there the many-coloured particles of loose sand shifted, as though beneath the surface gigantic, invisible fingers were moving. Heat waves shimmered blindingly across the distant haze. Dry wind flicked the faces of the riders.

They bound handkerchiefs about nostrils and mouths and pulled their hats down farther over their eyes.

The wind grew stronger. It caught the sand, twisted it into strands, and wove them into huge ropes with widespreading, tousled ends which gyrated wildly high in the air. The moving columns, gathering in size and force, swept like an army of strange monsters across the desert and circled about the riders, who bent low over their horses' necks.

The sand cut their flesh and crept into nostrils and lungs, their horses sidled and finally stopped, nose to nose, their tails to the storm and heads hanging low. The wind howled, the sand hissed, the sunlight was shut away, and grayness was turning to darkness.

Night was upon them and the storm still raged. They had hoped that it might die at sunset.

"Bonita," Roy said anxiously, leaning close to her, "we're in for a bad time of it. You had better turn back with Ramon before we get farther into the desert."

She shook her head.

“*Señorita*, eet is *muy malo*——”

There was no reply.

“Go back, Nita,” urged Roy, laying his hand upon hers. “Ramon knows the way and your backs will be to the storm.”

He could not see her face, but her voice came clearly: “I must go on!”

“Do you care so much, Bonita?”

The wind hushed for a second as though waiting the girl’s reply.

“I care so much that nothing he ever has done, nothing he ever could do, would make any difference to me. I love him.”

“Push on, Ramon,” the officer called to the guide.

“*Sí, señor.*”

“You shall not! You shall not!” shrieked the storm, beating them with thousands of lashes of sand.

Into the heart of it they plunged, their horses braced to meet the furious gale. Like swimmers fighting waterspouts in the sea, the men and the girl battled inch by inch against the terrific whirlwinds of the desert.

“*Señor,*” shouted Ramon above the noise, “we must stay here till the storm stops, or maybe so I lose the trail.” They dismounted.

Roy looked at the dimly outlined figure of the girl, who with Ramon’s serape over her head and shoulders bent low and took the storm as they huddled on the sand.

"I think the wind is dying down a bit." He lifted his voice above the noise: "Maybe you will be able to get a little sleep."

"I'm all right"—he caught her words—"don't worry about me, Roy."

"Eet will be over by midnight, *señor*," prophesied Ramon encouragingly.

And he was right. At midnight the wind abated. The three rose and moved about to straighten their cramped muscles.

"Stretch out and rest for a little while, Nita. I'll unsaddle the horses while Ramon gets us something to eat."

But not until after the guide had given them what food he was able to prepare and their horses had been fed did Bonita relax. She sank on the sand and lay with her sleepless eyes lifted to the sky. The full moon shone dimly through a haze of dust upon the illimitable desert. The men and horses had fallen where they were, in heavy sleep.

The silence after the storm was oppressive. Around, concealed by the heavy haze, lay miles of desert. Desert and sky—vast and silent as eternity—the land of lost trails.

Suddenly Bonita was erect, every nerve tense.

"Roy!" she called. "Roy!"

She ran over to him. "I heard something——"

Both men scrambled to their feet.

"Hello! Hello!" they shouted again and again,

pausing between calls to listen for an answer, but there was only silence.

The girl laid a trembling hand on Roy's arm. "Oh, I know that I heard something moving. I have not been asleep!"

Once more the two men shouted, again they waited a reply.

But the stillness was broken only by a girl's half-choked, despairing sob. Every muscle in her body ached, and the hope that had buoyed her till now had almost reached the breaking point.

"Oh, let us go on! Let us go on!" she cried piteously.

But Ramon insisted that until the haze had lifted from the obscured moon it would be dangerous to move.

Roy laid his hand on the girl's shoulder. "All right, Nita. We will push on just as soon as it is safe." Roughly tender, he added, "Buck up, girl!"

"I will," he heard her answer bravely through the gloom.

Roy sat down beside her. "Bonita, I do not know whether you heard that damnable gossip about Jerry or not, and——"

Her hand reached out quickly to check his words. "I know," she said, "but even though it is true, it makes no difference now to me."

"It was not true," he cried passionately. "Jerry was innocent. He was protecting me!"

And then while night hours crept across the desert Roy told her the whole wretched story. She asked no questions, made no comments, but as he finished speaking, he heard her whisper brokenly, "Jerry, forgive me—forgive me!"

The poignant grief of her voice tore at his heart. "Bonita"—he held her hand tightly in his own—"please believe me—I did not know—I would have given my life for him!"

In the faint light he saw her face lifted toward the hidden sky; her lips were moving. He bowed his head, and from his heart went forth a prayer.

## Chapter XLVII

### REVEILLE!

**B**Y JOVE!" Roy's exclamation startled them. "Something is moving! Hello! Hello!" His shout was caught up by Ramon. It was followed by an extraordinary answer from near by—"Hee—haw! Hee-haw!"

"A mule, by thunder!" the officer cried.

Ramon leaped to his bareback pony and dashed toward the sound. The shuffle of hoofs came faintly, then more clearly, and the Mexican emerged from obscurity leading a saddled mule—a mule with an army saddle.

"It's Lill!" Roy called. "Lord bless the old renegade!"

Bonita ran over and patted the mule's rough neck. Tears were on the girl's cheeks and hope rekindled in her heart.

Ramon tested the water in canteens which hung from Lill's saddle, and explained that it came from the alkali lake in the rocks, ten miles south of the spring toward which they themselves had been travelling, but the storm had diverted them from their course.



“Can you follow the mule’s trail in this light?” questioned the officer.

“*Sí, sí, teniente.*” Ramon already felt the money in his hand.

“Coffee first,” ordered Roy. Bonita shook her head, but he was determined. “There’s no telling when we’ll stop again. We all need food. If you play out, neither Ramon nor I can go on.”

“I won’t play out,” she said quietly.

It was not the distance they might have to travel which worried Roy, but whether her fortitude should prove equal to what they might find. Silently he helped the Mexican saddle the horses.

“Two o’clock,” Roy spoke as they started on their way.

“Two o’clock,” Bonita repeated, a thrill in her voice. “‘Two o’clock and all is well’ the sentinels are calling it, Roy! *All is well!*”

The gray haze revealed a shrouded moon. They travelled silently for two hours while Ramon, in the lead, bent over his pony’s neck and scrutinized the faint tracks where the small, sharp hoofs of the mule had cut deeply into the soft sand.

Adept in reading signs, the guide knew that the mule could have travelled some distance since the storm had died at midnight, so the trail would be clear. If she had strayed from her unknown rider before the storm had ceased, the tracks they now followed hopefully would be obliterated before the

man could be found. But even so, the trail would indicate the direction from which the mule had come.

And then, the thing they feared, happened. The hoofprints vanished. Wiped out by the sand storm.

“Well, now we are up against it!” Roy’s voice was heavy with discouragement. “How about it, Ramon? Do you know which way to go?”

The Mexican glanced up to the sky. As yet there was no sign of dawn. The dust haze was thick.

“*Quién sabe?*” he muttered and hunched over his pony to stare at the ground. “When the sun ees bright, maybe so we can follow the trail. *Quién sabe?*” Dubiously he shook his head.

Then Bonita took command.

“We’ll separate here. Some one of us may pick up the trail. Ramon, turn Lill loose. I will take her with me. Roy, you go to the right and Ramon to the left. We can cover ground in less time that way.”

“One of us must go with you,” expostulated Roy.

“No!” she shook her head impatiently. “I won’t get lost. The wind has died down and our trails will be fresh. We can double back at noon and find each other here. Leave something as a mark. Hurry! We are wasting time!”

“*Señor*, she is right.” Ramon spoke quickly, and as he spoke he threw his bright red serape in a heap on the sand. On top of it he placed a canteen of

water. "If some man come, he find water and know we come back *muy pronto!*"

The Mexican mounted his pony, then dismounted and hobbled the pack horse carefully, leaving it to hop at its will, for he knew it could not stray far from the spot where their camp outfit was lying, and where the red serape would attract attention.

"*Bueno!*" he grunted, and sent his horse at a gallop across the plain.

Bonita had already started, and Roy, moving to the right, turned in his saddle to look back at the slender, dauntless figure as it vanished in the haze.

For an hour she pressed on, scanning the desert as far as her eyes could reach, and hope grew in her heart each moment. The feeling that each step was bringing her nearer to Jerry was something she could not explain. Without the faintest shadow of doubt she pushed eagerly forward while at intervals her voice broke the silence.

"I am coming, Jerry! I am coming!" Sometimes it quivered a bit, but again it rang bravely: "I am coming!"

The first gray promise of day was filtering through the misty air. The vanishing moon, like a silver sword, cut the thinning haze, leaving a clear vista for a brief second; and in that instant Bonita had seen a dark spot on the sand.

She sent her horse at a furious gallop toward it and sprang to the ground beside the unconscious figure of

a man. A torn shirt clung to his sun-blistered body, and there were no yellow stripes on the blue trousers to indicate that this was an officer. His face, like brown parchment, was almost hidden in a matted mass of beard, and unkempt hair fell over his forehead, making him almost unrecognizable. But Bonita knew that it was Jerry.

In a moment she had unstrapped a canteen, jerked a flask from her saddle pocket, and knelt down beside him.

There was no sign of life as she rested his head on her arm and tried to force a few drops of water between the swollen lips, laved his face, then bathed temples and wrists with the brandy.

She let the stimulant drop upon his lips, and waited for a sign of consciousness. Waited in vain.

Calling his name, she held him closely against her breast. Around her stretched the desert. She did not know it was there. The haze lifted slowly and the first pink tinge grew in the sky. But she did not see it. There was no world, no desert, no sky.

The breeze freshened and lifted the hair on the sun-burned forehead, showing the whiter skin. Bonita touched it tenderly, remembering the first time she had seen him and had noticed the white strip which the vizor of his cap had protected from the sun. Her lips were laid against it.

Then fear crept into her heart—fear of the long, long years that she might have to live alone, with

no sound of his loved voice, no clasp of his arms, no touch of his lips on her own.

Around and about them lay silence, desolation, and death.

“Jerry!” she cried, and drew him closer in her arms. But he did not move.

With a burst of glory, into the cloudless sky leaped the sun. Then from the distant camp of Kern’s searching troop came the sweet, clear notes of a bugle. The call was like the touch of a white-hot iron on the girl’s tortured heart.

“Listen, my dear, my dear,” she sobbed, her face against the quiet one on her breast. “The bugles—the bugles of the troop! Can’t you hear us calling you?”

She felt him stir in her arms. Slowly he opened his eyes and looked into her face. The radiance of dawn lay upon it.

“Bonita—beloved——” Wonder was in his voice.

Then Life—glorious Life—surged back full tide upon him. The girl’s cheek, wet with tears of joy, was pressed against his own, and across the glowing golden sands clear and triumphant rang the music of a bugle.

Reveille!

THE END

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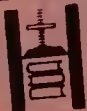








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