

DIAMOND DICK

JR.    JR.

BOYS BEST WEEKLY

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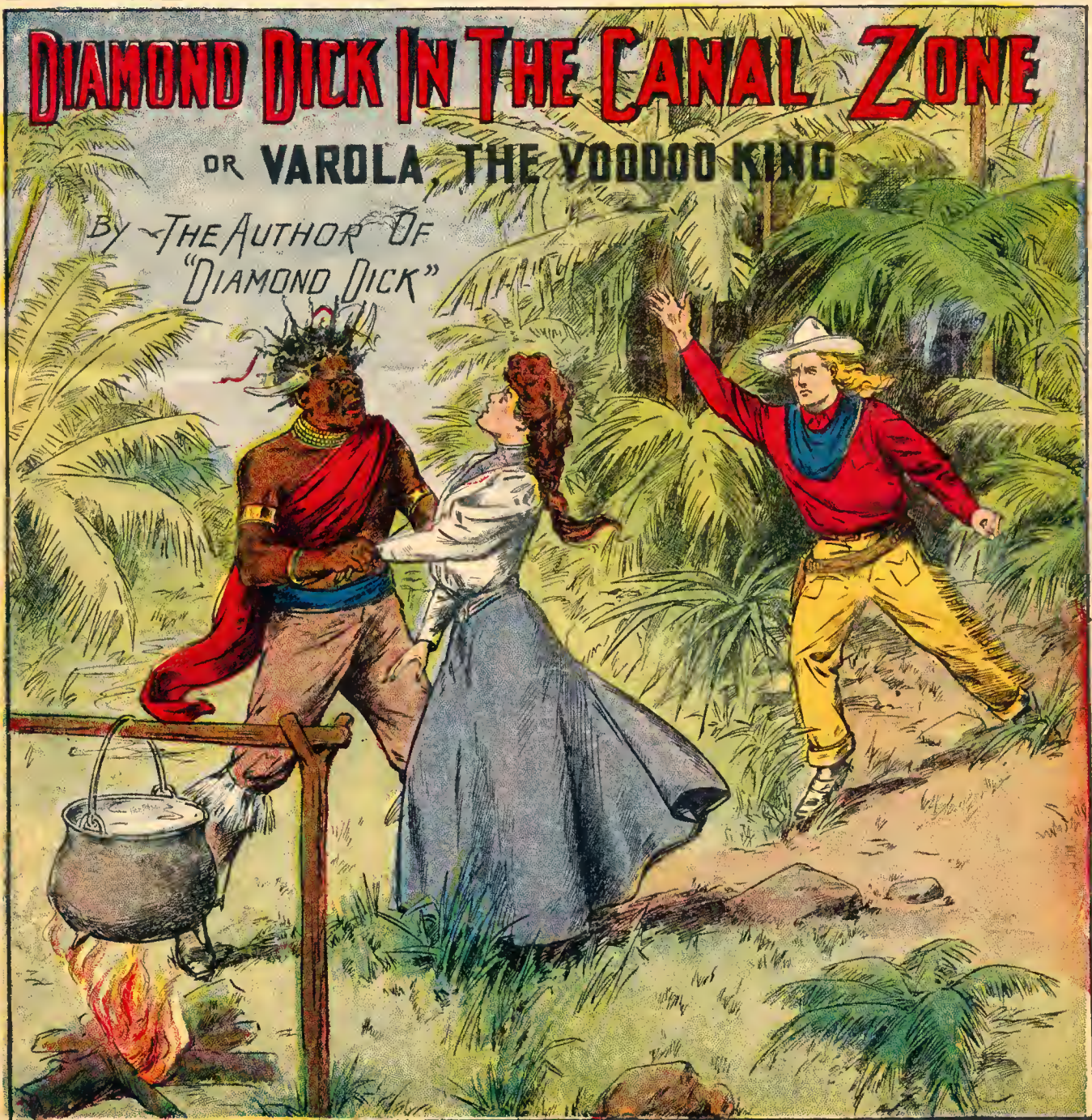
NEW YORK, APRIL 18, 1908.

Price, Five Cents

DIAMOND DICK IN THE CANAL ZONE

OR VAROLA, THE VOODOO KING

By THE AUTHOR OF
"DIAMOND DICK"



"Hold!" yelled Diamond Dick, dashing out from the palms with the intention of preventing the Voodoo King from carrying out his evil design by adding drops of blood to the magic witch's broth.

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CHAPTER I.

THE OLD SARPINT OF SISKIYOU.

From the deck of the slatternly schooner that had drawn up at the Panama dock came loud voices and sounds of a scuffle. A man appeared, red-bearded and a giant in size, in the midst of a group of sailors who were pushing him toward the schooner's side.

"Leggo of me, you!" he roared. "Wow! Leggo of me! This shore starts the pizen bad in my pizen teeth. Leggo, I say!"

"Ashore you go!" cried one of the men, the mate of the vessel. "We ought to pitch ye overboard; ought to done it long ago, when we was out at sea. This is the way we treat stowaways."

"Wow! You shore rile me powerful!" cried the giant, thrashing about and sending a number of the men sprawling. "I'm a stowaway, am I? Me? I reckon even now ye don't know me—don't know who I am? And I've got ter tell ye ag'in, have I? I'm the ole Sarpint of Siskiyou, wi' seventeen rattles and a button; and the pizen is shore workin' quick up inter my pizen teeth. Keep yer dirty paws off o' me. You hear me howl! Wough-h-h-h! S-s-s!"

"Over with him, boys!" screamed the mate. "This is the way we treat stowaways."

"A stowaway, am I?" shouted the giant. "Hansum Harry, ther ole Sarpint o' Siskiyou, has got down so low as ter be a common, no-count stowaway. I'll stow away

yer breath fer that, yer terantular! If I'm a stowaway, why don't yer take me before some off'cer and put charges agin' me? I dar' yer ter do it. Hyar's ther port o' Panama, and hyar's off'cers, I don't doubt, in plenty. I dar' yer ter do it. It would give me er chancet ter show up what kind er pizen skunks ye air. Me a stowaway! When yer know yer shanghaied me in that beastly Mexican port of Apulco, thinkin' thet I'd make a sailor. And when I wasn't no sailor, and wouldn't do yer dirty work fer ye, but said I'd make it hot fer ye as soon as we hit dry ground, then you ups and claims I'm a stowaway. Jes lemme git my paws on ye, and I'll stow you away fer that."

But the mate, whose accusations had so aroused the ire of Handsome Harry, kept well back out of reach of his flailing arms, shouting to his men to tumble the giant ashore and make quick work of it.

The scene was like that when the pygmies swarmed round Gulliver. The strength of the giant did not avail him; for, though with each sweep of his brawny arms he laid men sprawling on the deck, others were upon him as quickly, and, tugging him by the legs, by the body, by the arms, they pushed and shoved him on over the side of the vessel, and into the midst of the crowd which had gathered on the dock, where other vessels lay at anchor.

On the decks of these vessels, and on the dock, men stood grinning, not doubting that the giant deserved all he was getting, and much tickled by his howling and the unavailing fight which he so lustily put up.

Handsome Harry tripped and stumbled, landed against

a bale of goods as he struck the dock, and went down sprawling.

For a moment he lay dazed and breathless, his immense strength well spent by his anger and his tremendous struggles, which had been so unavailing.

Then he rose, and with a kick of his massive feet, and a swing of his heavy arms, cleared a way round him, where men bitten by curiosity were beginning to press about him.

"Out er my way!" he howled in his anger. "Do yer think thet I'm a man-cater frum ther Connubial Islands? Stand back before I make mush of ther faeces o' some o' ye."

They stood back, almost respectfully.

Handsome Harry looked at the schooner and the men on her deck, and shook his big fist at the smiling mate, who felt that he was well rid of him.

"Yer think thet yer can muss up ther ole Sarpint o' Siskiyou same's if he was a mangy ole ant-cater, do ye!" he howled at the mate. "Waal, take another think. I'll settle wi' yer fer this insult. I'm goin' ter find ef there's any United States law in this hyar beastly Canal Zone, an' if thar is I'll make yer suffer. And don't yer fergit it!"

He turned round and glared at the men about him.

"Whichever is ther way ter ther Governor's office?" he demanded. "I want ter see him straight off quick. I'm thet he't up I'm about bu'stin' my b'iler. Whichever way is it?"

"The office of the foreman of the working-gang is over there," said a by-stander, pointing to a big house on a hill.

"Cl'ar a way thar, you!" he said, starting forth. "I'm ther ole Sarpint o' Siskiyou, and I've got my mad up; stand out o' ther way thar, er I'll shore eat ye. Wough-h! Hs-s-s-s!"

He looked big and angry enough to execute his wild threat as he pushed on across the dock.

But when he had left the dock and was toiling across the intervening ground, glaneing now and then at the big house which had been pointed out, he suddenly shifted his course, and struck into a street which led into the town itself.

"Wough-h-h!" he grunted. "Let 'em go; I ain't got time ter fool wi' 'em—can't waste my precious minutes on sich no-'count mangy animiles as them. I've gotter look fer Diamond Dick. And I wonder whar he is? Last time I heard of him he was hittin' it up down this er-way, chasin' after somethin' er uther. And if he's hyar I gotter find him right straight off."

Then he began to fume again about the treatment he had received on the schooner, and for a full minute stood staring at the big house, hesitating whether to go there or not, while another crowd began to gather about him, and some men had followed him in curiosity from the dock.

"No—let 'er go!" he muttered. "I gotter find ef Diamond Dick is hyar er hyarabouts. Let 'em go."

Then he went on again, turning angrily over in his mind memories of the mean treatment he had received at the hands of the mate of the schooner.

Handsome Harry, having been in Acapulco on a little business, and passing a night at a cheap boarding-house, had been literally snaked out of the house almost before he could wake up, and with a blanket over his head and cords on his limbs had been taken aboard the schooner,

which was just then short-handed, and which immediately sailed.

He hardly knew what had happened to him before the vessel was under way, and then the impossibility of getting ashore was apparent. He had raved, and been laughed at; and then the mate had thought to make him work and take up the tasks of a sailor by taking a rope's end to him.

This indignity had roused all the "pizen" blood in the old Sarpint of Siskiyou; he had literally cleaned the decks up with men who rushed on him; and, backing into the cabin, he had held it against all of them, with only a chair for a weapon, until finally, some hours after, the mate and captain eaved in and surrendered, when it began to seem that the old Sarpint was demolishing the cabin and about to kick holes through the side of the schooner.

The giant had been released and permitted to come on deck; they were not sure but that he would in his anger hurl himself overboard.

But Handsome Harry was no such fool as that. On the contrary, he seized a knife from a sailor, and then, campling down on a coil of rope—it was now daytime—he proceeded calmly to pick his teeth with the point of the knife, to irritate them, and hurled anathemas at the mate and captain and crew, declaring fiercely that he would carve into ribbons any man that dared lay hands on him.

From that time on during its run southward the old Sarpint had literally terrified the ship's crew and officers into submission; so that they had furnished him food, and otherwise let him alone. He gave them to understand that he would not help them work the vessel even if it was going to the bottom, and that he would have good grub in plenty, if he had to carve steaks from the men's legs.

He was a terror throughout the voyage; and the captain, seeing he had caught a tartar, and beginning to fear that a man of such spirit would make trouble when the Canal Zone was reached, conceived the idea of charging him with being a stowaway; and had dumped him ashore with that charge when the schooner touched the dock.

As soon as Handsome Harry got rid of a little of his bad temper on shore, he was rather disposed to be pleased that he had been favored by a piece of good luck in being thus dumped upon Panama territory.

Diamond Dick was there, he had heard; and he had not seen Diamond Dick in many a day; though his old pard and friend had seldom been out of his thoughts; so if he could discover Diamond Dick, the abuse he had suffered, and the shanghaing, and all, would be but payment for the joy that was now due.

He looked keenly about him as he made his way heavily along.

He was astonished. Somehow he had thought Panama an insignificant place; and here he saw that it was quite a city, with many streets and houses, and crowds of people, as he pressed on.

In addition to the regular inhabitants, there were swarms of negro laborers everywhere. Houses were being built, streets were being improved, and not far away there were indications of the gigantic work that was being done in digging the great Panama Canal.

It did him good to see so many American faces, for they were everywhere—men who seemed to be clerks,

and laborers, and mechanics, and of all callings; they were undeniably and undoubtedly American. Handsome Harry's belief that the chance of coming upon Diamond Dick here was good increased proportionately.

But he spoke to nobody. He did not know what kind of rôle Diamond Dick might be playing, if he were here. Diamond Dick was a "mighty oncertain creetur"; he had many aliases, and many disguises, and he might be in Panama, but not as Diamond Dick. That he would not know his old pard in whatever disguise the latter affected was something, however, which Handsome Harry did not believe.

It took him a good while to get into the heart of the city and on the principal streets. All the time he looked for Diamond Dick, but did not see him. Still, he would not ask questions, reasoning that sooner or later he would stumble on him if there; and that, anyway, it would be an unwise thing to say a word that might reveal Diamond Dick to any one, if the latter were there disguised.

Handsome Harry spent a good part of the day making this aimless kind of search, and finally sought a lodging-house.

"Wough-h!" he grumbled as he did so. "It's like looking fer er needle in er haystack. And ez fer a town, this is ther consarndest mix-up I ever poked my ole nose inter. Mexicans and Spanyards, and dagoes and niggers, and all the ragtag and bobtail er humanity frum the four corners of the yearth; I'm nighabout ashamed that it's American territory. But hyar I camps until I knows fer shore ef Diamond Dick is hyar; and ef not hyar, whar he is. You hear me! Wough-h!"

CHAPTER II.

L U C K Y L U K E .

It was night when Handsome Harry left the lodging-house and began again his aimless search for Diamond Dick, convinced that if his old friend and pard was in the city of Panama he would run on him sooner or later.

He was in the heart of the town, and he had gone no more than two or three blocks before he came on a sight that made his eyes shine.

A young fellow rather neatly dressed was standing up in the street on a goods-box selling some article to the crowd that surged about him. His voice crying his wares came distinctly to the old Sarpint, and awoke memories of years gone by.

"Wough-h! Kin it be?" Handsome Harry grunted; and he rubbed his eyes and looked again. "By all the diangular, triangular crawlin' sarpints, ef it ain't him I'm a goat!"

He did not mean by this that it was Diamond Dick he saw; but another, a pard of long ago, who had been often in his thoughts since the days when they had shared certain wild experiences in the wild West.

"Lucky Luke Lockhart, by all ther jumpin' kangaroos!" he grunted. "An' at his ole tricks! Down hyar in ther Canal Zone; and busted flat; an' he's tryin' ter rake in some needed shekels at ther ole game. Waal, who'd have thunk it? It's like findin' yer long-lost brother ter come on him hyar."

Whereupon, with a wide smile, he waltzed forward until he stood just beyond the fringe of prospective buyers about the young street-faker.

There he stood, wide-mouthed and grinning, while Lucky Luke Lockhart, still smooth-faced and very boyish-looking, cried his wares.

He was selling soap, little cubes done up in fancy tissue-paper, for which he was claiming almost magical properties. He did not observe the giant standing just beyond the crowd.

"Here we are! Here we are!" he was crying. "Here's the magical article you've all been waiting for. I've got to sell another twenty cakes of this marvelous saponaceous article; and then I'll give you another free show of sleight of hand and magic that will make your eyes bug out. Who takes the first cake? Don't all rush on me at once."

The one who rushed on him was Handsome Harry, in a manner quite unexpected.

The giant gave a characteristic bellow, and with big strides gained the side of the boy faker and acrobat, and swung up as quickly to the top of the goods-box at the boy's side.

He did not stop to explain; but seized one of the little cakes of soap and flourished it aloft in one of his big paws.

"Hyar ye air! Hyar ye air!" he yelled. "The reel ginowine article frum ther Soapy Islands. Take a cake o' this home to yer mother, and have her wash yer face with it, an' she won't know ye. Rub it on yer bowie-knives, and people will steal 'em from ye, thinkin' they're silver. Polish up yer consciences with it, an' ye won't know yerselves. Rub a little of it on yer greasy ole clo'es and run 'em through the wash-tub, an' they'll come out silks and satins and striped calikers, and all ther purty colors o' ther rainbow. Apply it to yer dogs, and it will kill fleas; apply it to yer children and it'll— waal, mebbe it'll kill the children, ef they're too dirty. The only ginowine, soul-scurin', skin-scrubbin', dirt-eatin' grease-devourin' compound frum ther Soapy Islands. And I'm offerin' it at their reedic'ously low price of——" He turned to staring Luke Lockhart. "What's ther price of this hyar, anyhow? I'm offerin' at the reedic'ous price of—— Tell me quick what's ther price— ther reedic'ous low price I'm offerin' it fur?"

But Lucky Luke did not answer the question. His staring had been brief; he had recognized Handsome Harry instantly; as who would not? and he caught him by the hand as the hand was lowered, and began to shake the hand with a vigor that made Handsome Harry's blood warm.

"The old Serpent of Siskiyou!" he exclaimed. "In the name of wonder, where did you drop from; and how did you get here; and what are you——"

"Steady! Steady!" said the giant; "don't ask more questions at a time than yer kin think of. I'm hyar; and that's enough, whilst ther crowd lissens, ain't it? Ther question afore ther house is, how did you git hyar?"

The crowd, pleased, was howling. There were some Americans in it, and the American humor was excited by so strange a sight.

Most of them thought this was, no doubt, a part of Lucky Luke's performance—the sudden appearance of this wild man with the red beard, howling out in that way, and pretending to be a friend who had suddenly

found the faker there. The thing tickled them immensely.

"How did I get here?" said Lucky Luke, as the giant wrung at his hand. "I walked—across the Gulf of Mexico."

"Then yer didn't come in a flyin'-machine? Waal, I walked, too; but I had a ship's deck under me, and ther meaneest—but I'll tell ye about it later."

He turned from the delighted youth and looked out over the crowd.

Then again he held up a cake of soap.

"Who's got ther price, the reedic'lous price of ten cents, fer this face beautifyer hyar? It's wuth a dollar; but we're sellin' it this evenin' at the reedic'lous loy price of on'y ten cents. Our ship's goin' ter sail in ther mornin', and we've got ter git rid of as much of this stuff as we kin 'fore she sails, 'cause we don't want ter kerry it away with us; we'd ruther kerry the money. So we're lettin' it go so dead cheap thet a man kin better afford ter be clean than not clean. Who takes ther fust cake?"

Whether or not the crowd thought they had been given something like their money's worth by that exhibition of comical friendship on the goods-box cannot be known certainly; but the luck of Lucky Luke seemed to change right there; for, whereas he had been having hard work making the cakes of soap go even with the promise of a sleight-of-hand performance thrown in after a few had been sold, they now began to sell like chocolate-creams set before a group of hungry schoolgirls.

"This hyar is goin' ter be ther cleanest town in American territory," Handsome Harry roared as he began to pass out cakes of soap and gather in the nimble dimes. "This hyar Canal Zone will be so free of fleas and muskeeters and gnats and bugs various that it'll git plum notorious fer its health. Ther doctors will be ther only folks what will die, and they'll die of plum starvation. Ter-morrer mornin', ef every man what buys a cake of this cleaner will on'y use it acordin' ter directions, which is ter rub it on ther face hard and then apply water an' er towel, thar will be more people huntin' about fer lost relations than ye ever heerd tell of; beecause, ther changes of complexions will be so great that friend won't know friend, and ther wife won't know her husband and childern. Ef any of you fellers have committed any crime what you're shore ashamed of, and you think the off'cers air trailin' ye, rub this soap over yer delicate features, and you'll find that ther result will be jes' like puttin' on er mask. Now, who takes another cake? Ah, there ye air, sonny! But don't rub too hard when yer applies it, er thet apple-bloom complexion may rub off. And hyar's another man what's determined ter be clean and virtuous. An' hyar they come! Hyar they come! Buyin' of the on'y wonderful dirt-killer and microbe-extermiator thet ever was sent out frum ther Soapy Islands. Pure extract this is uv a soap-root compound dug in ther Soapy Islands by Injuns so clean thet their neighbors allows they're plum like white men. And who takes another cake?"

The good humor of Handsome Harry was infectious, and the dimes fairly rained in on him and the young acrobat.

When enough had been sold to justify a performance, the gaping people in the street were favored with some as clever sleight-of-hand work as any of them had ever seen.

Lucky Luke was a wizard in his way; and the tricks he

performed, the mysterious manner in which cards from a pack disappeared and appeared in strange places, the queer method he had of digging silver coins out of the hair and out of the ears of his auditors, and the yards of ribbon that he could reel out of his mouth, as if the whole inside of him was one big ribbon-spool, were really marvelous; and brought stares, and shouts of surprise and delight.

He wound up with a fire-trick he had used often; breathing smoke and fire from his mouth and nostrils, and starting flames that burned through his clothing and licked blue tongues of fire round his hands and arms, without ever so much as singeing a single hair of his person.

"I think we'll stop now," he said in an undertone to Handsome Harry. "I haven't sold all the soap—quite; but I want to have a talk with you."

"An' about Diamond Dick," said the giant, in a low tone; which, however, he found trouble in making low enough. "Thet individooal is hyar, or hyarabouts, some-eres, and mebbe you've tumbled to whar he is already."

"Diamond Dick!" said the boy acrobat. "Is that wonder here in the Canal Zone?"

"He shore war headed this erway last time I had track of him. I reckon he's hyar long 'fore this; and I'm tryin' to diskiver whar he's campin'."

"Diamond Dick!" repeated Lucky Luke, as if he could not believe it. "Well, if he is here we've got to find him. That takes me back, away back, to some of the best times I ever had in my life; just as I was taken back when you tumbled in here on me so singularly. Diamond Dick! I wonder if we can hit his trail?"

He was about to dismount from his goods-box, when a young negress who had been standing near sidled up, holding out a dime in her black fingers.

For a negress she was comely; but when she spoke there was something abhorrent in her appearance, for her teeth had been filed to sharp points, so that they resembled the teeth of saws.

But she smiled and looked pleadingly at Lucky Luke.

"Yon haf de charm to-night?" she said.

Lucky Luke glanced at Handsome Harry, and said by way of explanation:

"I sold some charins last night, and intended to sell some more to-night after I'd got through with the soap, but—"

He turned back to the negress.

"Well, yes," he said, "I reckon I can supply you. But it's a quarter, you know; charms come higher than soap."

He smiled.

"The charm—the goot charm—for de quarter," she said, assenting. "I must de charm have."

"Wow!" grunted Handsome Harry, not wholly pleased. "This is too much like stealin' candy frum childern. The soap was bad; and this is plum wuss."

He stood grinning, wagging his big head in disapproval.

Nevertheless, Lucky Luke drew out some small objects, and selected one. It resembled a mass of black wool tied with strings, and in the middle of it was a Mexican bean that rattled when he shook it.

"A quarter," he said, handing it down to the woman. "Sleep with that under your pillow, and whatever you want will come to pass."

She took it and gave him the quarter.

"Stealin' candy frum childern!" grumbled the giant.

Then he gave a start of astonishment, for on the bosom of the negress he saw a tiny dagger of gold set with a ruby. Diamond Dick had at times worn an ornament like that; and the conviction was almost forced on the giant that the ornament had been taken from Diamond Dick.

He stooped toward the woman.

"Wough-h!" he said. "Whar'd yer git thet thar gold dagger? It looks tarnal like one thet a friend o' mine—a special friend——"

She drew back, fright, almost terror in her eyes; and then she turned sharp about and began to make her way hastily through the crowd, which fell apart to let her pass.

Handsome Harry stood for a moment stupefied with bewilderment.

"Follow her," said Lucky Luke, who had also seen the gold ornament, "while I get these things together. That may mean something, and it may not; but it stands us to investigate it."

"Foller her? I guess yes!" growled the giant; and he began to plunge through the crowd in the direction taken by the woman.

she was; and was proving a capable one, in spite of her youth.

But Mallory had been away, somewhere in the surrounding swamps, for two whole days; and the talk Meg heard in his absence, and the mutterings she knew had been made against him, gave her much uneasiness.

Jepson was away, too; she did not know where he was, and she did not much care, so long as he left her alone. She had begun to fear and hate Jepson as she had never feared and hated any one.

While sitting thus behind the mosquito-screen, thinking of the possible danger her father might be in, a soft footstep was heard, and a dark face was pushed close up against the screen.

The noiseless advance and that black face appearing so suddenly gave her a start of fright.

Then she made out the form of a negro woman, standing close against the screen and looking through at her.

"What is it?" she said, rising, and trembling with undefined fear.

Then she recognized the black face.

"Oh, it's you, Ilma? You scared me almost to death."

She walked to a door in the screen, and, opening it, let in the black woman who had bought the charm of Lucky Luke a short time before, and who had apparently been given no more than time to reach this place.

Meg Mallory struck a match and lighted a lamp standing on a table in the piazza. It revealed the black face of the young negress and lit up her sloe-black eyes.

"You have come with news?" said Meg, feeling a deepening fear for the safety of her father.

"I come from de big swamp, yes," said the young negress. "And I go back dis night. See!"

She pulled from a fold of her dress the charm which she had purchased, and held it forth toward the young girl.

"Yes, I see! What is it?" Meg asked.

"It is de charm."

"Oh, a charm!" She knew something of the superstition of these negroes. "And what do you do with it?"

"I wear it in a bag round my neck, and sleep wid it under my head in de night."

"And then what?"

She took the singular object and looked it over.

"It bring de good luck; it drive away de spirits; it make me happy."

"It's worth a good deal, then, isn't it?" said the girl, looking at it with interest and then passing it back.

"Where did you get it?"

"From de Fire-maker I buy it, to-night."

"The Fire-maker? Oh, you mean the young fellow who has been giving exhibitions on the streets? I saw him last night. It's really wonderful, isn't it; the things he does?"

She looked at the charm, held now in the hands of the negress.

"He sold you that? But you don't really believe it will do the things you say?"

"Why not?" said the negress. "It is charm; de charm is great what you call—wonder-worker. It do all t'ings—make all people happy; it kill dem you not like, and bring to you dem what you want. But I know much bigger charm, what my fader make. You have sec my fader? He is de voodoo king. You know de voodoo?"

The young American girl shuddered; she had heard much, altogether too much, of the terrible voodoo cus-

CHAPTER III.

MEG MALLORY.

Meg Mallory was the pretty daughter of Superintendent Jack Mallory, who had charge of certain construction work on the big ditch which our Uncle Samuel is digging through the tropic lands of the Isthmus of Panama.

On the evening in question she was sitting behind the screening curtains of the piazza at her home in the Canal Zone, secure from mosquitoes and the other pestiferous flying things of the tropical nights, and thinking very hard on a subject that recently had given her much anxiety.

She was but a young girl, unaffected in her tastes, and this warm evening she was very simply and lightly clad.

The thing that troubled her concerned her father; for, though Jack Mallory was one of the best of the Panama engineers, he had recently made himself disliked by certain of the negroes who worked under him on the big ditch.

In addition, as Meg had become sure, Hank Jepson, his secretary and confidential clerk, had done a good deal recently to stir up this growing animosity.

It seemed unnatural that Jepson should do so; for he was supposed to be heart and soul with Mallory in the work which occupied Mallory's active mind night and day; yet the fact that Mallory had not looked with favor on the advances Jepson had lately made, or had tried to make, for the affections of Mallory's daughter Meg, might be enough. Meg shrewdly reasoned, to turn Jepson against the canal superintendent.

Meg Mallory had few women friends with whom she could advise; and even had there been many she would have hesitated to broach this subject to them. She was alone in the big house on the hill, except for some servants, with whom she could not talk in matters of confidence. She was herself Mallory's housekeeper, young as

toms and practises which had been brought into the Canal Zone by the superstitious negroes from Jamaica and other West Indian islands. They were the most superstitious and ignorant creatures she had ever encountered. She had almost forgotten that this girl, who had been in the Canal Zone long enough to speak very good English, was also a Jamaican negress; and, therefore, of course, fully as superstitious as any. Now it came to her that this must be so. She for a moment regarded the young negress almost with a look of fear and horror.

"Your father is the voodoo king?"

But already the negro girl seemed to be sorry she had said so much; and she began to hedge, denying now that she had meant all she said.

Yet a certain horror clung to the mind of the young American girl; until it was driven out by the next words of the negress.

"De Fire-maker talk of diamonds," said the negress. "I t'ink he know where diamonds are. What you t'ink? And de big man wid de red whiskers who was wid him? I see him not before; but he, too, talk of de diamond. Perhaps dey have 'em—de diamond; I should like to know. But not of dat did I come to tell you; but of your fader."

Meg Mallory was out of her chair when she heard that, and standing before the negress.

"What of my father?" she asked, with a gasp. "You have heard that he is in trouble?"

"He is in trouble; he send me to take you to him, in de swamp. It is in de swamp, but not far; and I take you quick. He is what you call sick, dying, I t'ink; and he want you to come."

The white girl clasped the hand of the black woman.

"Tell me more," she commanded. "Where is this—where he is? And can we get to him without delay? I'll get some one to go with us; Mr. Jepson isn't here, but I can get some of the workmen, or perhaps some of the soldiers, or police. Perhaps we shall need a strong force?"

The black eyes of the negress burned with a strange, hot fire when she heard the name of Jepson; and she clutched at her bosom, as if at some pain in her heart, or as if she had a knife hidden there in her dress and placed her hand on it. Something connected with the name of Jepson stirred her emotions strangely. But she said nothing which would draw the girl's attention to this.

"You go wid me alone," she said. "We no can go if we have men wid us. But I guide you; and it is safe."

Meg Mallory did not observe the strange fire flashing in the black eyes; nor notice the stealthy, treacherous eagerness in the woman's voice. If she had observed, she would have hesitated. But her thoughts were on her father, sick, dying, somewhere in the swamps.

"Is it far?" she asked.

"One hour," said the young negress, "and we be dere; not one hour even. It is not far."

"How did it happen? I hope he hasn't been drinking any of that swamp-water? Or is it fever?"

"It is de snake," said the negress.

"The snake."

"De snake it bite him."

She was toying with the charm she had bought of

Lucky Luke, fondling it as if by so doing she hoped to influence the will of Meg Mallory; but even that the excited young girl did not notice. Yet she did observe the action of the negress, when the latter arose and with great deliberation reached over and stroked the hair of the white girl with the woolly charm.

"What was that for?" said Meg, startled by the strange action.

"To give you de luck—so we may get dere quick, before you' fader die."

"I will hurry; you wait here just a minute and I'll be ready. But it does seem to me we ought to take some one with us. There's Jim Brandon; he would go. And if Mr. Jepson could be found——"

She stopped, astonished by the light that flamed again in the eyes of the young black woman.

"Pardon me! But do you know Mr. Jepson?" she asked.

"I——" The negress caught her breath. "No; I do not know him. Who is he?"

"Why, he is father's secretary."

The negress shook her head; but there was something terrifying in the shining of her eyes—it suggested a suppressed rage and a tigerish ferocity.

"No; I never see him what you call Mr. Jepson," she declared.

"Why; you act so strange!" said the girl.

"It is you' fader; I t'ink of you' fader maybe dying."

"I'll hurry," said Meg penitently. "I oughtn't to think of anything but father. I suppose I ought to take a little whisky, or something, for him, if he has been bitten by a snake; he will need a stimulant?"

The eyes of the black woman smiled again; and then flashed as before.

"Yes; a little whisk," she said; "it ver' good for bite of de snake."

Meg hurried off, and the woman sat down to wait for her, crooning now and then to the charm as if it were a child, and now and then walking about the piazza with a tread like that of a tigress. She seemed to be listening.

At length she heard feet, and then voices.

She ran to the door behind which the girl had disappeared.

"I not wait longer," she said. "You come!"

The girl appeared, a cloak round her shoulders; then she and the black woman dropped from the piazza into the darkness of the little garden, and hastened away.

CHAPTER IV.

TREACHERY.

If pretty Meg Mallory could but have guessed the thoughts running riot in the half-savage breast of that

young Jamaican negress she would not have gone a yard from the house with her. Even as it was she had hesitated, because of the peculiar conditions imposed; and after setting forth she was more than once on the point of halting and demanding that a small company of men should be summoned.

But thoughts of her father, struck down by the fangs of some jungle serpent, and perhaps dying, calling for her, hastened her feet and made her fear to waste any of the precious time that was left.

Her desire to demand an escort was strongest as they passed out of the garden; for then she distinctly heard the footsteps of men, who seemed to be coming round the end of the garden wall; and for a moment there the negress stopped, also listening. What they heard made no particular impress on the mind of Meg Mallory, though it caused the negress to clutch her by the hand and drag her on in stealthy silence.

This was what Meg heard:

"Wough-h! S-s-s! By all ther biangular sarpints, ther dark hyar is so thick thet I kin cut it with my bowie, and this hyar ground is plum humpier than the back of a toad."

The negress pulled the girl on and beyond sound of that grumbling voice; and soon turned with her toward the lowland, beyond which lay the nearest of the swamps.

Now and then when Meg stumbled the negress supported her with her strong hands.

By and by they stopped; and the negress stood for a while quite silent and motionless, evidently listening.

"You hear something?" said the white girl, shivering.

"No."

The negress turned on the white girl.

"You spik of—Jepson?" she said. "You know where Jepson is?"

"You do know him; and you said you didn't!"

"You know where he is?"

"No, I don't; but he's been gone almost as long as father has; and that's strange; for when father is away it's Mr. Jepson's business to stay at home and see to the work and the men. There is an awful lot of work to do, and they must keep it moving."

"You like Jepson?"

She came closer to Meg Mallory; and now the white girl saw the eyes of the negress staring down into hers through the darkness; those eyes seemed almost to shoot rays of fire, and a strange fear and trembling seized the girl.

"Ah-h!" It sounded like the snarl or growl of some wild beast. "You want marry Jepson?"

"No, I don't; and I don't know why you think so, or why you should say so."

"Jepson he want marry you! Ah-h-h! I know. I

been watch; I see t'ing. Jepson he want marry you. Ha-ha! I know he like marry you."

Meg Mallory had been given too much evidence of that herself to deny it very emphatically.

"What is it to you if he does?" she demanded. "We are losing precious time here."

"Ah-h-h! I keel him—I keel Jepson!"

The fright which had been growing upon the girl increased.

"Please take me back," she begged; "I don't think I want to go any farther."

The negress looked at her—stared at her through the gloom.

"Why you say dat?"

"I—I am; oh, I am afraid to go any farder! Please take me back."

"You' fader; he bit by de snake."

"Are you sure—oh! are you sure you are telling me the truth; that you have been telling me the truth from the start?"

"You want see you' fader?"

"Yes, if—that is if I was sure——"

"Girl," shouted the negress, "you come go wid me, and make not de talk; you go wid me!"

She clutched her by the arm, a clutch of such fierce intensity that the girl screamed with pain. And then she began literally to drag Meg Mallory through the miry edge of the swamp, and through the clutching and scratching vines that loaded all the trees.

This so frightened Meg that she was not sure afterward but that she fainted. She knew she was dragged on, jerked along, lashed with words that stung and scared her, and hurried blindly in a direction she could not be sure of, and she did not know whether she was going straight or in circles.

CHAPTER V.

VAROLA, THE VOODOO KING.

A gleam of fires striking through the gloom of the tropical, swampy forest gave to Meg Mallory some sense of reassurance, after she had been dragged on, choking and blinded by the lashing undergrowth, for what seemed an interminable period.

Once she had tried to break away, even though the terrifying darkness surrounded her and she knew not whither to go; but Ilma, the self-confessed daughter of the fierce voodoo king, clutched her wrist with such tenacity, and became so threatening in her words and manner, that the terrified white girl failed utterly of her purpose.

All the while, in spite of her terrorizing methods, the negro woman continued to declare that her intentions

were of the best, and that she was only anxious to hurry Meg Mallory to her father.

Hence, when those lights flashed through the night, Meg Mallory hailed them somewhat as the wrecked and lost sailor hails the beacon which denotes a haven.

"It is de camp," said Ilma, still clutching the girl's aching wrist. "You' fader! Soon we shall be dere."

Her father! It stirred Meg Mallory to renewed exertions; almost she was ready to forgive this fierce black woman for her cruelty.

When they came within the circle of the lights Meg saw a row of palm-thatched huts of the most primitive sort, such as she knew sheltered often the low and ignorant classes of the native and Jamaican negroes.

The fierce black woman gave a strange, wild cry, like the call of an animal, as she stopped on the edge of the little clearing in the midst of palms and scrub.

The effect was instantaneous. Negroes appeared in view, boiling out of the palm-thatched huts. It was much as if some genii had suddenly touched the place into squirming life.

Foremost among those who thus appeared was a wild-looking man who, in spite of his startling aspect, Meg Mallory guessed must be the father of the girl she called Ilma.

This man was tattered as to clothing, and generally unkempt; but his most distinguishing mark, in addition to his fierce eyes, was that his hair, or, rather, his wool, was twisted into little tufts that stood up round his head in queer array, each tuft tricked out, or tied, with a string. And as the strings were of many colors, the effect was novel and rather frightful.

Seeing him, the negress started forward, dragging the white girl by the hand; for sight of him, and the other fierce figures about him, had filled the girl with a shrinking fear which caused her to draw back as if she would fly from the place.

"You come, girl!" said Ilma commandingly. "You' fader here; you come now!"

Then in the midst of the staring and curious negroes—and they were a scarecrow kind of crowd in their torn garments and with their black faces and shining eyes—appeared suddenly a white man, at whom Meg Mallory stared with wonder and surprise.

The man was Hank Jepson, her father's secretary.

The sight of him there, even though she feared and disliked him, seemed for the moment proof that Ilma had spoken truly, and that her father must be in one of the huts suffering, perhaps dying.

She ceased to pull back, and went on willingly, even eagerly, though her heart thumped unpleasantly, and she still had a foreboding she could not wholly banish.

"Ah, now you see you' fader," lied the black woman, pleased at this cessation of resistance. "You come on an' you see you' fader."

Not until the white girl and the negress were well within the light of the fires did Hank Jepson appear to know the meaning of the excitement which had roused him from sleep in one of the huts.

Then he looked startled, and stared hard at the girl and the woman, a puzzled expression breaking over his face; which was followed by a smile.

"Ah!" he said. "Meg Mallory! But I'd like to know what it means?"

The negress did not seem pleased by the discovery that Hank Jepson was there; yet she concealed this as well as she could, dissembling, and walked on until she stood before her father and the others.

"De man who is sick," she said; "where is he?"

The old voodoo king stared; for he did not understand this play made by the black girl to impress her sincerity on Meg Mallory.

"Eh?" he said. "I not know what you say."

"But her fader—he is here, wid de snake-bite; and dying. So I was told in Panama."

The old voodoo man eyed her uncertainly; then a change came over his dark face. He saw that his daughter was dissembling; and an inkling of her purpose came to him, causing that swift change in his hideous features.

"It is mistake," he said; "it was de lie what you hear in Panama. He haf never been here. No."

Hank Jepson, swayed by uncertainty and hesitation, stepped forth now, smiling.

"This is—er—startling to see you here!" he said to the white girl. "Some mistake has been made."

Meg Mallory looked about, frightened; she feared, she did not know what; but she knew she was afraid of this man most of all. Something sinister was in his manner and in his smiling eyes.

"Some falsehood has been told Ilma in the city," he explained, "making her believe your father was here and needed you; but you ought to be thankful he is not here, and in peril, or sick."

"But why are you here?" said Meg Mallory, regarding him unsteadily.

"Me? Ah! I was lost in the swamps, and by a mere chance found this spot. I took shelter here, and to-morrow one of the men has promised to guide me back again. You know why your father came out into the swamps?"

"To look for certain kinds of timber for the canal works," she said.

"And I was to meet him; but I missed my way, and got lost."

"Then father is in the swamps?"

"I don't know where he is. But you can calm yourself, and rest assured of safety. These people are better than they look. And to-morrow you can return to the city with me, when the guide I am promised takes me in."

But she did not seem assured; she could not get over her fear of this man.

Hank Jepson, glancing from her face to that of the black girl, saw something, as he talked, which she did not; but which, if she had seen it, would have appalled her. The face of the negress was working strangely, and her eyes had the glaring fury of some wild beast.

Jepson knew, what Meg Mallory did not, that this black woman was at the moment insanely jealous of the white girl; so jealous that she would have delighted to rend Meg limb from limb. The sight of that working face did not fill Jepson with any great sense of security; but he had a game to play, and he tried to play it, in spite of those forbidding looks.

He had deceived Ilma, making her believe that he loved her, or that at least he cared for her. She had begun to guess that he had lied. She had suspected his falsehood for some time; and had known likewise of the regard he held for this white girl. And it was jealousy, of the cruel and vindictive sort, which had caused her to lure Meg Mallory to the haunts of the voodoo king; just as love of this white man had a short time before caused her to guide him to that spot, when he believed that the bloodhounds of the law were trailing him.

For he it known that this white man, passing in Panama under an assumed name, was a criminal from justice in the States, and had fled for safety to the Canal Zone, where he had under an alias secured a good position—that of secretary to the superintendent of the canal work in that district, Jack Mallory.

He had lately discovered that the wolves of the law, led by no less a personage than Diamond Dick, were close upon him; and it was then that he had slipped away from Panama, guided to this haven by Ilma.

But Ilma, he knew, thought he was on this night in another camp, where he had been when last he had seen her; which accounted for the surprise she had shown when she saw him here.

What to do was the thing that oppressed and puzzled Jepson just at the moment. He wanted to stand well in the estimation of Meg Mallory; and he feared to stand ill in the estimation of the black tigress who was glaring at him.

"Perhaps Ilma and her father will be pleased to give you shelter in one of the huts," he suggested, looking at Ilma. "A search can be made by some of these people for your father. And to-morrow, if he is not found, you can go back to Panama when I do."

He was aware that Ilma would recognize as a lie the statement that he expected to return to Panama. She knew he had no such intention; that he would have feared to go there, or near the place; and he was crediting her with discernment enough to see that he was lying to the white girl.

"Yes," she said, and the tone relieved him; "she stay in de hut to-night."

And then the look that crossed her face, causing him to know that Ilma contemplated something terrible for this white girl, made even Hank Jepson shudder.

"I will stay," said Meg Mallory, still bewildered and terrified.

She saw it was the only thing she could do.

CHAPTER VI.

DIAMOND DICK.

A more miserable and terrifying night Meg Mallory never spent than that which she passed in the wretched hut to which she was finally conducted. A feeling that she had been deceived, and was still being deceived, troubled her so that she could not rest. Not once did she close her eyes in sleep. Constantly she thought of her father, wondering where he was and what had befallen him, sure that some awful peril threatened his life.

Hank Jepson came to her once, as if he thought to comfort her; but he did not tarry. A glance from the black eyes of the negro woman, cast at him as she skulked past the hut, was enough to cause him to depart from it in haste.

After that Ilma herself came in, with more lying words; but Meg Mallory's suspicions had been aroused against this black woman, and what Ilma said gave her no reassurance.

When morning came Meg Mallory found that, with the exception of Ilma and the old voodoo king, she was alone in the negro camp in the edge of the great swamp. What had become of Jepson and the negroes she did not know; they had vanished as silently as phantoms, so that it was hard for her to believe, as she looked round, that they had ever been there.

Ilma appeared almost as soon as the black woman knew that Meg was awake and stirring.

"You sleep well?" she asked, eying the white girl in a way to make her shiver. "It is good, if you sleep well. It better if you be fat—very fat. My fader he like dem very fat."

"What do you mean by that, Ilma?" asked the terrified girl.

Ilma laughed, a short, hard cough that had a strange sound.

"I not tink what I say," she urged. "But I hope you sleep very well."

"I didn't sleep at all. And where are the others; and Mr. Jepson? I was to go with Mr. Jepson back to the city to-day."

"You want to go wid dat Jepson man?" asked the negress, her eyes shining in the manner Meg had noticed before, and which had made her shrink.

"No; I don't want to go with him. I'm afraid of him. But what am I to do?"

"You like heem—Mr. Jepson?"

"I hate him! Oh, what am I saying? I have no right to say that. I don't know that Mr. Jepson isn't all that he claims to be; but——"

"But what is it?" asked the negress craftily. "You make de lie, eh?"

"Lie? No; why should I lie?"

"Because you do like heem. I know it." She bent toward her. "And for dat—ah! for dat, you will be——"

She checked herself; but her eyes were blazing with fury. Meg Mallory drew away from her, scared and shivering.

"What do you mean, Ilma?" she cried.

"Ah, I mean' not'ing; I mean' not'ing at all! You will go back to Panama quick; you see."

She glided out of the hut, her stealthy movements strangely suggestive of a serpent, leaving the white girl terrified beyond measure.

Meg Mallory went to the door of the flimsy, palm-thatched shack and looked about. She wondered what she ought to do; a sense that her peril there was very great kept growing on her. She wanted to scream aloud. And she wanted to dash away from the place, even though it lost her in the gloomy depths of the swamp; dash away, and run and run until she fell exhausted, if only that would take her away from this horrible black woman and her equally horrible father. It seemed strange to her now that she could ever have thought Ilma attractive or interesting in any way. Ilma had come to represent everything that was odious and terrifying. She began to suspect that Ilma was spurred by jealousy; though it seemed so strange to her that this black woman should hold jealousy against her.

Meg Mallory did not see Ilma as she looked round; but she beheld the old voodoo man walking toward her.

Out by one of the palm huts a fire burned in an open space, and on it was a bubbling pot that sent up clouds of steam. Apparently the old voodooist was preparing breakfast. Perhaps, Meg thought, he was coming to ask her if she desired something to eat. She knew she could eat nothing; certainly she could not have eaten a mouthful of any food he prepared!

The horrible figure of the voodoo king drew near, and she saw a queer, eager smile on his hideous face. He presented a frightful picture, with his twisted wool sticking out round his head, a nest of colored strings and cord. She thought she had never beheld anything more frightful; and she wanted to scream, or run, or hide away from him. But she stood still, waiting to hear what he would say, or see what he would do.

He came up and addressed her respectfully, speaking English in a manner she could easily understand, though it had a strange inflection not reproducible in print.

"You eat somet'ing?" he said, grinning and showing the serrated lines of his sawlike teeth; for his teeth were also filed to sharp points, like those of his daughter. It was a hideous African custom, and made him seem more like a wild beast than a man.

"No," said the girl, shaking her head in dissent. "I don't think I could eat anything."

But he caught her by the hand and pulled her out of the door of the hut.

"I want you look in de pot," he said. "I have somet'ing very nice in de pot. You see."

She did not want to anger him—she feared him greatly; so she did not resist when he asked this. She felt that it was better to humor him than to oppose him. And she wondered anxiously where Ilma had gone; and what had become of Jepson, and the black men seen by her in the night. The silence of the place was appalling. Nothing sounded but the guttural grunts of the old voodoo king and the snapping of the fire under the pot.

"You see somet'ing in de pot," said the voodooist, whom she had previously known by the name of Varola.

She tried to recall all she had heard of this terrible black man. She knew her father had had some trouble with him. Varola had been a leader of influence among the superstitious Jamaican negroes who worked on the great canal. And there had been trouble. As she remembered it, dimly, her father had objected to certain voodoo practises which Varola carried on; they were disorganizing and provocative of trouble. On certain "unlucky" days the Jamaican negroes would not work; but repaired to secret places with Varola and went through strange performances and incantations. Altogether, he had been a demoralizing influence. And then he had been discharged and ordered to leave the district, and had been threatened with deportation from the Canal Zone.

The girl thought of all this as she walked toward the bubbling pot with the voodooist. She felt sure that Varola hated her father—had a deep grudge against him; and that he was out here in the swamp because he had feared the deportation which her father had threatened. It seemed equally apparent that the black men seen here with Varola had been brought by him there. And she wondered if all of them, or most of them, were not criminal negroes, hiding out in the swamps with this old voodooist.

Almost before she knew it she was standing by the fire, and Varola was bidding her look into the pot.

And then she heard him saying words which frightened her; he was saying over something that sounded strangely like the wild prayer of a savage.

"Look in de pot!" he commanded, when she hesitated.

Varola caught her again by the wrist, and held her, or she would have turned about and fled.

"Lissen!" he said, hissing the word through his sawlike teeth. "I am what you call it—de voodoo king! I

make de magic. De spirits be pleased; dey do all t'ings Varola ask. It is de sacrifice. You also be de sacrifice. Ilma bring you to me, for make de sacrifice."

For an instant Meg Mallory's senses seemed deserting her. Not until that moment had she understood; and it cannot be said that she fully understood even then. But she knew in a measure what this hideous voodooist meant; and swarming in on her memory came the strange tales she had heard, of the magic, the incantations, the superstitions, the fetishes, of the half-wild Jamaican negroes who worked on the canal.

It was told of them that they indulged in human sacrifices, a thing she had hardly believed; that they stole children away, even babies from the arms of their mothers, and that in the depths of the forests and in the shadows of the swamps they performed their orgies, after sacrificing these children; and that cannibalism was not the least of their wickedness.

She drew back screaming with horror; for she recognized that the terrible voodoo man meant to slay her there; that Ilma had brought her there for that purpose.

The discovery made a madwoman of her; and she fought like an aroused tigress.

Varola laughed at her impotent rage; and when she drew back from the fire he caught her again, and dragged her up to it screaming. He had drawn a knife, and as he clutched and held her now, using for the purpose his strong left hand, with his right hand he made a dash at her wrist with the knife. His purpose was plain.

But suddenly there was an interruption, as the girl fought and screamed.

A man appeared, running, in the midst of the palms. He was lithe-looking, athletic, indeed, as a deer as he dashed out into view. His yellow hair, worn long on his shoulders, floated out in the breeze. His hand was lifted.

The reader needs hardly to be told that this man, so splendid in appearance, so strong and purposeful, so fearless in his bearing, was Diamond Dick.

"Hold!" yelled Diamond Dick, dashing out from the palms with the intention of preventing the voodoo king from carrying out his evil design of adding drops of blood to the magic witch's broth.

The interruption was like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky.

The voodoo king had thought no one was near who would, or could, prevent him from doing the thing he so intensely desired to do. The white man, Jepson, had been sent away, lest he try to interfere. With Jepson had gone some of the negroes; though the voodooist had no fear that they would try to stop him, for they were as superstitious as he was himself. Nor did he fear interference from his daughter; she had brought the white girl there for this sacrifice, and rejoiced in the thought of it.

Not alone was it a desire to be revenged on Jack Mallory which moved him. That was something; but it was really a minor thing. He had practised human sacrifices in the interior of the black belt of Jamaica, and he was the lineal descendant of voodooists who had carried on their horrid rites in the distant and dark forests of the Congo. He was now in danger—hiding in the swamps lest the bloodhounds of the law of the Canal Zone should get him; he wanted the help of the spirits; and the way to get that assistance, his religion told him, was to offer human sacrifices.

The interruption which came so suddenly frightened him; not only because he feared the white man who jumped out at him, but the interruption of the sacrifice was likely, he thought, to anger the spirits; and he dreaded this more than anything else.

Seeing the white man draw and level a revolver, he abandoned his attempt, and with a scream of mingled rage and fear darted into the midst of the near-by palms.

In another minute, with his yell still sounding in the ears of the almost swooning white girl, he was gone like some dreadful phantom of the swamps.

She was dimly conscious, as she tried to keep from fainting, that the white man who had dashed out to her aid had caught her and prevented her from falling.

Then she heard his voice:

"You are all right; and, thank Heaven, unhurt! But it was a close call. I had got near enough to help you only a minute before. Yet I scared the black villain within an inch of his life; and by the way he ran, I rather think he will keep going for some time; it would trouble him to stop, he went so fast."

Meg Mallory came back to full consciousness. She had not fainted; but she had come so near to it that the momentary result had been almost the same.

She looked into the face of her rescuer, as he supported her while she swayed on her feet.

"Yes," she said, hardly recognizing the sound of her own voice; "you were just in time."

She shuddered.

"It was—terrible!" she added.

Diamond Dick had been glancing round; and he observed a rustling in the midst of the palms some distance off.

"I think it will be healthy for us if we make ourselves scarce here," he urged. "You can walk, I think, if I assist you. My opinion is, that some of that black rascal's followers are not far off; and we'd better get back from this exposed point as quickly as we can."

"Yes," she said, still dizzy and faint, "I can walk. We must—get away from here. I—I thank you; I don't know you, but you risked your life for me, a stranger; and I can't find words in which to thank you."

Then she shuddered again, recalling what she had been through and what she had escaped.

CHAPTER VII.

THE NEST IN THE SWAMP.

"By all ther biangular, diangular, triangular crawlin' sarpints, this hyar is ther wust nest I ever poked my ole head inter!" Handsome Harry grumbled as he scratched his way through a lot of trailing vines and thorny bushes. "I've been in mesquit so thick thet you'd shore think it a muskrat's nest, but 'twarn't as bad as this. I swars straight off on ther tropics fer travelin' purposes."

"What have you hit?" inquired the voice of Lucky Luke Lockhart, who was following the giant as they broke a path through the jungle.

A bending bough swung back and struck Handsome Harry in the face.

"Wough-h! I hain't hit nuthin; things is hittin' me. Thet thing made a mush plaster of my han'some features, I knows."

This was followed by a floundering leap; and the next moment he went pawing and falling through space, to bring up some yards lower down in a nest of rocks that were overgrown with vines and creepers; a regular bed of tropical tangle and flowers, but hard, nevertheless, because of the enclosing rocks.

Another grumbling note broke from the giant.

"Scatched two yards o' skin off o' me thet time," he grunted. "Ef this hyar jabbin' an' tearin' keeps on I'll soon lose so much hide and be so full of ragged holes that I can't travel whatever unless I'm tied together with strings. And what I've lit in, I dunno; though 't looks like a bird's nest half as big as a house, with rocks growin' all round it."

The plucky boy who was following him climbed to the spot from whence the giant had tumbled and looked down into the nest, where Handsome Harry lay sprawled out and feeling too sore and bruised to move.

"We ain't gittin' nowhar; an' ef thet nigger 'oman come this way, as them tracks back thar showed, she must be dead by this time, and thet gal thet was with her. A path like this hyar would w'ar out an elephant."

"They were not elephants," Lucky Luke reminded cheerfully. "Remember that they passed over ground, as we saw, which we couldn't pass over ourselves, but had to go round. An elephant would have a hard time getting through this mire. Some of these places would trouble a serpent to squirm through them."

"They troubles ther ole Sarpint a-plenty," said the giant, with grim humor.

He was getting heavily to his feet, when Lucky Luke heard a sound that startled him and caused him to hiss a low warning.

"Some one is coming!" he warned.

Whereupon he slid from the top of the rock where he was sitting, and in a manner much more gentle than that used by the giant gained the spot where the latter lay.

"Wough-h! I hears 'em," said Handsome Harry. "More'n one comin'; thar's two pa'rs o' feet goin' pitty-patty through the bushes, er I misses my guess. Mebbe they're ther two women we've been follerin'."

He crawled gingerly out of the hole and up the slope on the side toward the sounds, and Lucky Luke crept up with him, for the purpose of spying out the land in that direction.

The next moment Handsome Harry was on his feet, standing up his full length, and was swinging his hat round his head, while his lips opened as if he meant to yell out his wild delight.

"Cautious!" warned the boy.

"Wough-h-h! How kin I be? Seems ter me I gotter let her go! Do you see who it is? Diamond Dick, by all the yowlin' catamounts! And wouldn't thet s'prise ye? And a gal runnin' with him lickety split, like's ef all ther dogs of the swamps war chasin' 'em."

"Likely some devils of the swamps are chasing them," said Lucky Luke, as surprised as Handsome Harry to discover Diamond Dick out there in the jungle, in spite of the fact that sight of the diamond pin on the bosom of the negro woman was the thing which had caused them to trail her and so had brought them to this point.

Handsome Harry climbed higher, until he roosted on the rim of the nest in the rocks. And he swung his hat again.

"Wough-h-h!" he said, as loud as he dared, for the purpose of drawing Diamond Dick's attention. "Hyar we air—me and Lucky Luke Lockhart; and can't ye see us? Settin' hyar on this pinnacle, grinnin' with bu'stin' joy, and wantin' to yell so bad thet we kin taste it. Wough-h! Diamon' Dick! This way; hyar we air!"

Diamond Dick shifted his course with the girl, and came straight toward them. He saw that familiar figure on the rim of the rocks; and though it was as strange as any fantastic dream, to behold the old Sarpint there, when he was supposed to be in a distant part of the world, Diamond Dick did not make the mistake of fancying that his eyes deceived him.

"Friends and help at hand," he said encouragingly to the girl.

Behind him he had heard bushes rattling, as the followers of the voodoo king, those who had been near enough, pursued, with the old sorcerer at their head. They had been like a pack of wolves, noiseless, yet hovering close behind, as if they felt sure they could soon close round this white man and girl and have them at their mercy.

Diamond Dick had drawn his revolver at intervals and turned to send a shot at them; but every time he did so not a form could he see, though he could hear those suggestive sliding feet, and knew that the black bloodhounds were right behind him, though keeping out of sight.

And thus he had run on and on with the girl, determined to save her from the awful fate which had threatened her; and now he beheld that familiar figure, and shaped his course and hers toward it.

"Friends are near," he said; "it is strange, for the days of miracles are past; yet we are near friends, of the kind who will stand by us to the end."

The girl trembled, and was so breathless she could not answer; but she clung to the strong hand of Diamond Dick and kept close at his side, running as she had never run before, the goading thought of those hovering blacks being the spur that sent her on and sustained her failing strength.

"Right up hyar," cried Handsome Harry, scrambling over the rim and getting down on the other side where he could reach forth a helping-hand. "Wough-h! Never war eyes gladder'n mine air at this hyar minute to rest on ye. Right up hyar! Whatever's chasin' ye, whether it's Injuns, er outlaws, er whatever, hyar we air, ter back yer ter ther finish. And Lucky Luke's wi' me, mind ye; an' a braver boy ye don't often run acrost."

Diamond Dick reached the foot of the rocks, and pushed the trembling girl up ahead of him, until Handsome Harry could get hold of her hand.

"The old Sarpint of Siskiyou!" he said, as if he could hardly believe it.

"Wough-h! Ther same. Ther ole Sarpint o' Siskiyou, wi' seventeen rattles and a button. And wi' ther scales scraped off his back and holes jabbed in him without number; but still with his pizen fangs in good workin' order; and happier'n a sand-lizard settin' in the desert sun, jes' ter see ye. Up ye come, Miss; and you're thet welcome that I don't know how ter express it; you're welcome as the flowers in May."

He swung her up by main strength, and passed her onto Lucky Luke, just behind him; and then he extended his hand down to his old pard, Diamond Dick.

"Wough-h! And up yer comes, too. Up yer comes, smilin'! Jes' hang on, like er dog ter a root, and I lands yer over in this holler same's ef yer was flyin'."

Diamond Dick came up the vine-elad slope, and over the rim of rocks, assisted by Handsome Harry; and then the two men dropped softly down into the rocky nest whither the boy had conducted the girl.

Diamond Dick wanted to ask a dozen questions at once; but he was well blown by his sharp run; and, besides, he wished to know first where his pursuers were and what they were doing.

"It seems a miracle to see you and Lucky Luke here,"

he declared to them; "but climb to the top again, won't you, and see who is coming?"

Lucky Luke obeyed, climbing up with the agility of a monkey.

By profession Lucky Luke was originally an acrobat as well as a conjuror, and such climbing as that was as nothing to him; he had not forgotten his earlier skill, even if he did only at intervals practise his old calling now.

When he had poised himself in the midst of the creepers at the top, he looked off through the thickety growths.

"I don't hear anything," he said.

"We were chased by a lot of wild-looking blacks; and they're out there," said Diamond Dick. "Keep your eyes peeled for a minute; I'll be with you soon."

He turned to the girl. Lucky Luke had made a pillow for her with his coat, and she was leaning back against the rocks, pale and breathless. Her strength was nearly spent.

"I think we are perfectly safe now," said Diamond Dick, to reassure her.

"Yes, I hope so," she said, breathing heavily; "I sincerely hope so."

"By all ther diangular——"

"Yes, there's a good deal to explain," said Diamond Dick, cutting into the giant's exclamation; "and it strikes me that the first thing demanding explanation is why and how I happen to see you here. The thing is simply unbelievable."

Handsome Harry laughed in his characteristic way.

"It shore air," he admitted; "sometimes, when I shet my eyes, I can't believe it myself. But hyar I am: shanghaied down hyar in a manner thet I'll take delight in tellin' ye all about at a more convenient season, as ther sayin' is. Ther last thing thet led me hyar—thet is, inter this swamp—war yer diamond breast-pin shinin' on ther bosom of a coal-black nigger wench. Seemed ter me thet needed explanations; and me and Lucky Luke hit her trail straight off, and it led us hyar. We sorter gethered the fearsome idee thet mebbe she er some pal of hers had murdered ye and swiped yer jewelry."

Diamond Dick looked at the giant earnestly.

"Yes," he said, after a moment of thought, "that pin was stolen from me in Panama. I must aaccount it a lucky thing if it brought you here."

"Waal, thet's what brung us. But afore thet, I already knowed thet you war down hyar in this pesky region somewhar; and I war lookin' round fer yer, when I chanced ter run acrost Lucky Luke, doin' his old trick of gittin' good money fer nothin'. And then we saw the diamond; and hit hard ther trail of the nigger thet war w'arin' it. But, reely, I'd bergun ter calc'late we warn't ever goin' ter find anything about you in this wilderness. Did yer ever see sich a place?"

"I don't think I ever did."

"Thar's enough vines and purty flowers growin' wild and in ther way hyar, thet ef I could have 'em in New York and sell 'em fer a cent apiece, I reckon I could give p'int on riches ter ther Standard Oil Company. I allow I've tripped over a million of 'em, more er less, and one of 'em flung me sprawlin' inter this hole and nigh about made a finish of me. But what was yer hikin' it so hard fer?"

"Anything doing up there, Luke?" Diamond Dick asked before answering this question.

"Not a thing," the boy lookout reported. "It's so peaceful out there I can't make myself believe any one is around at all. Even the birds have commenced to twitter and squawk again; and that's a sign they don't see anything alarming."

"Did yer ever hear sech jawin' of parrots and monkeys as there air in this jungle?" said Handsome Harry. "Shet yer eyes at times and you'd think yer war in er monkey-and-parrot house."

Diamond Dick flung another cautionary word to Lucky Luke.

Then he began to explain, for the benefit of Handsome Harry and the boy:

"I'll hear your story later, Harry. And just now all I need to say is, that I set out to bring to justice a scoundrel who fled from California, where he murdered a government officer in cold blood; he came to Panama, where he has been going under an assumed name. His real name is Herman Long; but in Panama he has passed as Hank Jepson; and he was clever enough to secure a place under Jack Mallory, as secretary. Mallory is a square, fair man; lately he suspected this scoundrel, and——"

A gasping exclamation from Meg Mallory attracted his attention.

"My father! And Mr. Jepson!"

Diamond Dick and Handsome Harry both looked at her.

"Yes; what is it?" was Diamond Dick's inquiry.

"Why, Mr. Jepson is the man who is, or was, with those negroes; and my father is Jack Mallory! But [——]"

She hesitated; and Diamond Dick began to question her.

Then they had her story, as it is known to the reader.

"It is pretty clear now," said Diamond Dick, when he had heard her recital, "that this black woman, Ilma, wanted to get you out of the way, because she had learned that Jepson, as he is known here, had been trying to make love to you, and she is in love with the scoundrel herself. In addition to that, from what I saw, and what you remember all too well, I am of the opinion that she was entirely willing to furnish you, or any other white girl or child, to her superstitious old voodoo father, to be sacrificed by him in his horrid fashion; for she is, of

course, as superstitious as he, and believes that such a sacrifice would bring him wonderful luck."

Handsome Harry had sat with staring eyes throughout the telling of Mallory's story.

"Wough-h!" he grumbled at last. "Wuss'n Apaches! This hyar turns me shore agin' niggers. What they got sech shoats workin' fer the government fer down hyar, anyway?"

"The difficulty of getting other kinds of laborers," explained the girl. "The government must have laborers, and it takes what it can get."

"Wough-h! It's payin' too much fer ther ole canal," grumbled the giant. "Ther sacrificin' of one person, even, is too much. Seems ter me ther government ought ter clean out ther hull b'ilin' of 'em."

"We'll be likely to clean out a few of them," commented Diamond Dick grimly, "if they stick to my trail and follow us here; there will be some hot fighting, is my guess."

"I think they're more likely to be a cowardly lot," Lucky Luke remarked from his perch, where he had heard this. "That was the opinion I got of them in Panama. But they are superstitious, all right. If I'd been willing to do it, I could have raked in a lot of money selling all sorts of charms and fetishes to them."

"Yer did!" Handsome Harry grunted. He had not been pleased by what he had seen.

"There you're mistaken; I sold only a few little things, at no more than a quarter apiece, because they wanted something of the kind, and I thought it would increase their opinion of me and of my conjuring performances; but I didn't go into the thing big, as I might have done."

"The government would have been after you, I suspect, if you had," said Diamond Dick, with an easy laugh.

He was somewhat rested now; and he saw that the girl's face was regaining its color, and she did not seem so badly frightened. The brief respite and the confidence produced by knowing she was in charge of brave white men were having a good effect.

A chirrup from Lucky Luke drew attention.

"The bushes are bobbing round out there," he said, "and my guess is there's a nigger behind one of 'em, at least; shall I wake him up with my revolver?"

Diamond Dick advised against it.

"Let them show themselves, and we can see, maybe, what they're planning."

"They'll try ter snake us outer this, I don't doubt," was the surmise of the giant. "Makes me think of Injun-fightin'. About how many hunderd chased ye?"

"Not even one hundred; but a dozen or more, I thought, led by the old voodoo king himself."

"There are more of them," said the girl. "There were more than that many last night; and from something I heard I think there's another camp near here. And, besides, you know that Jepson is with them; and a white

man, if he's the kind you say Jepson is, would be worth more than any one of them in a fight. He'd likely be desperate."

"But he'd prob'ly be makin' tracks away from whar he knowed Diamond Dick ter be, ruther than comin' toward him," averred the giant.

"I'm not so sure of that," said Diamond Dick. "He might think that if he could wipe me out here he'd be rid of me, and safe hereafter."

He was climbing up beside Lucky Luke.

When he gained the rim of the rocky nest he lay quiet at the side of the boy acrobat, and they looked off through the brushy cover round them, and at the point which Lucky Luke indicated as the one where he had seen some palms moving.

Diamond Dick drew his revolver to have it ready; but he did not send a shot in that direction.

Then he saw in another quarter some tall vines sway and shake.

They were in the top of a bushy tree; but it was a safe guess that the man whose touch on the tree had caused them to sway and quiver was not in the tree, but on the ground under it.

"I'd like to touch him up with a bullet," said Lucky Luke, who also held a revolver in his hand.

"They've discovered that we're here and are trying to surround the place," was the guess of Diamond Dick. "No doubt they know just what kind of a hole it is."

"It's a good one, all right," said the boy.

"Yes, for a little while; but suppose they try to keep us here and starve us out?"

"Then they've got us, if they're in force," Lucky Luke admitted. "We haven't anything to eat here, and no water; though there's water enough; just down there under our noses in the edge of the swampy ground."

"And poison water, too—poison with the muck of the swamp."

"The blacks probably drink it."

"They're used to it; if a white man should drink much of it, he'd be dead of a fever inside of a week. That's my guess."

"Then you think we're in bad shape here?" asked the boy anxiously.

"No, I don't think so; I never think that as long as I've a good revolver in my hand and plenty of cartridges for it in my belt," replied Dick.

feared almost more than any other on earth, was in the swamps, in pursuit of him, and was now with friends and Meg Mallory in that nest of rocks.

The discovery stirred in him a determination to block this harassing pursuit by slaying the pursuers. He did not doubt that the man and the boy who were known to be with Diamond Dick had come with him from Panama.

As for Meg Mallory, he wished sincerely that she were safe back in Panama, for her presence in the swamp stirred the jealousy of the voodoo king's daughter, on whose good-will his safety with the blacks depended.

He had returned to the camp, and joined with others in the pursuit of Diamond Dick and the girl, urging the negroes to surround and kill all the men who were with her.

But the negroes lacked courage. In addition, they saw that the voodoo king was racked with superstitious fears, due to the failure of his attempt to sacrifice the girl. The spirits were angry, he believed; and he cowered before the thought of what their anger meant. So that altogether Hank Jepson found them a lily-livered set, willing enough to surround the stronghold of the white men, but unwilling to take the risks necessary to effect their capture or death.

Armed with a good revolver, he did more than all the negroes put together, to hold the white men and the girl in that nest in the rocks; for he stationed himself at a point where he could see the crown of the nest, and whenever a vine or bush shook there he sent a shot at the spot from his revolver.

"We can starve them out and make them surrender," he told Ilma, and through Ilma told her father. "When they get hungry enough they will come out and lay down their weapons and surrender. Then you can do as you will with the girl; only I must have the men. Not one of them must escape."

But the negroes were not overwatchful; and the result was that, as night approached, Hank Jepson made the discovery that the occupants of the nest were escaping from it, or had escaped, going out on the side opposite that which he guarded.

He rallied the negroes; and with Ilma ran around to the side where the escape, he thought, was being made.

The nest, he found, was already empty.

While he was fuming over this, a shout in another direction told him something had occurred; and then he saw a party of negroes approaching, with a boy in their midst.

The boy was Luke Lockhart.

Lucky Luke was brought up to the white man; and then the voodooist appeared.

"I'm Lucky Luke no longer," said the boy, though he

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DUEL OF THE NECROMANCERS.

Hank Jepson had discovered that Diamond Dick, the man from whom he had fled in Panama, the man he

did not appear cast down, but rather cheerful when his situation is considered. "I played the fool, that's all; and I reckon I've got to suffer for it."

"Where is Diamond Dick and those who were with him?" demanded Jepson, who at first did not care for the capture of this boy.

"Find out, will you!" said Lucky Luke defiantly.

Jepson scowled and drew his revolver.

"You'll talk, or I'll put a bullet through you."

"I guess I'm rather wishing you would; it would save me from the attentions I'm likely to get at the hands of these ragged black gentlemen."

"You won't talk?"

"Nit. Only as I choose my words. But I'll say this: If I hadn't been a fool you wouldn't have got me. The others are where you'll not find 'em—they're safe enough. And I was all right, too. But I forgot something that I was anxious to recover; and so I started back to get it, against the advice of my friends, and I ran into the hands of these cowards. That's all the news you'll get out of me; and you can make eyes and threaten till you're as black in the face as any of these critters. You hear me!"

Then the suggestive thought came to Jepson that the capture of Lucky Luke Lockhart might be a very fine thing for him, after all; he could hold the boy as a hostage, and so secure his own safety. He could send word to Diamond Dick that if he did not retreat at once to Panama the boy would be killed; and he did not doubt, from their looks, that some of the blacks would be glad to put that threat into instant execution.

So he began to explain his new plan to Ilma; who repeated it to her father.

But right here was where Jepson struck a snag.

The old voodoo king had ideas of his own; the first and chief of which was that the boy had been sent to him by the angry spirits to be sacrificed in the place of the girl whom he could not now get his hands on.

Lucky Luke heard this, when the girl interpreted it to Jepson, with a shrinking he did not show. On the contrary, his defiant and almost cheery manner did not desert him.

"Do you speak French?" Jepson asked him suddenly.

"Not enough so that a Frenchman would guess it; but I can understand you, maybe, if *you* do."

"It is this," said Jepson, speaking in French, which he hoped none of the negroes would understand. "If I can manage your release, and you will agree in advance that this hunt of Diamond Dick for me shall be given up, I'll do it; I'll get you out of this."

But the undaunted youth had been doing some thinking of his own; and he was not as hopeless as Jepson naturally supposed he would be.

"Not on your tintype," he declared. "I never interfere with the work and plans of Diamond Dick. He'll

get me out of this mess if he can; if he can't, I suppose I'll have to take my medicine. But——"

They were interrupted by the old voodooist, who was suspicious of this conversation carried on in alternate French and English, the English composed of many words he could not understand.

And then he made his wishes understood, declaring that the only thing which could bring safety to the blacks, and perhaps bring about the capture of the escaping whites, was the immediate sacrifice of this white boy whom the spirits had delivered into his hands.

"You hear," said Jepson, speaking again in French. "Perhaps it can be staved off; and to-night maybe I can get you away from them, if you make me that solemn promise."

Lucky Luke had not been tied, but had been dragged up by the blacks, who had seized him, being helpless in their clutches. And now he did a thing which caused the old voodoo king to open his black eyes in wonder.

The boy conjuror, after swinging his hand to his face as if to brush away an annoying mosquito, began suddenly to choke and gag, as if he had an obstruction in his throat—this to draw all eyes to him—and then smoke and blue flames began to pour out of his mouth and nostrils in an astonishing manner.

The negroes jumped back with gurgles and cries of fear; and even the old voodoo man, who knew something of conjuring himself, seemed almost on the point of running away into the bushes and hiding.

"It's a trick!" shouted Jepson, enraged by the effect this had on the superstitious and scared blacks. "Can't you see that it is a trick?"

The flames issuing from the lips of the boy conjuror, and seeming to make him writhe in pain, flowed down over his clothing, so that streaks of fire were soon running over his body.

He tore at the flames with his hands, in apparent torture, and began to scream as with pain; and seemed to be trying to get the fire out of his mouth and off his clothing; though it continued to blaze and smoke and sputter in a manner marvelous to behold.

The frightened old voodoo king was beginning to get his wits again, due to some words spoken by his daughter, for she was trying to tell him that this was but one of the tricks of magic which the boy showed every night on the streets of Panama.

But the boy gasped and gurgled again, tore at his mouth and throat in a most frantic way; and at length seemingly brought out of his mouth a wriggling snake, which in disgust he threw down on the ground, where it coiled and hissed with a strange sputtering, and then disappeared with an explosion and in smoke.

The boy conjuror looked at the old voodooist, stood up straight, and smiled into the staring eyes of the old black man.

"Beat it, old witch-doctor!" he said. "I've heard you can do some handy things in that line yourself. Beat it."

Ilma was still explaining that this was but a trick which the boy conjuror showed nightly on the streets of Panama; she had seen him do it there in a way that was as wonderful.

Her words, and what he knew of conjuring, brought confidence back to the negro necromancer. He began to surmise that the boy had put that fire and smoke and that singular serpent, which was not a serpent, into his mouth in some other form than the ones in which they issued therefrom. He had even done something akin to that himself, as he now proceeded to show.

Clapping a black hand suddenly to his stomach, as if an intolerable pain had struck him there, he fell on the ground, foaming at the mouth and beating his head against the miry earth; he clutched at his stomach and worked his hands upward toward his mouth as if he were forcing something from his stomach up to his mouth; and then he suddenly threw his hideous, saw-toothed jaws wide open, and pulled out, or seemed to pull out, a small turtle.

He rose with a cry of feigned disgust and horror, and threw the turtle on the ground; and the boy conjuror saw that it was a real turtle and alive, for it began to walk, or, rather, crawl, along on the ground.

"Go up head!" he said in admiration. "You're all right, old Blackie! You had that turtle in your clothing; but you worked the trick slick as could be, all right, all right. I'm saying I admire your skill. But, see here; how's this?"

He threw his hand suddenly into the wool of the negro nearest him, and drew forth another serpent like the one he had drawn apparently out of his own mouth; and this he threw down on the ground, where it coiled, hissed as if it emitted steam, and then, like the first, it exploded with a puff of smoke and was gone.

The negro out of whose wool that snake seemed to have been drawn had given a jump and a scream of horror, and seemed to want to depart hurriedly to some more secure place; while the cries and exclamations, in words that he did not understand, told the boy conjuror that his exhibitions were of a kind these blacks had never seen.

Yet they were so very simple he felt like laughing when he saw their staring-eyed fright; for the chemicals which changed into those serpents, he had in the sleeves of his coat, and all that was needed was the pressure of his fingers to set them on fire and cause them to take the strange forms shown.

"How do?" said the staring voodoo king.

The boy necromancer grinned.

"Why, I'm well, thank you; how are you?"

"He mean," put in Ilma, "de way you do dat; he want know how you do dat."

"Oh, that's it? Well, tell him that the spirits help me; that I stand in with 'em, and that they'll be angrier than he can think of if he harms me in any way. They'll shower fire and flames down on this crowd and burn you all up that quick, if he tries to do me any harm."

The voodoo king heard this with wide-open eyes.

Then he smiled in a strange way, making his face wrinkle until it looked seamed and cracked.

"He no believe dat," said Ilma, shaking her head. "He say you do trick; he do trick, too. You show him bimeby, and maybe he show you. He trade trick wid you bimeby maybe."

Jepson was beginning to show distrust and disgust. He began to see that the voodoo king might not want to fall in with his plans concerning this boy.

"It's all tommyrot," he said to Varola. "Don't you see it is? Those are just clever tricks. You do tricks yourself; and you ought to know."

The eyes of the voodoo king snapped.

"I know," he said, speaking to the fuming white man. "I keep him alive, eh? I t'ink I want know dem tricks."

The boy conjuror had gained his point; in his desperation he had been coolly fighting for his life, and for time, believing that if he could assure his safety for a while Diamond Dick and Handsome Harry would be able to rescue him.

"I'll show you the tricks, all right," he said to the voodooist. "I've got hundreds of 'em better than those, and I'll teach 'em all to you; but I can't do it right this minute. But to-morrow, and the next day, and the next week—I'll need a lot of time to teach you all of them. For I think I shall like to stay with you. Our white friend over there doesn't seem to enjoy it, but that doesn't matter. You're king here, I believe; and what he likes and dislikes docsn't matter. I'll show you all my tricks; but not this minute. We must get in some safe place, and I've got to have a little time."

He knew he was safe for a while; his skill in conjuring promised to be the thing that would now stand between him and a horrible death. And Diamond Dick and Handsome Harry would be given time to do things.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CLEVER VOODOOIST.

It was not in the nature of Diamond Dick to abandon the imperiled boy conjuror; he never deserted a friend in danger. Besides, he had come into these forbidding swamps to bag Hank Jepson, the murderer, and he had no notion of going back until he had accomplished it.

Leaving Meg Mallory with Handsome Harry in a position that looked secure, he struck the trail of the re-

treating negroes, and did not halt until he found them in camp, at a point not very far from the rocky nest itself.

There were a few huts here, to which they had retreated, and apparently they had made some attempt at a barricade, perhaps under the direction of Hank Jepson.

Lying out in the cover of the palms, Diamond Dick surveyed this fortified camp as well as he could in the darkness, and gained a fair idea as to where the boy conjuror was held. He saw the black woman, Ilina, and also her murderous-minded father; and he saw Jepson pass from one hut to another.

Though not a great time had elapsed since Lucky Luke's capture, Diamond Dick was really afraid the boy had been slain by these blacks. He felt sure now that Lucky Luke was still alive, and he shrewdly guessed the means the boy conjuror had taken to prolong his life. He had known Lucky Luke to work a trick like that before.

As Diamond Dick thus watched, wondering how he could get into the camp of the blacks and rescue his boy pard, he saw Lucky Luke brought out into the light of the camp-fire before one of the huts. The fire was kicked into greater vigor by one of the blacks stirring the fagots up with his foot.

The old voodoo king appeared before the boy in the midst of his friends, they surrounding the boy so that escape seemed unlikely or impossible.

Diamond Dick drew his revolver.

"I might down a few of them and then charge 'em for all I'm worth," he muttered. "I think I could turn the trick and get the boy away."

But he hesitated, for he really had no desire to shoot down any of the blacks; and then he saw why Lucky Luke had been brought forth into the midst of the negroes.

The boy conjuror began to perform tricks at the bidding of the voodooist, beginning with some simple ones, which he explained as well as he could as he went along. There were tricks with disappearing cards which he brought out of one of his pockets: simple tricks with strings; and then some fire tricks, different from those already shown. The latter the negroes could not understand, for they were chemical tricks, and they knew nothing of chemistry; yet the tricks were simple, from the chemical standpoint, as the boy conjuror had only the simplest materials to work with.

As he worked and tried to explain, still fighting in that way to prolong his life, and, perhaps, gain the good-will of the voodoo king, a cry of alarm ran through the negroes.

Most of them dived into the palm huts, going in head foremost; but the old voodooist, not willing the boy should escape, caught him and hurled him down, and then faced round.

Diamond Dick, in trying to get closer in, had caught his hand in a trailing vine, and it had swung back, making the noise which they heard; which accounted for their sudden panic and the stopping of the boy conjuror's performance.

It seemed to Diamond Dick that the moment for action had come; so he sprang to his feet, swinging his revolver, and was about to dash in boldly to the rescue of Lucky Luke, taking the chances, even though he was sure that Jepson was there and armed with a revolver.

But as he moved forward, the movement of his feet sounding, the black voodoo king caught up something from the ground, touched it an instant in the blaze of the camp-fire, and then hurled it out from him.

The effect was instantaneous and startling. He had shot out with his black hand what had seemed a fire-ball. It fell at a point beyond the huts, where some leaves and litter had been ridged up in a line; and as it did so there was a flash and a flare, with an explosion that was like the burning of exposed gunpowder: the heaped-up line of litter broke into a smoky, acrid flame, which swung instantly aloft, billowing and towering in crackling fire and stenchy smoke, and interposed itself as a barrier of fire between Diamond Dick and the huts.

Diamond Dick stopped, hesitating; and then the foul smoke smote him in the face with overpowering force, for the wind was toward him and hurled the smoke full upon him.

He had been caught once in a burning building filled with deadly gas; and this was as near like it as anything he could think of. The smoke cut into his eyes, choked his lungs so that he seemed strangling, while the unbearable stench was frightful.

His experience taught him to throw himself face downward; but the smoke sought him out there, and he was forced to beat a retreat, choking and coughing painfully as he scrambled backward.

He could not now see the huts or the men, for a fierce flame roared upward in front of them—a flame that seemed to eat into the very leaves and mire of the swamp as if it sought to follow him and hunt him down wherever he went.

He turned and literally ran from it, a thing he would not have done before any human enemy.

When he had gone a short distance, but enough to take him out of that scorching, acrid smoke, he stopped, thinking that perhaps he could circle round an end of the line of fire and so get at the palm huts where Lucky Luke was held a prisoner.

The palms and the swamp were filled with the smoke, however, which hung low, clinging to the ground, still obscuring the camp from his sight.

Diamond Dick made his way quickly along, and at length when the smoke became less thick he circled round

an end of the now dying fire and in the direction of the huts.

When he reached them they were abandoned.

The negroes and Hank Jepson were gone, and they had taken the boy conjuror with them.

CHAPTER X.

HANDSOME HARRY'S DISCOVERY.

The smoke and fire which drove Diamond Dick back from the huts were seen by Handsome Harry and Meg Mallory in their hiding-place.

It aroused the fears of the giant, who had been uneasy ever since the departure of Diamond Dick.

"Wough-h!" he grunted suspiciously. "I reckon I don't admire ther looks o' thet; I seems ter smell danger in it."

"You think it may indicate that your friend is in trouble?" Meg Mallory asked anxiously.

"I recollects ther customs of Injuns, an' others," he said, as he stood up and stared at the line of fire and smoke; "and it teaches me thet thar air times when critters o' thet kind will set fire ter ther bresh fer ther purpose of runnin' out er roastin' their inimies. It's in ther direction, yer see, thet Diamond Dick tuck when he left us. They may have got him surrounded thar an' air tryin' ter burn him same's if he war a rattlesnake in ther swamps. Sometimes Injuns, and even niggers, sets fires like thet ter run game out of the thickets; an' I'm free ter say I don't like ther looks of it."

The girl came and stood beside him. She seemed to feel safer close by the side of the big-hearted, red-bearded Sarpint. For there was something in the manhood and character of that diamond in the rough which made even children trust him. Together they looked off at the fire.

For a time Handsome Harry stood sniffing the smoke that floated to him.

"Smells cur'us and tainted," he said. "An' thar's a feelin' workin' through my j'int's thet it means danger ter Diamond Dick."

He turned to her earnestly.

"Young lady, I don't reckon I could make yer understand ther way I feels when thet man gits inter danger, er when I think maybe he is in danger; fer he's more ter me than any brother. I jes'——"

"We might go out in that direction so that you could investigate," she interrupted.

"Would ye?" he asked eagerly.

"Why, yes, I'm to go with you; you're with me to protect me, and I'm willing to do whatever you think is best."

She said it in a trusting, childlike way that touched the giant's tender heart.

"Bless yer, yes; I'm ter look out fer yer safety; and thet's why I hesertates. Ef I should go rampagin' out thar, lookin' round fer trouble, and then hit thet trouble, an' you with me, I dunno what Diamond Dick would say when he larnt of it."

"But if you were trying to help him; or find out if he needed help?"

"Thet's so; thet do make it diff'runt. And, I'd like ter try it, with yer consent, yer know. I'd reelly like ter know ef Diamond Dick is in ther middle of thet fire, and in danger of roastin'. I dunno ef I could help him; but——"

"I think myself it would be well to investigate a little. You might leave some word, written, for him here, in case he should come here while we are gone. And I'm anxious to know, too, what has happened to that young man you call Lucky Luke."

Both being anxious, the note was written, with pencil, on a scrap of paper found in Handsome Harry's pocket, and they set out at once; and soon were threading their way through the tangled creepers in the darkness, finding this difficult work.

They were forced to deviate from a straight line more than once, and make big circuits; and by and by, as they journeyed on, the fire and smoke sank lower and lower; so that finally it was not to be seen at all, though the scent of it still lingered in the swamp.

"Now whatever?" grumbled the giant.

"I suppose we'll have to make our way back," she said; "we haven't accomplished anything. And it may be your friend will get back to that place and find the bit of writing you left there for him, and will be waiting for us there."

It was not easy to lose Handsome Harry in the mountains or on the plains, but this jungly swamp in the darkness was a different proposition, as he found when he turned round and with the girl tried to retrace his way.

It did not take him long to discover that he was not getting back to the point he aimed at; and a little later he knew that he was lost.

"Waal," he grumbled, "this hyar is one on ther ole Sarpint! I didn't believe that I war sech a numskull."

But he floundered on, and kept turning this way and that, until the time came when he was convinced that the farther he went the worse off he would be.

"We'll jes' have ter camp right down hyar," he said finally, making the confession with some confusion, for his pride in his ability to find his way anywhere under any circumstances was touched. "Daylight will find us, ef nothin' else does; and when it comes we'll know better whar we air and what's best fer us ter do. I dislikes powerful ter admit thet I'm lost, fer it warn't never a trick o' ther ole Sarpint of Siskiyou not to know allus jes' whar he war; but I'm plum lost now, and I ain't denyin'

it no longer. So hyar we bogs down till we know which way ter go."

The night that followed seemed tediously long, even to the girl, though she slept uneasily through the greater part of it; to Handsome Harry, standing guard in the darkness, it was interminable.

With the first streakings of day, which came rather late in the thick swamp, he was stirring about, trying to discover his location and what was to be done.

When he came back his face was still clouded.

"I reckons I could slaughter one er them monkeys that's whoopin' it up over yander, and so git suthin' ter cat fer ye, ef you're powerful hungry; but it does seem too much like killin' children fer me ter hanker fer it."

She looked disgusted.

"Monkeys! Indeed, I'm not at all hungry—for a monkey breakfast. You didn't see anything?"

"On'y thet ther woods seems lighter off in thet direction; and I reckon it wouldn't be a bad idee ef we went thet way; we're sure ter come out some'ere; and as we're pikin' along maybe we'll run across suthin' thet will give us our bearin's, er help in some way"

When they had gone a short distance the woods lightened more and more, and soon they found themselves on the edge of a bit of water, that was probably a lagoon; but the thing that especially attracted their attention was a little hut that stood in the middle of it on an isle.

To the door of this hut came a dark-faced woman, scantily clad, whom they eyed with interest.

"It's an Indian woman," said the girl.

"I'm agreein' thet it is; an' I never had any great love fer Injuns of any kind, hyar er back in ther United States. But what's troublin' me even more, is them movin' logs swimmin' round in ther water out there between hyar and ther house. I allow you've noticed 'em."

"Why, they're caymen!" she said, when her attention was thus attracted to them.

"Um-hum! Yas, mebbe; but what air caymen?"

"Why alligators—Central American alligators."

"Wough-h! Alligators!" He stepped back from the shore. "Wuss'n rattlers, I'm guessin'. Excuse me frum bein' interduced ter 'em. Wonder ef that 'oman makes pets of 'em; er ef this is an alligator farm?"

"They just happen to be there, I suppose; they're in most of the waters round here."

"Wough-h. Wake up snakes and lick lickerish! Alligators! I thought fust off they must be black logs thet mebbe some fish war pushin' round as they nosed under 'em fer grub."

"The woman sees us."

"But she can't git ter us, and we can't git ter her, 'less we swim; and when it comes ter swimmin', ther ole Sarpint chooses water that ain't all muddy as ye may say with 'gators. Wough-h! Alligators!"

But he was undeceived.

The woman came out of the hut, and going down to the shore of the islet, she pulled a flat-bottomed boat from under some bushes; then leaping into it and catching up a long pole she began to push out, propelling it toward them across the water.

"Comin' over hyar ter make us a visit," said Handsome Harry dubiously. "But thar's one thing: Mebbe she kin tell us whar we air and whichever way it will be best fer us ter go; thet is, ef she kin talk United States, which I'm much doubtin'."

Then he roared again, giving vent to his surprise, for the caymen had been stirred into activity by the movements of the boat. They rose to the surface of the fetid water, so that their ugly snouts could be seen, and their wicked little eyes, and they began to surround the boat, as if they thought of snatching the woman out of it and devouring her.

The sight surprised and astounded Handsome Harry, and gave the girl much anxiety for the safety of the woman.

"Wough-h! See thet?" he cried.

The woman had lifted her pole and was rapping the caymen over the snouts, driving them back from the boat; she was as cool about it, too, as if this were an every-day occurrence, which probably it was.

"Wough-h! Hit 'em ag'in!" Handsome Harry commended. "Thet war a good 'un. Crack thet black feller in ther eye, before he gits his nose clean over ther gunwale and grabs ye; he'll shore do it ef yer don't hurry!"

He was greatly excited, walking back and forth on the shore; and he drew his heavy revolver, not knowing but that he might feel tempted to go to the woman's aid, though he doubted his ability to accomplish much with it for her protection.

But the woman seemed not to mind the swarming caymen in the least. When they crowded the boat uncomfortably, or showed a disposition to crawl into it, or overturn it, she simply cracked their black noses with the pole she used in propelling the craft, and continued her way.

It did not take her long to cross. When she came up to the shore they saw that she was a mere slip of a girl, Indian, to be sure, but of seeming intelligence and good nature. Her black eyes smiled, and her lips opened in welcome, showing her white, even teeth.

"Wough-h! You're shore a cool one, anyhow!" said Handsome Harry, hardly supposing that she would understand him.

She drove the nose of the boat against the oozy bank, flung the pole out on the ground, and leaped ashore. Some of the caymen had followed her until they were actually wallowing in the shallows, almost aground, and fully exposed to Handsome Harry's revolver, if he had cared to use it.

Meg Mallory eyed her closely, and then began to speak

in a queer mixture of Spanish and Indian, which she had learned since her residence in Panama. Equally to the surprise of Handsome Harry, the Indian girl answered, though the giant did not know what was said by either. But he saw the Indian girl smile reassuringly, and he knew that she at least had no evil thoughts against them.

Meg Mallory turned to him.

"It's the strangest thing!" she said. "But, you see, I've met this girl in Panama, at my home; she came there two or three times, to sell some Indian basketwork which she makes of the swamp-grass and rushes. She says she lives here alone with her father, who left the house a little while ago; and that he went out to shadow some runaway negroes who have been interfering with his traps and fish-nets. She knows where these negroes are in camp; and it strikes me that perhaps they are the ones we've been having trouble with. And doesn't it occur to you," she added, "that by finding where those negroes are might be a good way to get on the track of your friend, or, at any rate, of that boy you call Lucky Luke?"

"You've hit it!" he said. "By all ther diangular sarpints, but I believe you've hit it plum center fust try! Thar may be other niggers stowed away in this pesky swamp, but I'm thinkin' thet if thar air they're knowin' ter ther gang we've had dealin's with, and thet ther two gangs are close united. Kin she show us whar thet place is?"

Meg Mallory asked the question.

"She can," she said to Handsome Harry, after the Indian girl had replied. "But it will take time, as it is some distance from here. And she wants to know if you wouldn't like something to eat first? She was roasting some fish when she saw us."

"Wough-h! Luck's hittin' us! I ain't denyin' thet ther ole Sarpint is so plum holler thet ther scales on his back is meetin' ther ones on ther front of him. Fish sounds pertickler invitin', say ter her, and thank ye. Ther on'y thing is, thet I don't like ter tarry. But mebber her pap's comin' back; and he might be a better guide then even she'd be. Ask her thet, will ye?"

The result of the conversation was that Handsome Harry and Meg Mallory entered the boat with the Indian girl, for the purpose of crossing to the islet.

The giant looked with distrust at the caymen swarming so thickly in the water beyond the boat that the water boiled, when the Indian girl took up her pole and set the boat in motion.

"Yer ain't afraid of 'em?"

Meg Mallory repeated his question to the Indian girl. The latter laughed, with a flashing of her white teeth.

"No, she isn't afraid of them," Meg Mallory interpreted; "she has got used to them. They killed a little dog for her last week, though; and now she hasn't even a dog to stay with her when her father is away fishing,

or trapping, or hunting. But she says she isn't lonesome; she has always lived here in the swamp, and she likes it."

Handsome Harry looked about, strangely interested.

"I've noticed thet people like the place whar they're brung up, wharever it is," was his philosophical statement. "But fer me, yer couldn't keep me hyar in ther midst of these alligators, 'less'n I war so tied up I natch'elly couldn't git erway. It shore gives me ther creeps ter see them black noses poppin' outer ther water; and ther ole Sarpint ain't a man thet's turr'ble easy to scare. They simply makes me narvous."

"They make me nervous, too!"

The Indian girl seemed to know what they were talking about; and she laughed good-naturedly as she prodded the noses of the saurians with her pole when they ventured too near.

In answer to questions, after they landed, the Indian girl said she had seen the fire and smoke in the night, and her father had seen it; her explanation of it was that it was made by the old negro who was the leader of the ones she had mentioned as troubling her father's traps.

She seemed to dislike the negroes very much; and when she had learned that Handsome Harry and the girl disliked them, too, she was more than ever willing to guide them to the permanent camp of the black men.

"I hope you will kill all of them," she said to the giant, delivering her words to the white girl. "They steal everything."

But she still smiled, showing her milky teeth, so that she did not seem as bloodthirsty as her words indicated.

The fish she had been roasting were done; but she cooked more, for Handsome Harry and Meg Mallory, doing them to a turn on some coals burning on an earthen hearth. At the top of the hut was a round hole, like those in the lodges of Indians, which let the smoke out. The hut itself was of the most primitive kind, so that the giant almost feared to move round in it, lest by some accident he should knock it down.

But that meal of fresh-roasted fish made almost another man of him; gave him courage and new strength; and its heartening effect on Meg Mallory was equally great.

Handsome Harry was offering the Indian girl money, which made her black eyes shine with approving delight, and caused him to see also that an offer of money was the thing which would induce her to exert herself to the utmost in his behalf, when he was given one of the surprises of his life.

A shadow darkened the little door; and looking up when he observed it, he looked into the face of Diamond Dick.

"Wough-h!" the giant yelled, dropping a coin, for which the Indian girl scrambled greedily. "Wake up snakes, an' shine yer scales! Diamond Dick, by all ther wonders! Whar'd yer come frum?"

He leaped across the intervening space and caught the hand of his pard, drawing him into the hut.

Meg Mallory was as astonished as Handsome Harry; and the Indian girl, having recovered the dropped coin and stowed it away securely, took time now to look surprised, too.

"I saw you come here—across the lagoon in the boat," said Diamond Dick.

"Wough-h! You was clost by? But yer didn't wade through them alligators?"

"I was on the other side; if you should step out back of this hut you would see that there is only a little strip of water there, and a rude crossing of logs; it's no trouble to get here from that direction."

Handsome Harry continued his pump-handle movement, seeming not able to relinquish the hand of Diamond Dick.

"Ther kid?" he said. "Lucky Luke?"

"I was on the trail of the blacks who have him; the trail passes along back there. I was following it, when I saw you come here. I came over, then; that's all."

He explained more fully, for the benefit both of Meg Mallory and the giant, telling them of the smoke which had driven him back; of how he had circled round and found the camp deserted, and of how he had not been able to do much until daylight came to aid him.

The Indian girl was staring at him now, in mute questioning.

Meg Mallory translated for her some of the things Diamond Dick said.

The fact that the negroes had passed so near astonished and interested her, and she too began to ask questions of Diamond Dick; she feared apparently now for the safety of her father. The negroes had never before come so near the hut, she said.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE VOODOO KING'S STRONGHOLD.

Lucky Luke realized that in spite of the power he had gained over the superstitious mind of the voodoo king, his peril was still great and imminent. How to increase and hold that power was the thing to which he chiefly gave his mind. He saw that he could not escape; for, in addition to the watch maintained over him by the blacks, Hank Jepson kept him under close surveillance. Jepson reasoned that he would need to use Lucky Luke to secure his own safety; and, therefore, he could not afford to let him get away.

The sudden flashing out of the fire and the murky smoke was an astonishing thing to the boy conjuror, and **set him to observing and thinking.** He knew that some

kind of chemical had been used to produce that fire; his own experience with chemicals taught him that much; and he had been sure the voodooist knew little or nothing about chemicals.

"That bids me take another think on that subject," he said to himself. "The old fellow isn't such a fool as he looks. That chemical held gunpowder, for I got a whiff of the saltpeter smell; but there was something else mixed with it, and I wonder what it was. I wonder, too, where he got the gunpowder? He must have used a lot of it."

He was not given at once an opportunity to discover anything on this interesting subject. The blacks beat a hasty retreat under cover of the fire and smoke, taking him with them.

He saw that Ilma and Hank Jepson kept together, and talked a good deal. As for himself, he was carefully watched by one of the blacks, delegated for the purpose by the voodoo king.

The hurried retreat through the swamp brought them finally to a row of huts on a rocky ridge, which was backed by high rocks, and the front of which was guarded by a sort of flimsy palisade made by driving the trunks of small palm-trees into the ooze that lay just at the edge of the ridge. There was a gate through the palisade leading to the row of palm huts, this gate being closed and blocked with a log of wood.

Yet the palisade was of so flimsy a character, the boy conjuror wondered that the blacks should trust their safety to it, if they really believed any body of men would ever try to force it.

Jepson took something like secondary command, backed by Ilma, when this stronghold was gained; and under his direction the palisades and the flimsy gate were strengthened.

The old voodoo king busied himself, too, as if preparing for a repetition of that smoke-and-fire performance which had already proved so effective.

In this the boy conjuror watched him narrowly, without appearing to do anything of the kind. He was held in one of the huts; but he was still not tied; for apparently the old voodooist did not think he had any chance of escaping, or would be so foolish as to risk trying it.

In one of the huts, as the boy discovered, and in a kind of storehouse in the ground in front of it, was kept a large quantity of gunpowder. He felt sure it could be nothing else; and his surmise was that it had been stolen from the government stores in Panama by these negroes. Some of it resembled blasting-powder, of which the government had large quantities.

Much of this powder was damp, from the moisture of the swamp and the dampness of the ground where it was kept; but this seemed not to trouble the voodoo king as he uncovered his storehouse and brought out

from the hut great quantities of it. Then the boy saw him fixing it with what looked to be a whitish earth or clay; two parts or more of the white clay to one of the powder.

Just beyond the boundary of the barrier where Hank Jepson and some of the blacks were working, the old voodoo king caused his compound to be carried; and there it was strewn along the ground in a line that stretched close to the palisades and paralleled them.

This line of "fireworks," as Lucky Luke called it, was covered over carefully with leaves and litter.

"The same old trick," mused the boy conjuror. "He will fire that off when Diamond Dick and the others come up; and he thinks it will drive them back. But what if the wind should be blowing toward these huts at the time? I'm guessing that every mother's son of us would die of the stench and suffocation. But the wind's all right now for the old black rascal; and maybe he's got some wireless guarantee from somewhere that it's going to hold that way. Well, we'll see! He's shrewd, anyhow; and I thought he was a good deal of a fool; which goes to show that a man may have a lot of sense, even if he does believe in spirits and witches and charms and all that sort of rot. That black voodooist is a wise old guy, all right; and it's going to hump me to keep on the good side of him. I've already explained and showed to him a lot of my best tricks; and soon he'll have me dry on the subject. But he wants to learn to do them himself, and that will take longer; I can make it occupy a good while. I wonder where Diamond Dick and Handsome Harry, and that girl, are? It's ticklish business waiting here for them; and I hate to see those preparations. Is there anything I can do?"

Then Lucky Luke received an inspiration, given to him by looking at the powder being taken from time to time out of the storehouse in front of that hut.

"Maybe I can work it!" he said, with sudden hope and gratification. "I've got to work it. Gee! If I can, they'll think old Vesuvius has opened up his jaws."

It was morning before the voodooist and Jepson had completed their preparations for defense; and by that time Lucky Luke was dog-tired, yet he resolutely kept awake.

As the sun came up the wind shifted, so that it blew toward the huts, much to the gratification of the boy conjuror and the evident dismay of the voodoo king and his followers.

"If Diamond Dick could get here now with a force he might do something," was the thought of the boy. "But what am I talking of? There's no force to be had nearer than Panama. Yet Diamond Dick and Handsome Harry are each worth half a dozen ordinary men. What a strange thing it was that I should run across them here in this far part of the world!"

Lucky Luke was careful not to let the old voodooist

or Hank Jepson observe the gratification he felt over the change in the direction of the wind.

Some breakfast of fish was brought him by one of the blacks; and as he was eating it Hank Jepson strolled over to his hut.

"Hello!" said Jepson, looking down at him.

"The top of the morning to you," responded the boy conjuror airily.

"One of my men came in a while ago," said Jepson, speaking as if he were himself master of that little force of blacks, "and he discovered signs that your friends are not far from here. We don't want to have trouble with them. I suppose you know what Diamond Dick is here for?"

"I might guess," said Lucky Luke cautiously.

"Yes; no doubt. And now I have a proposition. I am holding you for a purpose." Lucky Luke had thought it was the old voodooist who was holding him! "If Diamond Dick scents out this place, as he probably will, I have a proposition to make to him—I shall offer to release you, on condition that he returns at once to Panama and troubles me no further. What do you think of it?"

"I think it will be a lucky thing for you if he accepts."

Lucky Luke's frankness was not pleasing.

"Have a care!" warned Jepson, scowling blackly.

"You asked me a question, and I answered it."

"What I meant to ask was how the proposition will likely strike Diamond Dick. Do you think he will accept it?"

"I don't know," said the boy quite frankly. "But, really, I doubt it."

"It means your life," Jepson warned.

"Perhaps so; but I'm not the one to decide, you know. You will have to go to Diamond Dick for that."

Jepson drew pencil and note-book from his pocket.

"I want you to write a message, which I shall try to send out to Diamond Dick if he locates us here," he said. "I could write it myself, and I shall write one myself. What I want you to say is merely to inform him that you are still safe and sound, but that you don't know how long you will be so, and that you write this at my request simply to let him know."

"That's easy," said Lucky Luke, "if you'll let me word it."

"I don't care how you word it, if you say about what I have indicated."

Lucky Luke took the note-book and pencil and wrote:

"Mr. Jepson asks me to say that I am well and sound, but that I don't know how long I shall remain so. He wants to release me on condition that you retire to Panama and do not trouble him further. It is not my province to give advice; but I guess that you won't do it, now that you have him located and run into a hole. I'm having a lot of fun with the old voodoo king teaching

him conjuring tricks; he's got a few himself that are corkers, and I'm trying to get onto them. He begins to think rather well of me, and that's in my favor. I think I can hold out quite a while by being good to the old voodooist. As for Mr. Jepson, he is scared out of his boots; but he has some influence here, because of his influence over Ilma. I wish I had some kind of a wireless; for there are a lot of things I'd like to send you as a message. But look out for tricks.

"LUCKY LUKE LOCKHART.

"To Diamond Dick and Handsome Harry."

Hank Jepson read this over carefully. He frowned when he came to the statement that he was scared out of his boots, and demanded to know why it had been written.

"Well, you are, aren't you?" said Lucky Luke.

"Not a bit of it! I defy Diamond Dick to get at me here. The blacks, and especially Varola, think he is after them, and they'll fight to the finish, and that means my protection; and, besides, I am well armed myself, and I'll die right here before I am taken."

He spoke with unusual spirit.

"Still," he added, "I hope Diamond Dick will be reasonable, and go back to Panama; I don't like hiding out in this swamp any longer than I have to. It means fever in the end, and I don't fancy these deadly jungle fevers. That's why I want to get him to withdraw; so that I can get out of this safely."

When Jepson had departed Lucky Luke quietly finished his frugal breakfast, and did a lot of thinking.

A little later a stir among the blacks proclaimed that something of interest had occurred, or been discovered; and the guess of the boy conjuror was that Diamond Dick and the others had been sighted.

This he soon knew to be the fact; for, after some of the blacks had been sent quietly out in the swamp, as if for the purpose of investigating, Jepson again came to the boy.

"Movements have been discovered out in the swamp, and it's the opinion that your friends are approaching. Have you anything else you want to write and send out, if it proves to be them?"

Lucky Luke declared that he had no message other than that he had written.

The excitement in the camp soon reached fever-pitch; and one of the messengers came back, slipping hurriedly through the palisaded gate and running to report to the voodoo king.

"Your friends are out there," said Jepson, coming to Lucky Luke once more. "But they'll not get in here; and the old Voodooist is planning to destroy them if they come closer. Still, I'm going to send out my message. You think you haven't anything else to send yourself?"

Lucky Luke declared that he had nothing else to send.

"You might make your statement stronger; tell Dia-

mond Dick that it will be best for him to accede to my demand."

Lucky Luke shook his head.

"I don't interfere with Diamond Dick's business. He's got more sense than I have, and I'm not inclined to butt into his plans. I haven't anything to send."

Ilma appeared at this juncture armed with Jepson's revolver; and the boy conjuror saw that she intended to take out the messages, and meant to defend herself if she met treachery.

"Diamond Dick is honorable," said the boy. "Just wave a palm-branch as a flag of truce and he'll treat you right. Give him my love, will you? and tell him I never felt better in my life."

She answered only with a black look; and then, taking the message that Jepson had written, she went forth through the gate, and disappeared from sight in the tangle of the swamp.

After that for some time an uneasy silence reigned in the camp of the voodoo king.

The black girl was gone so long that Jepson grew uneasy, and ventured out beyond the palisaded gate on a little tour of investigation, in spite of the personal peril this involved.

He had no sooner disappeared than Lucky Luke beckoned to Varola.

"See here," he said. "I've got a little trick here that I haven't shown you yet; and while we're waiting we'll just look into it."

Concealed in his clothing he had a small mirror, which he now produced.

He held it up so that the black man could see himself in it.

Varola grinned as he inspected his hideous features.

But he had seen mirrors before, and so his curiosity was not greatly excited. And there were no tricks Lucky Luke could do with it, more than to flash its light into the eyes of some of Varola's followers, which caused them to duck their heads and laugh.

But Lucky Luke had come out of his hut, and by degrees, as he exhibited the mirror to different members of the band, he mounted to higher ground, so that, without apparently having tried to gain it, he secured a rather elevated position at the edge of the rocks, and could look out over the swamp, where the tops of palms flashed in the morning sunlight.

He continued to flash the light of the mirror, turning it at length toward one of the palms, in the direction taken by Ilma.

His hope was that Diamond Dick's party was out there.

While he was engaged in this Hank Jepson made a sudden reappearance, slipping in through the palisades almost before the boy conjuror knew it. He saw what the boy was doing, and rushed upon him.

"Here!" he cried. "What trick is this?"

He dashed the mirror to the ground.

Lucky Luke looked up at him innocently.

"What's that for?" he demanded. "I don't know that Varola will be pleased to have you knock his present about in that way. I intend to make him a present of this little looking-glass, and was showing him how it would reflect light on various objects."

Jepson stood glaring at him angrily.

"And wasn't you trying to flash some sort of a message to your friends out there?" he demanded.

Lucky Luke laughed.

"You've got an imagination to beat the band!" he said. "How do I even know where they are; or if they're out there at all? Take another think."

He picked up the looking-glass and handed it to Varola, who was regarding him suspiciously.

"I meant it as a gift to you," he said. "Take it. What he says is foolish. You saw what I was doing."

Yet Lucky Luke knew that he had made a narrow escape.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MESSAGE.

When Ilma boldly approached Diamond Dick's party, carrying Hank Jepson's messages, and saw there the Indian girl who had guided them, it was with the greatest difficulty that she restrained the rage which consumed her. She wanted to draw the revolver she had concealed on her person and shoot this Indian girl dead.

"Ah!" was her thought, "you will suffer for this; you and your father! I know you; and the blacks have not troubled you; but now it will be different. As soon as these white men are gone we will settle with you for this."

Only the flashing of her black eyes showed aught of this; and as she seemed not even to notice the Indian girl, but directed her attention wholly to Diamond Dick, her burning rage went undiscovered, or its meaning unguessed.

Diamond Dick and Handsome Harry, with Meg Mallory, and guided by the Indian girl, had reached that point but a short while before, having discovered that the permanent camp of the voodoo king was just before them.

The advance into their midst of the black woman was a surprising thing, yet it was gratifying; for even before she indicated that she was the bearer of messages, her mere coming showed that Jepson and the voodooist considered their situation precarious.

Diamond Dick read the messages carefully, and Handsome Harry and Meg Mallory did the same.

Ilma stood in quivering suspense while they discussed them, awaiting their answer.

Suddenly Handsome Harry clapped a hand to his face and fell back with a gurgle.

"Wough-h!" he grumbled. "By all ther biangler——"

Then he stopped.

The thing that had struck him so full in the face was a beam of light: and now it was flashing and dancing on the leaves of the palm over their heads. He stared at it, and Diamond Dick did the same, being joined in this by the three girls.

"Wough-h! Wake up snakes an' lick lickerish! Shake yerselves, sarpints, and shine yer scales. Wough-h! What in ther name of——"

The giant stopped again, gasping.

Diamond Dick had seen instantly that this was a message; for he was skilled in such things; and he was reading it, translating from the Morse code, though there were many erratic flashes and blanks and eccentric things connected with it; and the palm-leaves themselves did not lend themselves well to such work; so that he was having trouble.

But he made out this, by piecing some things together and guessing at others:

"Powder here. I'll touch it off. 'Ware last night's trick. Take no risks."

Suddenly the eyes of the black woman flashed, lighting up with kindling suspicion.

"It is words?" she said.

"Wough-h! Not on yer daguerreotype! I don't know what it is."

But the black girl felt sure she had guessed correctly; and was more than ever convinced by the manner in which Diamond Dick scanned those singular spots and flickers of light.

"Dat boy; it from de camp. I know."

Handsome Harry's emphatic denials only made her more sure.

That strange flashing on the leaves did not last long; suddenly it ceased.

"You' answer to dem message?" she said impatiently to Diamond Dick. "You go 'way, eh?"

"This is our message," said Diamond Dick, turning to her. "Tell your father and Hank Jepson that if they harm that young fellow we'll not rest while they're on top of ground; we'll drag them out of this swamp, and we'll have them hanged in Panama for murder. That's our answer. And tell your father that he had better surrender the white boy to us without parley; for we intend to get him. It will be better for your father to do this. If he does, we will not trouble him."

"You not go away?" she asked.

"Not until we have Hank Jepson. And if he or any of them harm that boy we'll take it out of the band. That's our answer."

Her black eyes flashed wickedly.

But she turned about, and soon was hurrying away.

"Was that wise?" asked Meg Mallory anxiously.

"I'm hoping it will make them afraid to hurt him."

"And those flashes? They meant something?"

Diamond Dick told her what he had read from them.

"It is wonderful," she confessed.

"And now we'll follow right on the heels of that black woman; and we'll see what we see."

The palisaded stronghold of the voodoo king was not far off, they knew. From the top of a palm Diamond Dick had seen it not long before, and he knew just where it lay; and he saw that the black woman was returning directly to it.

"The wind has shifted again," he said, observing the tops of the trees; "that's the second shift of the wind since daylight."

"Which means," grumbled the giant, "thet thet smoke, if it's started ag'in, is goin' ter hit us plum in ther face; and it's enough ter kill a dog jes ter smell it, ter say nothin' o' ther fire what goes with it."

"It means that we have got to shift our course," said Diamond Dick, "and try to come on the camp of the blacks from the other side, with the wind in our favor."

He was thinking of the message, which, though no name had been given, he was sure had been sent by the boy conjuror; and he was wondering about the powder it had mentioned, and asking himself just what the plans of the young fellow could be, and if they could be carried out.

His hope from the first had been that when the old voodoo man found himself in great danger he would surrender the white murderer whom he was sheltering. He still clung to that hope. He knew that the blacks were much scared; everything went to show that now. Only the day before they had been bold enough to chase him through the swamps. Now they were in concealment. They were men of small intellect, easily frightened and stampeded. He knew, too, that the thing which had brought about the change in their attitude was the superstition that their luck had failed, or that the spirits were against them; the white girl, the voodooist's intended sacrifice, had escaped, and the spirits were angry because of it. The fear did not stir them to try to get hold of her again; it merely destroyed their courage, so that they were as ready as rabbits to scuttle and hide for safety.

This characteristic of the ignorant and deeply superstitious mind Diamond Dick had often encountered in Indians; and he understood it thoroughly, and was able to use to his advantage.

The thing he most feared, and had for some time worried over, was that the life of the boy conjuror was in great danger; but that clever message Lucky Luke flashed to him largely mitigated this fear. The boy con-

juror was still safe, and was even planning how he could aid his friends in their efforts. It seemed a clear indication that he was not only hopeful, but resourceful, and that his peril was not imminent.

But just how Lucky Luke planned to assist him Diamond Dick could not clearly make out; the message had been brief and imperfect.

He discussed the matter with Handsome Harry and Meg Mallory.

"Ther kid will be thar with ther goods, all right!" was the giant's confident declaration.

CHAPTER XIII.

A DESPERATE DEED.

The return of Ilma to the camp of the voodoo king caused Jepson much dismay, because of the message she brought. And what Lucky Luke overheard her saying to Jepson filled the boy conjuror with uneasiness. It was plain that she had seen the flashes of reflected light on the leaves of the palm and knew what they meant. But the fact that Diamond Dick had seen them, also, was a cause for gratification.

What the girl said to her father Lucky Luke could only guess, for he could not understand their words; but he saw the voodoo man give him a quick, strange look.

"I'm thinking that Diamond Dick will have to hustle, if he gets here in time to do me much good," was his unpleasant reflection. "The deep, dark tar of distrust is being smeared all over me. That black woman's looks would strike me dead, if scowls could kill; I'm guessing that she'd like to run a knife into me. She'll knife Jepson himself sooner or later; she's that kind."

But his courage did not desert him; and that quality of mind which made Diamond Dick sure the boy conjuror was able to look out for himself in the most unfavorable circumstances came now to the fore, as he continued to plan just what he should do if worst came to worst in his case.

He estimated with his eyes the exact number of yards between himself and that powder storehouse, and separating him from the nearest open fire; there was a connection, it can be seen, in his mind, between the two. Fire and gunpowder! They are a combination that is full of suggestion.

He resolved that he would not submit to being tied now, no matter who sought to bind him; he would fight for his freedom, and he would act promptly along the lines of his present planning.

The scared negroes were made more panicky by the girl's report. Even the voodoo king was thrown into a mood of hesitation; and the way in which, as Lucky Luke observed, he glanced now and then at Jepson made

the boy conjuror sure that the old sorcerer was beginning seriously to think of surrendering the murderer to the men who asked for him. He was kept from doing it only by the influence of his daughter; yet how long that influence would be powerful enough to prevail was a question.

Jepson was as panicky as the blacks, but more determined. He had taken his revolver again, and seemed desperately resolved to make a great stand for his liberty and his life. What capture meant he knew only too well.

The old voodoo king inspected his line of gunpowder combination covered with litter beyond the palisades, and stationed close by the gate some of his most reliable men. Then he walked about, ill at ease, mounting now and then to some point from whence he could look off into the palms and bushes. As for Jepson, he put his back against the rocks, and stood there with his revolver ready, the picture of desperation. For a time the boy conjuror seemed to have been quite forgotten.

Suddenly the black lookout on top of the rocks uttered a warning cry that stirred the camp to action.

When he heard it, the voodoo king snatched a fiery brand from the nearest fire, and, swinging it round his head to make it brisk into a blaze, he hurled it over the palisades so that it would fall on the defensive line there. The littered line exploded and flamed.

At the same instant Jepson gave a desperate jump, which placed him by the side of Lucky Luke.

Landing thus, Jepson swung the boy forward, and, poking the muzzle of his revolver into the boy's back, gave him to understand that he meant to use him as a shield, and that a revolver-bullet would be the penalty if he was not pliant.

But the daring and desperate moment which Lucky Luke had been waiting for had arrived, and he did not intend to have his plans miscarry, even though that revolver threatened him. An old and unforgotten acrobatic-trick came into play, by which he hurled himself, with a backward leap, right over the head of Jepson, landing behind and facing him; the whole thing being done in a way that was so sudden and astonishing that Jepson forgot his threat to use his revolver, and, indeed, was hardly given time to think before the boy acrobat was sailing over his head.

Throwing his arms round Jepson as he came down, the boy conjuror caught hold of the revolver, and a struggle for its possession followed. But again Lucky Luke triumphed; and, having gained the weapon, he went bounding toward the gunpowder-store in front of the hut.

In his planning he had meant to snatch up a fire-brand and hurl it into the storehouse of powder, and so bring about an explosion, which, while it might wipe him out with others, would at least throw the blacks into

such a panic that they could not stand before any determined assault which Diamond Dick and Handsome Harry might make.

He stuck to this plan now, holding the revolver to threaten back any one who might try to interfere with him.

The very desperation of the scheme was enough of itself to keep any one from guessing its contemplation; for who would expect the boy conjuror to think of firing the powder, when that would be as likely to result in his own death as in the destruction of any of the others there?

But Lucky Luke's plans had been rather carefully thought out, and seemed, in a measure, safe. And now as he passed the fire, apparently running from Jepson, he caught up a brand that was covered with flames and red coals, and swung it about his head as he had seen the voodoo king do.

But he did not hurl it over the palisades, as the voodoo man did the other; there the expected flash and dull explosion had come, and fire was flaring and a stenchy smoke rolling upward.

The boy conjuror ran on along the face of the rocks as far as he could get; and then turning about he deliberately threw the fire-brand into the gaping mouth of the storehouse, it being open at the time to enable the blacks to get at its contents quickly, as it was far enough from any of the fires to make them think it perfectly safe.

As he thus hurled the flaming brand, Lucky Luke threw himself backward with all his might to the ground, to get as far from the point of explosion as possible.

He had said that if he carried out his plan it would be like the opening of the jaws of Vesuvius.

It was not quite so serious as that, though it was bad enough; the powder was damp, otherwise the whole ridge would have been torn up and blotted out of existence. But there was enough dry gunpowder and blasting-powder in that hole in the ground to cause a tremendous explosion—so tremendous that the boy conjuror was hurled still farther back, as the ground itself seemed to open; and when he dropped, he fell without sign of life or motion. Apparently his desperate remedy for a desperate situation had brought his own destruction.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONCLUSION.

"Ye-e-e—ow! Wough-h-h! Wake up snakes and lick lickerish!"

The exclamation so characteristic was drawn from Handsome Harry by the sudden flaming forth of the line of fire and smoke by the palisades and the terrific explosion which seemed almost instantly to follow it.

Diamond Dick and his companions had veered to pass round the end of the stenchy fire which they expected would spring up there on their approach, for they dreaded the choking fumes which they knew in that event the wind would bring to them.

They had gone so far that when the acrid smoke billowed out and began to spread over the swamp they were well to the right of it, and it rolled past them; but they turned almost straight toward the point where that terrible explosion had occurred, sure that it signified an event of importance.

It had been Diamond Dick's hope to go round the camp of the blacks, and, gaining the rocky ridge which the Indian girl said backed it, get on top of the latter, and perhaps be able from there to cover the camp with their revolvers and force the surrender of Jepson and the boy acrobat.

But what had now happened changed this plan.

Handsome Harry leaped to the front, running heavily, and bellowing his astonishment as well as his determination.

"Hyar we comes!" he squalled, hoping to send the sound to the boy acrobat and encourage him, if his condition was as desperate as that explosion hinted it might be. "Hyar we air! B'ilin' along as ef we had wings—fourteen thousand wings, and was usin' every one of 'em. Wough-h! Jes hold on; we're comin'! Wake up snakes and shine yer scales. Stand ther niggers off; stand 'em off! Wough-h-h! Whoop! Ye-e-e—ow!"

Close beside him ran Diamond Dick, who did not stop to see if the girls were keeping up with him; it was not a time for that.

Off at their right as they ran along rolled the smoke from that line of flaring fire by the palisades, spreading across the swamp and screening the shining palms, blotting out the sun, too, in that direction; a vile-smelling smoke which seemed to have fed on all the villainous scents of a belching volcano; no man with a nose on his face could have stood before it. But fortunately it did not reach the little group hurrying toward the camp of the blacks, though a whiff of it occasionally told them what it must be to any one who was in its path.

"I hope the wind holds as it is," was the thought of Diamond Dick as he ran on.

Then the huts and the rocks back of them were dimly seen, and the palisades where the fire flamed. In the midst of the camp the ground seemed torn and tumbled; some of the huts were shredded and had fallen over; and a mad half-dozen or more of negroes raged back and forth with shrieks like madmen.

"Wough-h!" squalled the giant when he beheld them. "Charge 'em; charge 'em! Stand yer ground!"

But he did not see Lucky Luke.

It was a good thing that the line of fire outside the

palisades was not close up against them; for it would have been troublesome in that case for the giant and Diamond Dick to have reached the palisaded gate.

They ran in between the flames and the palisades, and, though the stench there was something awful, they bore it, as they forced their way on.

The howling blacks inside, who had been capering like maniacs, seemed to have regained their senses enough to know that there was a gate somewhere, and now they came tearing out through the exit pell-mell, dashing right over the flame of the fire and on into the evil-scented swamp.

Their mad dash out of the gate left it open, and so made a way for the easy entrance of Handsome Harry and Diamond Dick, which they were not slow to take advantage of.

In another minute they were in the camp itself, finding themselves unopposed.

They reached the spot where the explosion had occurred, finding here and there as they moved on a black body; and then the torn rent in the earth, with the shattered palm huts scattered about.

"Whar's ther kid?" bellowed the giant, looking about as he swung his big revolver. "Whar's ther kid? Wough-h! Have they kerried him off? Wake up snakes and find him!"

A blackened and shaky figure disengaged itself from the ruins of a palm hut by the farthest rocks, and came tottering toward them; it was the figure of Lucky Luke. He had just recovered consciousness, having been aroused by the bellowing cries of the giant.

And he was practically unhurt, though he had suffered some bruises, and his clothing—it was shreds and tatters! "Wough-h! You're safe!" cried the giant.

The next moment he was lifting the boy acrobat in his arms and giving expression to his uproarious delight.

Among the dead, slain by the explosion which in his desperation the boy acrobat had brought about, was Hank Jepson and the old voodoo king.

The black girl, Ilma, had disappeared, along with the negroes who had remained unhurt.

Twenty-four hours afterward, under the guidance of the Indian girl, Diamond Dick's party was back in Panama; where Meg Mallory found her father, who had returned, uninjured, from his search for timber in the swamps.

The Indian girl's eyes were made to shine, and her lips to give expression to chattering thanks, when she saw the coins which Diamond Dick and his friends and Meg Mallory heaped, as a reward, into her brown palms.

THE END.

Next week's issue will be No. 602, "Diamond Dick and the Coast Indians; or, Handsome Harry's Closest Call." Another story of the Panama Canal Zone.



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STRANGE HAPPENINGS.

ALLIGATORS AS PETS.

Away at Hot Springs, in the State of Arkansas, you may see what has been described as "the most gruesome and yet one of the most beautiful sights in the whole wide world." You may see a comfortable-looking dwelling standing in a veritable Garden of Eden several acres in area, through which a small mountain stream winds and trickles, and in which many small lakes are tucked away among luxuriant growths of water-flowers and plants; and the horrible sight of a thousand alligators. The truth to tell, this glorious garden is an alligator-farm, and it is owned by an English gentleman and lady. They are Mr. and Mrs. H. J. Campbell, the former the son of a colonel and the latter the daughter of parents well known in society.

Three years have passed since the farm was founded. It owes its existence to the growing scarcity of alligators, and consequently an increase in the price of the reptiles' skins, for which there is a very large demand.

It seems that Mr. Campbell once made it his business to act as guide to alligator-hunting parties. This was when the sport was a rage in America. The swamps and bayous of Florida were his chief hunting-ground; but in time, the reptiles being killed at the rate of a million a year, decade after decade, the sport fell off, and Mr. Campbell found his business as a guide at a standstill.

Then it was that it occurred to him to start his alligator-farm. It was a happy idea, for only success has crowned the experiment. The lakes in the pretty garden form the quarters of the strange creatures. In one you will find very small alligators, in the next reptiles of a larger size, and in the next larger alligators still, and so on. This classification is essential on account of the cannibalistic tendencies of the saurians.

Horrible to relate, a full-grown alligator will kill and devour a smaller specimen with all the pleasure with which

it will kill and eat any other living creature. It is also owing to this gruesome fact that the eggs found on the farm are collected and hatched in incubators. They are found in large, comfortable nests, in clutches of from thirty to sixty, are in color of a yellowish-white, and in size equal to a turkey's egg. If left alone it must be generally known that the heat of the sun would in time suffice to hatch them.

In the reptile's native haunts, directly the eggs burst and the young appear, the mother regards her duties as completed. Up to this time, however, during the whole period of the incubation, her ferocity and daring has been little less than amazing. Every person and creature who has happened to approach the vicinity of her nest has been attacked and driven away.

A baby alligator is quite a pretty little thing, and as lively as a cricket. In many respects it resembles a tadpole. It has eight yellow stripes on its tail, which gradually disappear as it grows and develops, and large round eyes which sparkle like finely cut diamonds. If the little creature is fed regularly by its owner and treated with gentleness and kindness it will become as domesticated and as affectionate as a dog.

One little thing which a New York gentleman succeeded in taming would even follow his master up-stairs. Times out of number, too, this same little alligator was found basking before the fire with his head pillowed on the cat's body, and on other occasions sharing puss' milk.

It is worthy of mention that as far as is known Mr. Campbell is the only man who has ever succeeded in breeding alligators in confinement. There are specimens in most zoological gardens, but, strange to say, there is not a single authenticated instance of any of these having ever reproduced. At the Hot Springs farm, however, the alligators, as already intimated, build nests and breed quite regularly.

It is rare that Mr. Campbell is at home on any day for any great length of time. So the arduous task of superintending the management of their thousand strange and dangerous pets falls chiefly on the shoulders of his wife.

Mr. Campbell, it would seem, is often away in search of wild specimens for his breeding pens and in search of eggs. No man has hunted the alligator more than he, nor is any man more skilful in capturing the creature alive and unharmed. Indeed, so skilful is he in the latter respect that he is known to practically the whole of America as "Alligator Joe." Only a strong-noosed rope and an iron spike are his implements of war. With the latter he rouses the monster from his lair, and with the rope he captures him.

Coming quickly to close quarters, as the frenzied monster turns to attack him, roaring like a mad bull, he throws his lariat with an accuracy that is quite uncanny, and the next fraction of a second the creature is writhing and groaning with his huge jaws locked firmly together in the greatest rage of mingled fright and anger. But, fight he never so strenuously, it is impossible for him to escape. As the struggle goes on, tighter becomes the noose, till at last the reptile is only too glad to give in. Then he is bound more securely, and eventually placed in a huge box and put on the train for Hot Springs.

The smallest alligators on the farm are no larger than

lizards, but many of the larger measure a good fourteen feet in length. The veteran, old Joe, is a magnificent specimen. Sixteen feet in length and large in proportion, he is said to be fully two hundred years old, which no doubt is true enough, for alligators, it must be remembered, live for as many as five hundred years.

This novel farm, the only one of its kind in all the world, is worth traveling thousands of miles to see. Sunday is the show-day. Often on that day hundreds of people visit the place. And what a sight meets their astonished gaze! There are alligators floundering down chutes at almost the rate at which the lightning scuds across the plain; there are others playing seesaw on huge planks fixed across boulders; and still others licking their master's face, and shaking "hands" with him. There never was such a place before.

Then there is also the sight of seeing the creatures fed. No meat comes amiss to an alligator, from the most putrid to the daintiest, and from the largest chunks to the thinnest slices.

Indeed, the reptile will devour almost any and everything devourable, and in about the ugliest and greediest manner imaginable. Lastly there is the enjoyment of purchasing a souvenir. Alligator teeth and jewelry-bags made of alligator-skin, stuffed alligators in all sorts of queer and pleasing poses, and even the live alligators themselves are all on sale.

In conclusion, it may be added several of Mr. Campbell's pets are on view in the parks of St. Louis, and many others in New York shop-windows as advertisements.

CHUMS.

A curious story is told of a cat which lived for some years in the underground stables of a coal-mine. It was always to be found in the stall belonging to an old donkey when that animal was resting from its labors.

One day, owing to the carelessness of its driver in unloading it, the donkey suffered a severe strain, and it was quite unable to perform its daily work.

For nearly a fortnight the donkey lay in agony in its stable, and during that time the cat scarcely ever left its friend.

Sometimes the pit lads would drive it away, but it would always steal stealthily back again; and when the donkey died as a result of its injuries, the cat began to howl pitifully, and would not be comforted.

But the climax came when they were taking the donkey's carcass to the surface. The cat began to scratch and fly at the men who were removing it, and became so violent that it had to be killed.

FISH WHICH HATCH THEIR YOUNG IN THEIR MOUTHS.

Fishes of the genus *Chromis*, found in the Sea of Galilee, and also of the genus *Arius*, allied to the catfish, have the very peculiar habit of carrying their eggs about in their mouths, where they appear to be safely lodged during the period of hatching in the large and capacious pharynx or hinder part of the mouth cavity. The eggs of these remarkable fishes having been hatched by them in their mouths, the young ones continue, until they are able to feed for themselves, to use the parent's mouth as their home, and

have been observed during that stage of their existence swimming in and out of their mouth-dwelling. A frog which is found in Chile, *Rhinoderma Darwinii*, has the same habit. It possesses two vocal sacs, which have, however, become diverted from their original use, and are now utilized as brood-pouches. Into these sacs, or pouches, of the males, which alone possess them, the eggs are introduced; there they are protected and undergo development, and within them the young are kept until able to forage for themselves.

ANIMALS THAT NEVER DRINK.

Mr. Blanford, in his book on Abyssinia, says that neither the dorcas nor Bennett's gazelle (two allied species) ever drink.

Darwin states, in his "Voyage of a Naturalist," that, unless the wild llamas of Patagonia drink salt water, in many localities they must drink none at all.

The large and interesting group of sloths are alike in never drinking.

A parrot is said to have lived in the Zoological Gardens, London, for fifty-two years without a drop of water.

It is often said that rabbits in a wild state never drink. The late Rev. J. G. Wood doubted whether this idea was correct, and recorded the fact that they feed on the herbage when it is heavy with dew, and, therefore, practically drink when eating.

In the autumn and winter, when sheep are feeding on turnips, they require little or no water.

A BLOW FROM BEHIND.

BY A. COMSTOCK.

"We will desert the ship to-night, Bill."

"Aye, aye, Jack, to-night; for the craft will sail to-morrow morning."

"Have you got everything ready, as I——"

"Yes," interrupted Jack. "I've filled my pockets with sea-biscuit, and have just put on two pairs of pants and two extra shirts."

"That's right. I'm prepared in the same way. As soon as it's dark we'll just lower ourselves by the ship's cable, and swim to that little island off the starboard bow, where we'll lay concealed until the ship sails, when we can easily make our way to the larger island."

The speakers were both young men. Bill was short and stout, with fair hair and blue eyes; his companion was tall, and of dark complexion. They were brothers. They stood just forward of the windlass, on board of the bark *Comrade*, in which vessel they had shipped before the mast, a year previous to the time of which we write.

They were excellent seamen, but the first officer, who was very fond of his glass, had taken a dislike to them, because, on a certain occasion, they refused to drink with him.

Since then he had "hazed"—overworked—them most unmercifully; had deprived them of their watch below, and threatened to seize them up in the rigging and flog the skin from their backs, if they uttered a word of complaint. He had heard, he said, that "cold-water men" could do more work than those who drank, and he was going to prove that it was an "infernal lie."

It was not to be wondered at, therefore, that when the captain anchored off the Navigator Islands for wood and water, the brothers resolved to desert the vessel in the manner already described.

"The natives won't be overfriendly to us, I reckon," continued Bill, as the two seated themselves on the knighthead; "but they are preferable to the mate of this craft."

"Aye, aye," answered Jack. "He's spoiling all the officers on board of this ship, with the exception of the captain, who is a good man. In my opinion, a savage is better than a civilized tyrant."

The backs of the two, while they conversed, were toward the windlass, otherwise they might have seen a tall man stealthily emerge from behind the foremast, and steal on tiptoe to the quarter-deck.

He seated himself on the steerage-hatch, and, clenching his fists, shook them violently.

"They will desert the ship, will they?" he hissed between his set teeth. "Ho, ho! we shall see how they'll make out, for as sure as my name is Grumps, and I'm first officer of this ship—which isn't the first one, neither, I've been chief officer of—I'll l'arn 'em a lesson they won't easily forget."

So saying, he glided into the cabin, and, entering the stateroom, summoned the second, third, and fourth mates.

They came promptly enough, anticipating a treat; nor were they disappointed. Grumps poured out for each of them a couple of glasses of the "Jamaica" which he kept in his chest, before he proceeded to business.

"And now," said he, while they were drinking, "you can swim, can you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, it seems the two lubberly rascals, Bill and Jack Helmet, intend to desert to-night. It is now twilight, so we have no time to lose. I want you to swim to the little island off our starboard bow, which it seems is the place where the youngsters intend to go, and lay in wait for 'em. I'll join you with my cat before they come, and as soon as they land we are to pounce upon 'em, tie 'em to a couple of trees, and flog 'em within an inch of their lives."

"But why not flog 'em on board ship?" inquired the third mate. "It seems to me we oughtn't to go to so much trouble for them graceless scamps."

"Nonsense," returned the mate. "You know very well, or at least you ought to know, that our fool of a captain has forbidden flogging aboard of his ship. If we

flog 'em on the island he can't say that we've broken the rules—d'ye see? We can easily manage the business, as the skipper is ashore."

"Aye, aye, you are right, sir," cried the third mate. "I didn't think of that. You've a wonderful mind for planning, Mr. Grumps."

"So he has," chimed in the second and fourth officers, directing wistful glances at the bottle of Jamaica.

"And he knows how to carry out his plans, too," exclaimed the third mate, looking in the same direction.

Grumps "treated" again; then, having emptied the bottle at one swallow, he ordered the mates to get themselves ready for their swim. They promptly obeyed, after which the mate ascended to the deck, and ordered the two brothers into the forehold.

"There's some loose strands of rope there," he continued, "which I want you to make oakum of; and mind that you do it in the dark, too, for I can't afford to waste my lamp-oil on such lubbers as you are."

The two brothers jumped into the hold; then Grumps told the watch that they might go below. This they were glad to do; and, having thus cleared the decks, the mate called up the three officers and ordered them to swim to the island. Chuekling to themselves, they dropped into the water; soon after, Grumps, seeing them land, also lowered himself into the sea, and, being a good swimmer, he was soon with them.

"Now, then," he hissed through his teeth, as the four crouched in a clump of shrubbery, "we'll soon have the satisfaction of flogging the lubbers."

So saying, he drew from his pocket a formidable-looking cat-o'-nine-tails, and flourished it triumphantly about his head. A moment later he fell upon his face with a low groan, as a heavy war-club crushed through his skull.

His companions heard behind them a terrific yell, and, turning, beheld half a dozen naked savages, armed with long spears, rushing toward them, while near the dead body of the mate stood a gigantic chief—the man who had dealt the fatal blow—leaning upon his club.

"Back!" he exclaimed, in "tolerable" English, as his savage companions approached. "No care kill all. Dis one"—pointing at the corpse of the mate—"call my wife bad name once when ashore, and kick one of my little piganiny boys. Dis why me kill him; no care kill more. Rest mus' go back to ship quick as can."

The officers were glad to obey. They at once struck out for the ship, which they reached just as the brothers were preparing to lower themselves by the cable into the water. Of course, on hearing the "fearful news" which the three mates now communicated to all hands, the two young men decided not to leave the craft. Grumps, their enemy, being dead, there was no longer any reason why they should do so.

The captain, who arrived on board at daylight, was much shocked on learning what had happened. He landed upon the little island with a picked boat's crew; but no trace either of the savages or of the dead body of the mate could now be found.

"I see how it is," remarked an old tar a few hours after, as the ship went bowling out of the harbor. "Them cannibals has carried the body off in their canoe, and perhaps they are a-roasting it in some out-of-the-way nook of t'other island."



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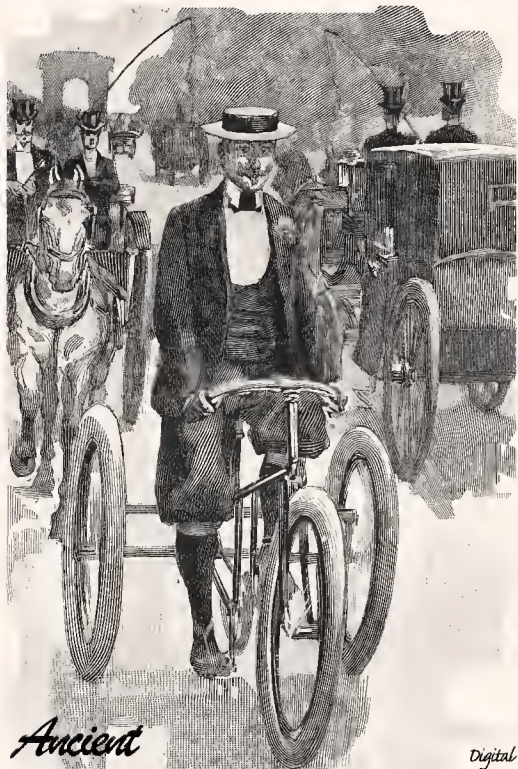
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