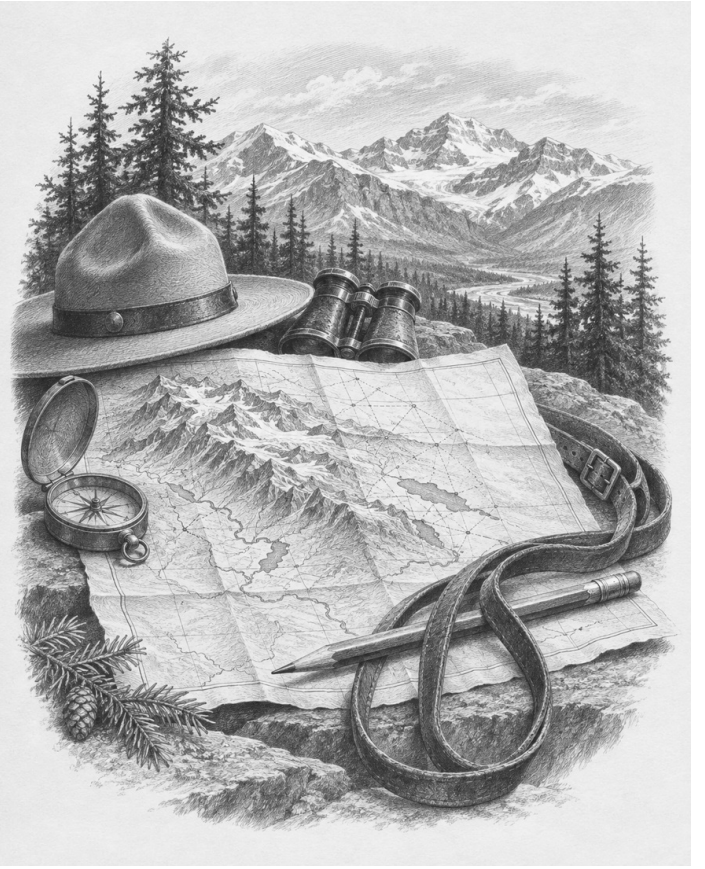
PIPCUB EDITIONS

Sergeant Dick of the Royal Mounted Police

John G. Rowe

THE AUTHOR



John G. Rowe

Author vignette inspired by the published work.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John G. Rowe

John G. Rowe wrote adventure fiction for younger readers. The books published under his name often turn on practical questions of distance, resources and courage: where a character must go, what can be carried and who can be trusted along the route.

Sergeant Dick of the Royal Mounted Police places these questions within a recognizable tradition of mounted-police adventure. Its hero's obligations give the journey a direction, while the demands of travel give the story its physical scale.

SERGEANT DICK OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED POLICE



SERGEANT DICK TOOK IN ALL THESE PARTICULARS.

SERGEANT DICK
OF THE
ROYAL MOUNTED POLICE

A Thrilling Story of the
Canadian Woods

By JOHN G. ROWE

AUTHOR OF "CRUSOE ISLAND," "LIGHTSHIP PIRATES,"
"THE MYSTERY OF THE DERELICT," ETC.

NEW YORK
CUPPLES & LEON COMPANY

SERGEANT DICK OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED POLICE

By JOHN G. ROWE

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THE SECRET OF THE MYSTERY IDOL
THE LIGHTSHIP PIRATES

CUPPLES & LEON COMPANY, New York

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SERGEANT DICK OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED POLICE
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SERGEANT DICK OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED POLICE

CHAPTER I
THE HOODED RUSTLERS

Sergeant John Dick, of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, was leading his horse up a steep and rugged gorge in the great southwest region of Canada. It was close by the United States border, and practically in the shadow of the Rocky Mountains.

A fine, military-looking figure, Sergeant Dick cut, in his scarlet tunic, riding-breeches, and "Stetson" or broad-brimmed, bell-crowned hat. He carried his rifle at the trail in his left hand, and had the bridle of his horse looped over his right arm.

The animal was limping painfully. It had got a thorn in its hoof lower down the trail, where this was on the open prairie, and had gone dead lame before its master discovered its injury and could extract the thorn.

The accident was particularly annoying to Sergeant Dick, for it was almost imperative he should be at the Paquita Island Reservation, just over the United States border, by sundown, and the lord of day was already well down the western sky.

A howling hurricane of wind made progress still more difficult, blowing dead in his teeth as it was. No ordinary gusty gale was this, but a ceaseless avalanche of wind tearing with a terrific howl along the gorge, raging against man and beast in insensate fury.

At times Sergeant Dick would turn his back to the storm, and the horse, with head also turned, would sidle along almost broadside to it, the better to keep its feet and hold its own.

Man and horse were thus maneuvering one of the turns in the gorge when, high above the howl of the hurricane, rang the sharp, air-splitting crack of a rifle close by—just in front—and simultaneously Sergeant Dick staggered and nearly fell, feeling a sudden numbing, burning pain upon the right side of the head, above his ear.

His Stetson hat, which had so long resisted the tugging of the wind, was whirled from his head, and went rolling like a wheel, on its brim, away down the pass before the gale.

With a thrill of anger, rather than of any bodily fear, the sergeant promptly dived behind his horse, drawing it by the reins at the same time fully broadside across the rocky pass.

As he did so, he beheld for the first time a startling tableau or drama being enacted ahead, round the bend in the gorge.

The track still ascended, but the precipitous, seventy to two hundred feet high cliffs, which shut him in and almost excluded the westering sun, became at the scene gentle acclivities, thickly covered with dense undergrowth and forest trees from the edge of the road to their summits.

It was an ideal spot for an ambuscade, and such was what had taken place. The stage-coach from Settleford, to Paquita Springs over the border, was halted in the dim twilight of the leafy avenue, and the driver and passengers were all lined up at one side of the road, with their hands in the air—women as well as men—under the menace of two *ghost-like* bandits or "rustlers," pointing an automatic pistol in either hand and with rifles on backs.

Ghost-like indeed the bandits were. There was no other word for their bizarre and spectral appearance.

There were four others, likewise attired, busy around the coach, from which they were taking bags and boxes, and loading up a round dozen of horses. Two of the horses had evidently been taken from the traces of the coach, which was always drawn by four.

All six "rustlers" were clad in loose white linen frocks, which descended to mid-thigh or even lower, and had great white peaked hoods, like monks' cowls, drawn completely over their heads and faces!

Only two holes for the eyes showed in each hood; so the reader can well imagine how weird and ghostly they looked in the twilight of the leafy archway, in spite of the rifles slung across their backs or the Browning automatic pistols in their hands, and the top boots showing under the white frocks.

Sergeant Dick took in all these particulars—the whole thrilling tableau before him—at a single glance of course. And, even as he did so, he comprehended that it was not one of the six hooded, ghostly figures beside the stage-coach who had shot at him and so narrowly missed ending his career.

The marksman was clearly a seventh member of the gang—on the look-out, and without a doubt perched upon the rocks at either hand.

Sergeant Dick swiftly removed his eyes from the tableau under the storm-tossed trees ahead, and ran them over the two bold cliffs forming the jaws of the pass at that end. He caught sight of a small cloudlet of smoke, still hanging limply in the air above a ledge just below the summit of the right-hand rock.

The rock behind the ledge acted as a wind-screen, and, although a hurricane was shrieking overhead and sweeping the rocky pass below, the air at the point was as still as if there were no wind at all.

Just as the Sergeant sighted the cloudlet of smoke, a jet of flame darted from behind a boulder on the ledge, the gorge rang again to the echoing detonation of a rifle, and he felt the noble animal shielding him give a convulsive shudder, which told him it had been hit.

It yet stood stockstill and upright before him, however, and so he was satisfied that it could not have been struck in a vital spot.

Swift as the thought itself, Dick brought his own rifle to his shoulder, and leveled it across the saddle at a white triangular tip of cloth, showing above the boulder on the ledge, alongside the new cloudlet of smoke. That white triangular tip he knew was the peaked headgear of another of the dreaded White Hood Rustlers.

He got that triangular tip of white cloth dead in front of his sights with the quickness of considerable practice and rare skill; and simultaneously he pressed the trigger.

As the report of his rifle, blown along by the furious wind, went echoing down the rocky pass, a white-clad, hooded form leaped up from behind the boulder and went scuttling into a little cleft beside the ledge, vanishing as swiftly as a rabbit diving into its hole.

Sergeant Dick smiled a little grimly. He was used to seeing well entrenched foes skedaddle—vacate their quarters as a little too warm—under his straight shooting.

He knew for a certainty that his bullet had gone clean through the white hood of the fugitive rustle-sentinel, within an inch or two of its rascally wearer's skull. The bullet would have bored a hole through *that* if only a little more than just the tip or peak of the white hood had been showing.

It was a splendid shot, like hitting a card torn in half and stuck on the chimney pot of a three- or four-story house.

Besides, the shot was such a swift reply to the one preceding it. No wonder it scared its recipient from his strong position—"shook him up some," to use the language of the country.

The six bandits in the leafy avenue in front of Sergeant Dick had all turned in his direction at the first shot. The four who had been removing the loot from the coach were now making warily for him—scattered in a line across the avenue, with rifles at the ready, like hunters stalking game.

He turned his attention to them, wondering not a little why they did not pour a volley into him or his breastwork of horseflesh. It was evident they considered him their "meat"—a "dead goner" already, and were anxious to take his horse, if not himself, alive.

A live horse is always desirable property in the Far West.

But the ghostly, white-robed and hooded ruffians speedily discovered that they were reckoning without their host. Their attention was somewhat distracted by the sudden appearance of the comrade they had posted as "look-out man" upon the bluff, and then—crack—crack—crack!

Sergeant Dick's rifle pealed out sharply, and as many of the four rustlers advancing upon him staggered or stumbled.

But to the police officer's amazement, none of the three fell, although he believed he had hit all three badly.

Recovering immediately from the effects of their hurts, the fellows rushed forward, firing wildly and furiously at the plucky young policeman. Then, suddenly, in a lull of the hurricane, came

the clatter of rapidly approaching hoofs *behind Sergeant Dick*, and immediately afterwards two shrill, sharp whistles from the bluff or cliff above him.

He caught a fleeting glimpse of the hooded sentinel within the cleft in the rock, evidently returning to that coign of vantage, with a view to helping to shoot him down—saw the fellow put his left hand under his hood.

It was this man, undoubtedly, who had uttered those two warning whistles, for he now immediately vanished again inside the cleft. Simultaneously the four rustlers firing at Dick wheeled about, and ran for the shelter of the woods on either hand.

CHAPTER II
MURIEL ARNOLD

With only one cartridge remaining in the magazine of his Mauser, which he preferred and was allowed to carry instead of a Ross rifle, Sergeant John Dick was thinking of falling back upon his revolver, when the unexpected retreat was beaten by the rustlers.

With the rapidly approaching hoofs hardly sounding now in his ears, with the hurricane again tearing past him, Dick turned his head. He beheld a two-horse top-buggy whirling swiftly up the pass toward him in the teeth of the storm.

These vehicles generally have only a single seat, capable of accommodating two persons, however; and this one contained two young women—mere girls, both of them, the elder not more than twenty years of age!

Dick saw that the girls were not unaware of what was transpiring. The one who was not driving, the younger and—even in that moment of excitement he could not help noticing—by far the prettier, held a rifle at the ready, with a grim, determined look upon her charming face, while her companion was urging the horses to their fastest up the rocky and broken incline.

“Say! Who are they? Why should we cut and run?” came a shout borne on the wind from the direction of the four rustlers to Sergeant Dick’s ears.

“They’re the—”

He did not catch the end of the answer from the fellow on the cliff. The word, whatever it was, was lost on the raging wind.

But apparently it was heard by one or more of the gang in the road, for they immediately communicated the tidings to one another, and then shouted and waved to the pair guarding the driver and passengers of the stage-coach.

Sergeant Dick had edged his horse partly against the angle of the cliff. He now dived under the animal’s head and, rushing round the rock, fired at the fleeing quartet with his revolver.

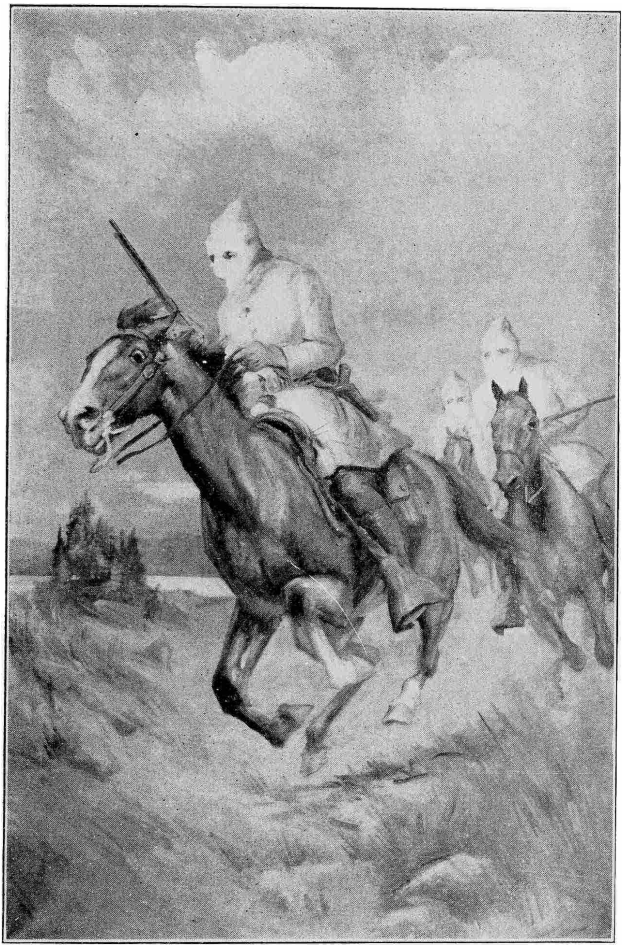
He hit one in the broad of the back, he was certain. The fellow only stumbled, however, and, promptly recovering and wheeling about, sent a shot back at him with lightning speed, but fortunately with nothing like accuracy.

Then all four plunged into the thicket out of his sight, and he could hear them trampling and bursting through the thick growth in a line parallel with the road, bawling as they ran, and unintelligibly, so far as he was concerned.

The pair guarding the people of the coach backed hurriedly to their horses, what time the sergeant hurriedly slipped another clip of five cartridges into the magazine of his rifle.

Gaining their horses' sides, the two rustlers bounded into the saddle, firing a couple of shots apiece from their pistols over the heads of their late prisoners, to overawe them still. Then digging their spurs deep into their mounts' flanks, away into the wood on the windward side they tore, dragging the other horses after them by a long lariat which had been passed through all the bridles.

Seeing the pair thus making off, Sergeant Dick threw all further prudence to the winds, and, running forward, pumped two shots with swift accuracy into the leafy covert, even as it closed over their retreating forms.



THEN DIGGING THEIR SPURS DEEP, AWAY THEY TORE.

The shrill, almost human-like scream of a horse badly stricken came out of the thicket. Sergeant Dick ran on along the woods, pelting two more shots into these at random in the direction he knew the fugitives were taking.

Then, suddenly, all became red and blurred before him. He reeled blindly and fell upon his hands and knees, his rifle flying far out of his hands.

He had forgotten his wound in the excitement of the fight, had been losing blood profusely from it all the time, and the consequent weakness came suddenly and unexpectedly upon him.

When he opened his eyes again, he looked into the most beautiful face he believed he had ever seen—the face of the younger of the two girls who had come, in so surprising and plucky a manner, to his reënforcement.

He was lying on the ground, and she was kneeling beside him, binding up the injury to his head, while some one supported his shoulders behind. On the other side of him was kneeling the elder girl, with her face buried in her hands, and sobbing bitterly, great salt tears oozing through her fingers and dropping to the ground.

Around were standing the robbed passengers of the stage-coach, rueful and vindictive-looking, none of them in their bitter resentment against Fate taking any notice of the weeping girl.

"Thank you—thank you! You are very kind," murmured Dick. "But—but I'm all right now, and the rustlers—they mustn't be allowed to get away. My horse, quick! Men, who'll follow me? Any of you?"

The weeping girl lifted her head with an ecstatic cry.

"He will not die—he will live? Oh, Heaven be praised! Ah, and you have hidden the blood upon his face, Muriel! I cannot bear the sight of blood. It—it always makes me feel sick. But, then, of course, I am weak-minded, you know—not like other people, or like Muriel here, who is as good as she is brave."

"Be quiet, Jenny," said the younger girl, flushing hotly. "It is impossible, sergeant, for you to follow the robbers. Your horse is lame, you sure forget."

Sergeant Dick rose to his feet with the aid of the two men who had been supporting his head. He saw that two horses remained in the traces of the rifled coach.

"Lend me one of your horses, driver," he cried. "I must follow these ruffians without delay."

"Sorry, sergeant, but one horse 'ud be no power o' use in pulling the coach from here to Paquita Springs; and, asides, you yourself be in no fit condition I guess to go man-trailin' arter seven rustlers of their type. You are noo to these parts, that's plain, or I reckon you'd have heard of the White Hood Gang—the worstest, most desp'rit gang this region has ever yit seen, I calculate."

"I *have* heard of the gang. But its notoriety would not deter me from following it, only spur me on, if I had my strength back, and my horse, too, were equal to the call I should have to make upon it. Driver, you have been robbed of the gold you were carrying to the Indian Reservation on Paquita Island?"

"Sure," was the characteristic reply, with a doleful nod.

"Then I must let the gang go, even if I were equal to following them, and accompany you in the coach with all speed to the Reservation. What the result will be when the Indians learn that the gold sent them has been stolen, I shudder to think of—judging from the frame of mind they have been lately showing."

"Guess they'll go on the war-path, and jist raise Cain around here," growled the stage-coach driver, amid horrified ejaculations from all the passengers.

"I know of a quicker means of reaching the Reservation than by the stage," said the girl Muriel, her lovely face flushing again at thus once more attracting the attention of all. "My cousin here and I live near by on Lake Paquita, as some of these people may know—the coach-driver certainly does—in a house built on piles over a shoal out in the middle of the lake. We keep a large sailing scow, which my uncle calls his 'Ark'; and we can convey you in it to Paquita Island at the lower end of the lake in the shortest time possible."

"Why—why! Your uncle has surely taken the idea of his lake-dwelling and his scow or 'ark' from Fenimore Cooper's famous novel, the 'Deerslayer,'" gasped Sergeant Dick.

"That is so. My uncle was so charmed with the idea of the lake-fortress in Fenimore Cooper's tale, the 'Deerslayer,' that he determined to adopt the same mode of living when he first came here. We have the book at Water Castle, as we call our lake-home, and it is the most-read book in our little library, I believe, except as regards Jenny, who, just like poor, half-witted Hetty Hutter in the novel, is always reading her Bible. Uncle Alf has said that having a half-witted daughter like Hetty Hutter also helped to put into his head the idea of living like 'Floating Tom Hutter' in 'The Deerslayer'; and poor Jenny herself models her life on Hetty Hutter's, reading the Bible regularly, and trying to do good always in

her own simple way. You will come with us in the buggy? Uncle Alf contrived an extra seat at the back, on which we might carry extra marketing. Our name, by the way, is Arnold."

"Thank you. I shall be glad to avail myself of your kind offer, Miss Arnold. Certainly I must reach the Indian Reservation before news of the robbery of the stage, and the gold they were to receive by it, gets to their ears."

Sergeant Dick was helped on to the back seat of the buggy, all the marketing being disposed under it inside a kind of locker; and then, parting from the stage-coach people, away the two girls and he whirled at top speed along the leafy avenue. His lame horse, of course, he left behind, to be brought along in the rear of the stage-coach, which would perforce proceed at a walk as far as the next stopping-place.

At the speed it traveled, the buggy was soon out of the gorge, and at a point where the road forked, the coach road continuing on in a straight line, and the other—a mere grass-grown cattle track, barely perceptible—leading away at right angles through dense woods.

Along this second leafy avenue the two girls and the sergeant bowled more rapidly still. They presently came out on the shores of a lovely lake, lying placidly in the bosom of the mountains, which dense woods covered from the water-line to their rounded summits.

"Behold our lake home—Water Castle!" cried the younger girl, pointing out across the storm-ruffled water to a most strange-looking structure—a house like a huge Madeira-cake standing on innumerable legs, about a quarter of a mile from the shore.

CHAPTER III
THE HOUSE IN THE LAKE

"It is certainly a most admirable situation for safety and defensive purposes," said Sergeant Dick, regarding the distant lake-dwelling with great curiosity and interest.

"You will find it even stronger than it looks," laughed Muriel Arnold. "My uncle has been quite ingenious, I consider, in the way he has fortified it. He has improved on Fenimore Cooper's idea; and I am sure that you will say that the place is almost impregnable when you have seen over it. We keep our horses and the buggy on that little island you see just behind the castle."

"Signal to mother, Muriel," said her cousin Jenny, a little impatiently.

They had all three alighted from the buggy. Muriel drew an automatic pistol from her belt, and fired three shots into the air.

At the southern end of the strange dwelling out in the lake appeared to be a kind of platform; and, quickly on the echoing reports of the pistol shots—which would carry far in the light mountain air and across the water at any time, but were now blown directly towards the house by the strong wind—the figure of a woman appeared on the platform.

She seemed to regard them through a spyglass, and remained gazing at them a long time, so long, in fact, that Jenny Arnold asked:

"What ails mother? Surely she can see that it is you and I, Muriel, through the field-glass. And the sergeant's red coat ought to reassure her. She knows the uniform of the Mounted Police."

Muriel was waving her long white scarf vigorously to the distant figure.

"Naturally she does not know what to make of you being in my company," said Sergeant Dick.

"Of course," said Muriel, "she is concerned, and fears something terrible must have happened to us or to my uncle and cousins."

The figure on the platform of "Water Castle" turned and hurried to the farther end, where she evidently stepped into a boat of some kind, concealed by the house.

A minute later Sergeant John Dick saw a long, low craft, not unlike the ordinary conception of Noah's ark, slowly emerging into view round the far side of the platform and house.

As it came round the corner of the "castle" into full view, Sergeant Dick saw it was furnished with a short, stumpy mast, upon which a ridiculously small leg-of-mutton sail was being hoisted by the only apparent occupant.

Small though the sail was, it served its purpose well, and, bellying before the wind, caused the great, clumsy-looking craft to slip with considerable speed through the choppy little waves caused by the moaning wind. The figure aboard ran aft, and, taking a long sweep which was rigged astern to act as tiller and rudder combined, brought the ark's broad nose steadily round almost into the eye of the wind, and headed the craft for a point close to where the two girls and the police officer stood.

Leading the horses, Muriel made along the shore for the point the ark was steering towards. Her cousin and Sergeant Dick followed leisurely, the last-mentioned feeling his wound very slightly now, to his great satisfaction and surprise.

As they went, his eye traveled up and down Muriel Arnold's trim, graceful figure with increasing interest and approval, and finally rested with evident admiration upon her sunny brown hair, drawn back in many a clustering curl and knotted so charmingly in the nape of her lovely white neck.

Her simple blue print dress, belted at the waist with a broad leathern cincture, supporting a pistol holster, became her well, as did the exceedingly small and dapper Wellington boots which were shown almost to their tops beneath the rather short dress, and the great broad-brimmed, flapping "wide-awake" hat, set so rakishly upon her head and ornamented with a single upright eagle's feather.

About her shoulders and her neat little waist was wound a long flimsy white veil or muslin wrap.

Her cousin's costume was very much the same, save that there was no feather in the hat, and this was not set at a rakish angle, but as squarely as that of the inmate of an orphanage, while the print dress was a pale, washed-out pink.

"Gee!" muttered Sergeant John Dick. "She's almost as lovely a creature as the novelist, Fenimore Cooper, described Judith Hutter to be in his story, 'The Deerslayer.'"

Of course he referred to Muriel, not to poor, uncomely, dowdyish Jenny, whose Wellington boots were squaretoed instead of round-toed like her cousin's and fully twice as large in the feet.

"What a curious chain of coincidences or circumstances," Dick went on musing; "here we have almost exactly what the American author, Cooper, imagined; two girls—one quite a beauty and the other half-witted and otherwise rather poorly favored, certainly not as pretty—living in a wonderful lake-dwelling, built to resist a siege. I wonder what sort of a man the uncle and father of the girls, this 'Floating Tom Hutter,' of real life, will be. He ought to prove a rather interesting old fellow."

And then, with sparkling eyes, his thoughts ran again on the girl in front of him; and he nodded and murmured:

"Yes, she's the sort of girl I'd like. She's not tall, but she strikes me as being just the right height a girl should be, and she's just as plump, too, as I like them. I owe them both a debt of gratitude. It was plucky of them and no error, to come to my help as they did, and not turn and bolt as most girls would have done."

They reached the little spit of land for which the scow or "ark" was making; and, while they stood waiting for it to come in, Muriel drew Dick's attention to the scenery around them—the lovely wooded shores of the lake. She asked him, with enthusiastic eyes, if he had ever seen finer views.

He had to admit that he had not.

The sun was throwing a golden, glittering track now across the waters of the lake, which were gradually subsiding into their usual peaceful serenity as the gale dropped to mere fitful, ragged gusts.

It was about a mile across the lake where they stood, but both higher up and lower down, that is to northward and southward of them, the water was much broader, then narrowed again, and curved round prettily out of sight.

All around, the trees grew close to the water—in some places they overhung it and dipped their branches in it—and on the farther shore the woods, rising steeply to the crests of the low but gently rounded hills behind, were faithfully mirrored in the stiller pools and backwaters.

Sergeant Dick and Muriel were still pointing out the more charming prospects to one another when the ark drew within hail, and its occupant called out:

"What's that policeman doing with you, Muriel—Jenny? Anything wrong?"

"No, Aunt Kate, there's nothing wrong," Muriel answered, with her hand held trumpet-wise beside her mouth. "Nothing, that is, so far as we are concerned. But the sergeant was wounded in the head, as you may see, in a fight with the White Hood Gang, who held up the stage-coach in Crooked Gulch. As his horse was lamed, and he must get to the Indian Reservation on the island at the south end of the lake as quickly as possible, we brought him along. Jenny and I have promised to take him to Paquita Island in the ark."

"Oh, indeed!" her aunt responded, in a rather ungracious tone. "Allow me to tell you, Muriel Arnold, that it is not for you, or Jenny either, to make use of the ark without first consulting *my* wishes, or those of your uncle and Jenny's father. However, as you are a police officer, sir, I don't suppose my husband 'ill object to the girls taking you down to the Reservation, and I'm sure I shan't. But you must first come to the 'castle,' and get your wound dressed properly. Reckon, too, you could do with something to buck you up."

"You had better do as mother says," whispered Jenny, the half-witted girl, "that is, come to the 'castle' first, and take something and have your wound redressed. She doesn't like any one not to do as she says, and, asides, you might just as well humor her."

Dick looked at Muriel and capitulated.

"I'm rather pressed for time," he said, "but still, I don't suppose just visiting your home for a few minutes will delay me much; and I never believe in crossing old ladies if it can be avoided—or anybody else for that matter, I may add."

The ark came sailing in, and softly grounded her forefoot on the spit. As her square bow projected fully five feet over the bank, Muriel was able to leap on board dryshod.

She swiftly cast free a wide, sliding gangway in the bow, and thrust it out, so that, as it dropped outboard, it formed a gentle gradient, up which her cousin at once led the two horses in the buggy.

Behind the sliding gangway, and covered by it when it was inboard, was another gentle, boarded slope; and the space between it and the cabin or "house" was sufficiently long, as well as broad to accommodate the vehicle and the two horses abreast.

CHAPTER IV
INSIDE "WATER CASTLE"

As Sergeant John Dick followed the buggy aboard the ark, a big, powerful woman of middle-age and rather unprepossessing looks came hurrying out of the door of the fore-cabin.

"Are you badly hurt, sergeant?" she asked, in a voice like a ship's siren, but not in an unkindly tone.

Dick answered in the negative, and said that he was ashamed that his injury had even been mentioned.

Aunt Kate gave him a swift, searching glance, then, evidently satisfied by her scrutiny, emitted a non-committal grunt and turned to help her niece to draw the gangboard in again and hook it in place.

Sergeant Dick would have helped them, but Muriel smilingly waved him back, and the operation was easily and quickly performed.

Mrs. Arnold then pushed the scow off the spit with a boat hook, and, sending her daughter to the sweep astern, turned the sail again to the wind, and they swung round and headed for the "castle."

As they slipped along towards it, she eagerly and curiously questioned her niece as to what had actually transpired in Crooked Gulch.

"This White Hood Gang of road-agents and rustlers is fast creating a panic in these parts, sergeant," she said, when Muriel had finished her recital. "You may consider yourself lucky that you have come through your meeting with 'em as well as you have. I guess you've been sent down here to try and round 'em up. But are the Government mad, to send you by yourself—to only send one man?"

"Oh, it was more with regard to the trouble with the Indians of the Paquita Island Reservation than anything else I was sent along. But you may take it from me, Mrs. Arnold, that this last exploit of the gang's will be about their last. Government is bound to send a strong force to put 'em down after this."

Mrs. Arnold said that the sooner that happened the better, and then she turned to the stores in the carrier of the buggy, and was speedily discussing with her niece what the latter and Jenny had paid for the things—and should have paid in her estimation.

This discussion lasted until they were almost at "Water Castle," which Sergeant Dick surveyed, as they approached, with the greatest interest.

A shoal existed or had been contrived at the spot, and into this Alfred Arnold, Jenny's father, aided by his four grown sons—all big, powerful men like himself, as Dick was subsequently to learn—had driven stout piles, upon which they had erected their dwelling.

It was square in shape, and built of tree-trunks, each two feet thick, and squared on three sides, so that they made a smooth inner wall and rested solidly on one another without any chinks between them.

In each of the four exterior walls were six windows, set equidistant apart; and before the front door, which was plated with iron an inch thick, inside and out—to make it as strong as the walls—was a platform or verandah, seven or eight feet wide, running the whole length of that side of the building, and covered by the projecting roof.

The roof itself was a flattened cone, that is, with very little rise in it, and consisted of strips of corrugated iron, bolted down securely, to resist high winds, upon an inner roof of timber, almost as thick as the walls.

Surmounting it was an iron stove-pipe, and a skylight was set in each of the four gentle slopes.

All around the house were set palisades—stout trunks of trees driven firmly into the shoal, like the piles supporting the building itself.

These palisades completely ringed the "castle" round, and were not more than nine inches apart anywhere, while they all stood about three feet above the water. Consequently they formed an outer rampart or stockade, which would prevent possible assailants in canoes or rafts getting in under the windows.

There was a wide gateway, fastened by a strong padlock and chain, in these palisades, just in front of the platform or landing stage, and the space within the enclosure was large enough to admit of the ark being kept inside.

All the piles under the edges of the house, moreover, were strengthened, as well as made into an inner ring of defense, by braces and cross-timbering closing up the spaces between them. Thus a boat could not pass under the house except through another, smaller gateway contrived in them, and also secured by a padlock.

Mrs. Arnold had, of course, on this occasion left the outer gateway —that in the palisades—merely hooked to; and, freeing it with a pole, she and her niece and daughter, amid Sergeant Dick's loudly expressed admiration, deftly maneuvered the ark within, and ran its bow up to a short wooden ladder hanging from the verandah.

Muriel sprang nimbly up the hanging ladder on to the verandah of the house, and the sergeant mounted quickly after her. Then Mrs. Arnold pushed the scow backwards with so vigorous and dexterous a push with her pole, that the stern of the craft was carried well out again through the gateway in the palisades. She and Jenny meant to convey the horses and buggy to the islet, and stable them there.

"I knew you would be keenly interested in our lake home," said Muriel, as she lifted the latch of the door of the building, and ushered her companion into the living-room. "Now if you will sit down in that easy chair of Uncle Alf's, I will soon get you something to put new life into you, and then re-dress your wound."

"No, no, there is no need, I assure you. My hurt is so slight it will do very well dressed as it is, until I reach the Indian Reservation, and can have it attended to at my leisure. And as for alcoholic refreshment I never take anything of that nature. A glass of cold water or a cup of milk will be all sufficient, thank you. I am really more curious to be shown over your wonderful lake-home, than I am thirsty or exhausted."

"Oh, I will soon gratify your curiosity then," Muriel laughed; and, going to a cupboard or pantry at one end of the living-room, she reappeared promptly with a jug of milk, from which she filled a tumbler she took off a rude dresser, standing at the back of the apartment.

As she did so, Sergeant Dick looked around this, and saw that, with the pantry, it took up the whole front of the house.

It showed signs, however, of being regularly divided into three compartments, for two rods ran across the ceiling at about the same distance from either end, and on these rods were hung thick, rather shabby curtains, on rings.

Right round the three outer walls of the room ran a "bank," almost as high as the sills of the windows—that is breast high.

"You are wondering what that high bank all around is for?" asked the girl, as he drank off the glass of milk, and just as if she had read his thoughts. "That is to form an additional breastwork against shot penetrating, in case of a siege. We keep it filled, you will see, if you peep in, chiefly with firewood for the stove."

Dick looked the astonishment he felt; and Muriel now led him through a door, which stood between two others.

"The other two doors," she said, "lead into bedrooms. This door, as you see, leads into a central passage or hall, from which all the other rooms open. You will notice it is lighted by a skylight. It is here that we women would be placed in case of a siege so as to be out of danger—I don't think," she added, laughingly.

John Dick saw that there were no less than six doors around him, including the one he had just come through.

"This is—" Muriel was beginning, advancing to the first door on her right, when there dully resounded in their ears two gunshots in rapid succession, evidently fired some distance away. The shots were followed after a momentary pause by two more.

Muriel started violently, and gasped hoarsely:

"*There is something wrong!* That's our danger-signal—four shots fired like that!"

She wheeled and darted back into the living-room, followed by the sergeant.

They flew to the nearest window, which was open to admit the air, and looked out.

The ark, which could not possibly have had time to get to the islet, was only a short distance from the "castle." Mrs. Arnold stood in the stern with a rifle in her hands.

She saw their faces at the window, and immediately stabbed her finger excitedly towards the southern end of the lake, and bawled with all the strength of her lungs:

"Your uncle and the lads—chased—*chased by Indians*!"

With a half-stifled ejaculation, Sergeant Dick flung open the front door beside him, and sprang out on to the verandah.

Muriel was immediately beside him; and, looking in the direction her aunt had pointed, they saw two canoes, containing three or four white persons apiece, paddling madly for the "castle," while behind, just rounding the bend in the shore of the lake, appeared several more canoes full of Indians, all half-naked and bedecked in war-paint and feathers.

CHAPTER V
A RUNNING FIGHT

"It is what I expected and feared," groaned Sergeant Dick; "the Indians of the Paquita Reservation have revolted over the delay of the Government in sending them the promised compensation for the wrongful arrest of their chiefs last year in regard to these White Hood outrages."

"Pray Heaven that my uncle and cousins will be able to gain the shelter of the 'castle,'" panted Muriel. "My two cousins-in-law, the wives of my cousins Abel and Aaron, are with them. What can we do to help them?"

"Nothing as yet that I can see," rejoined Dick; "they are too far off for the carry of a rifle. Ah, they can hold their own, and will win here safely, I think."

Seven puffs of smoke had spurted from the two leading canoes. Evidently the shots had found human billets in the pursuing crafts, for two of these yawed wildly, and were run foul of by two of their fellows with such force that all four canoes were upset, and their occupants flung into the water.

And then from the right-hand side of the pair on the "castle" verandah—from a point on the western shore, somewhat to the northward—came the echo, loud and distinct, of the fusillade from the fugitive canoes—seven separate reports in quick succession.

Sergeant Dick was surprised at the sharp-cut clearness of the echo, and could almost have believed that it was no echo, but that seven shots had been fired at the point whence the sound came.

But for that wonderful echo the reports of the fugitives' rifles would have been unheard by the two on the verandah of "Water Castle," and the pair in the ark. It accounted also for their hearing the alarm-signal fired so far away down the lake.

Muriel read in the young trooper's face his amazement at the echo, and said:

"It is a curious phenomenon, and was known long before my uncle built this house. A shot fired anywhere round the margin of the lake is repeated from that shore and tossed to our ears here as if the sound came directly from there."

"Wonderful!"

"That was one of the reasons why my uncle chose this particular site for his fortress. Of course, he and his sons, aided by some of the other settlers and their cowboys, made the shoal by dumping into the lake at the spot boatloads of rock blasted from the hills behind the woods yonder."

She pointed to the shore whence the echo had come.

"There are a lot of great cliff-like rocks over there. You can see some of them peeping above the trees, and it is supposed that the echo comes from them. The Indians used to call this lake 'The Lake of the Wonderful Echo.'"

A ringing chorus of derisive laughter now came across from the western shore, clearly the echo of that with which Trapper Arnold and his four sons and two daughters-in-law, in their canoes, had hailed the temporary discomfiture of their red-skinned foes.

Sharp on the laughter came the echoing crash of rattling volley after volley, broken occasionally by a stray shot or two.

Sergeant Dick and Muriel, even while they had been discussing the wonderful echo, had seen the two fugitive canoes simply spouting smoke and flame for several seconds, pouring in a ceaseless fire from every rifle they contained into the embarrassed Indians, who could be seen thrown into the utmost confusion.

Only one or two redskins replied to the devastating fire of their white adversaries, and they were quickly silenced.

All the pursuing canoes fell behind; and, amid triumphant hurrahs and more derisive laughter borne to the ears of those in the ark and on the castle-verandah by the remarkable echo, the fugitives came on again with redoubled speed in their direction.

In a few minutes the fleeing whites had put a considerable distance between themselves and their red foes, who, making no further attempt to pursue, fired after them in a desultory, enraged way.

"Hurray! Hurray! Your uncle and the lads and their wives have beaten them off, Muriel!" roared Aunt Kate from the ark.

And she and Jenny now, having put that clumsy craft about, stood away at full speed, with the wind abeam, to meet the fugitives.

"Yes, thank Heaven they have beaten them off!" cried Muriel. "The red ruffians will probably now abandon the chase. My uncle and cousins are safe."

"The Indians are not in any great numbers," said Sergeant Dick, shading his eyes from the dazzling rays of the setting sun as he peered in the direction of the fighting. "That means, I suppose, that most of the bucks are raiding and murdering elsewhere. God help the inmates of the more lonely ranches that the painted demons may attack."

The police officer and the girl remained on the verandah, watching the ark and the two fugitive canoes rapidly approach each other, and the discomfited redmen gradually evolve some order among themselves again, and follow more warily, keeping up a dropping but impotent fire at long range.

Slowly the red sun sank from sight behind the cliffs from which the wonderful echo came; then rapidly the red streaks died out of the western sky and dusk began to settle down over the lake and the woods enclosing it.

It was almost dark, and the ark and the two leading canoes had nearly met, when Muriel Arnold suddenly uttered a startled cry.

She had brought a pair of binoculars from the living-room, and was attentively watching the ark and the canoes of her people through it.

"More Indians! A great fleet of canoes has just come round the southern bend, sergeant," she gasped, handing Dick the glasses.

He looked through them and saw, as she had said, a great flotilla of canoes—fully forty or fifty—rounding the bend and paddling swiftly to join the half-dozen craft which had originally been chasing the trappers.

"By Jove!" he murmured. "We are in for it with a vengeance. Thank goodness your people have almost met, and the ark sails swiftly with the wind on her beam. She'll have it the same coming

back, of course. I wouldn't have given her credit for so much speed. She can outstrip a canoe no matter how fast it is paddled."

"That is so, sergeant," gleefully exclaimed Muriel. "We have often run races, Jenny and I, or one of my cousins-in-law in the ark against the canoes, manned by as many as they could hold. Some of the cowboys and ranchmen from the nearest ranches have occasionally taken part in the race—helped man the canoes. And the ark has always won; that is if anything like a fair wind were blowing, of course."

Somehow, Sergeant Dick was not altogether pleased to hear that the cowboys and owners of the nearest ranches came to "Water Castle" at times, and were so friendly with its occupants.

He fell to wondering, even while he watched the exciting scene transpiring upon the southern end of the lake through the binoculars, whether any of the said cowboys or ranchmen came on account of the lovely girl beside him, attracted by her beauty and charm of manner. And he pictured, with a certain twinge of heartburning and jealousy, her graceful form sitting on the verandah with several handsome, dare-devil young cow-punchers bending admiringly over her.

An awful, piercing, long-drawn-out yell or screech rang suddenly in the ears of the pair on the verandah. It was the echo of the war-whoop of the newly-arrived redmen.

Much has been written and told of the terrible battle-cry of the American Indian, but one who has never heard it can have no conception really of its terror-inspiring and nerve-shattering shrillness and duration.

It has been likened to the shriek of "some maddened steam-engine," a long-drawn piercing screech, modulated by the fingers placed as stops over the mouth. And it has been said that buffaloes on hearing it have been known to sink in terror to the ground, and bears to topple from a tree.

The effect of such a scream issuing in chorus from the throats of a hundred or more painted savages, deservedly dreaded for their ferocity and their cunning, might well strike panic to the hearts of the first white settlers in the wild and woolly west. Especially when

such knew it was but the prelude to the fiercest of bloody warfare, which, if successful, meant worse horrors—torture in the most fiendish way before death came as a happy release.

No wonder then that Muriel Arnold shuddered, trembled from head to foot, and clapped her hands over her ears, with agonized horror upon her face, to shut out that horrible, ringing, thrilling scream echoed from the western shore.

"Quick!" cried Sergeant Dick, "we must barricade the windows—put the house everywhere in a fit state to resist a fierce siege. Those hundred and more redmen are not going to quit here without a furious and determined effort to capture or destroy this place and all within it. We can do nothing as yet to succor your relations, Miss Arnold, but we can get all in readiness, before their arrival, to beat off the savages, or at any rate hold the wretches well at bay. Ah, see!"

And he pressed the binoculars into the hands of the girl.

"The ark has met your uncle and cousins, and they are getting aboard her. You may count them safe now from all pursuit so long as the wind lasts; and it is not likely to drop for some time, blowing as hard as it is. Come! We'll see to all the windows—make preparations for a possibly long and determined siege by the craftiest enemies ever known."

The first war-whoop of the more distant body of redskins was answered by another from the half-dozen leading canoes—the original pursuers, who now concentrated a heavy fire upon the ark as she took aboard the fugitives.

CHAPTER VI
THE TRAPPER AND HIS SONS

Muriel waited to dart a glance through the glasses in the direction of her relatives before following the police-sergeant into the house.

She saw the ark lying almost broadside on, in the act of putting about, with her cousins and cousins-in-law helping each other on to the stern-quarter from the two canoes.

A sufficiently wide and high screen had been put up by her aunt to cover Jenny at the tiller; and, from behind this shelter, Aunt Kate herself was rapidly firing at the Indians in the leading canoes, holding them well in check.

The strange echo from the western shore wafted the sounds of the brisk exchange of shots to Muriel's ears.

The screen her aunt and Jenny used was as big as two cabin doors placed side by side. Several inches thick, and covered on both sides with sheet iron, it was as much as two ordinary men could lift, yet Aunt Kate had moved it with ease by herself.

It had two collapsing or folding legs on one side, like the back legs of a pair of steps, so that it would stand upright. Furthermore it was loopholed for rifle-fire.

Uncle Alf and his sons and daughters-in-law, as they scrambled aboard from the canoes, were sheltered by the cabin from the fire of their red enemies. Some of them, rushing inside the two compartments, at once replied to it briskly—aided their mother in keeping the assailants back while the canoes were got in.

Then round the scow was turned, the screen astern being moved with the tiller to keep it or rather those at it still covered, and back the craft came bowling, with bellying sail, towards the "castle" again.

Muriel, half-laughing, half-crying with relief and satisfaction, now ran inside the house after Sergeant Dick.

"Where are you, sergeant?" she called, and he answered from one of the back bedrooms.

"My uncle and cousins are all safe aboard the ark, and are making here as fast as the wind can blow them," she called back. "Of course they could not hope to hold their own in the ark against so many canoes. The only thing is to defend the 'castle' to the bitter end."

She passed through, as she spoke, into the central passage, from which the six rooms of the "castle" all opened, and joined the sergeant in the left-hand back bedroom.

That apartment contained four small square windows, two in the rear wall, and two at the side.

Sergeant Dick had already secured two out of the four windows by letting down sliding shutters set within the embrasures. These shutters were, like the tiller-screen used on the ark, of stout wood faced and backed by iron plating, and they were fastened in position, when let down, by strong bolts, so that they could not be easily forced from without.

The windows, being of the casement type, opened inward, and could be hooked back against the wall. In each shutter was a loophole for firing through.

Sergeant Dick noticed that the corner forming the outside angle of the house was rounded off by an extra vertical balk of timber, fitted triangular-wise into it, thus greatly increasing the thickness of the two outer walls just there.

As the window on either hand was only a mere step from the corner, a man stationed there could with ease defend both the back and side of the house; and the extra thickness of the rounded angle would render his position still more snug and safe.

"This is my married cousin Abel's bedroom," explained Muriel, as she let down one of the shutters and shot home the two bolts on it. "You've seen to all the windows in—which other room?"

"The one through that door," replied John Dick, pointing towards the front of the house.

Another door, alongside the one the girl had come in, led into a bedroom between that they were in and the living-room.

There were no fewer than three doors in every room in the house, so that it was possible to make a complete circuit of this without utilizing the central passage, the idea being to enable the inmates, in

case of a siege or other emergency, like fire, passing quickly from one room to another.

"Aaron and Deborah's room," Muriel said. "Come then, the bathroom must be our next concern."

She led the way through the third door into a room somewhat smaller, fitted up with a large enameled iron bath—a piece of furniture which considerably surprised Sergeant Dick to find in a Wild West home of such limited dimensions, especially when built over a lake.

This apartment had its three doors like all the others, one in each of the inner walls, and having shuttered and bolted the two windows in it, the sergeant and Muriel went on into the next room.

"This is the room my cousin Jenny and I share," explained the girl.

Had she not told him, Sergeant Dick would have guessed as much from the female articles of dress and finery hanging around, as well as the general subtle atmosphere of daintiness that prevailed.

Pictures hung on the walls here, including a pretty water-color sketch of a lovely woman in evening dress.

There were *four* windows in this room, and they had all to be shuttered and made fast in like manner to the others. Then the man and girl entered Uncle Alf and Aunt Kate's bedroom adjoining, secured the two windows there, and, passing through yet another door, found themselves back in the living-room, the windows of which they likewise secured.

"Now there only remains the front door," said Muriel, adding, with a laugh, "and we can't very well fasten that up until my uncle and aunt and the others are all safe inside with us."

She stepped out again on to the verandah. And Dick, following her, saw that the ark was coming on fast to the "castle," and was not a quarter of a mile away now, while the Indian canoes, although paddling their swiftest in her wake, were fully half a mile off.

Laughing softly and yet tremulously over the escape of her relations from their pursuers, Muriel remained at the front door with the sergeant, while the ark drew nearer and nearer, until at last

it was close enough for its occupants to exchange greetings with her and Dick.

These greetings were naturally curt and scant.

Sailing up to the open gateway in the palisades, Uncle Alf and his sons warped the ark in by means of boathooks. Then the gate was padlocked behind the craft, and she was drawn by a rope, which Sergeant Dick threw from the verandah, alongside the hanging-ladder.

"Glad to have ye here, sergeant," greeted Uncle Alf—a huge, grizzled Hercules of a man—as he sprang up the steps and grasped Dick's hand cordially. "The more pairs of eyes behind the sights of rifles, and hands to use the weapons, the better, in the face of that crowd of painted, blood-thirsty rips. Ye're more'n welcome, sergeant."

"'Specially if ye can shoot as straight as most of you troopers can," grinned the eldest son, Abel.

The rude witticism was received by all with a merriment that spoke volumes for their dauntlessness, in the face of the red peril coming on so fast behind them.

The ark was hurriedly moored alongside the verandah, the cabin doors being locked with ordinary keys and then padlocked as well, so that they might not be easily burst in if the savages got aboard.

The iron-plated tiller shield was brought into the house, and all withdrew within this. Then the door was not only locked and bolted, top and bottom, but also barricaded with stout logs, put transversely across it, at intervals of only a few feet, within iron sockets screwed on to the doorposts.

Sergeant Dick and the four women did the barricading, while the old trapper and his four stalwart sons—all big, powerful men like himself—hastily arranged as to where each of them should be stationed.

Bella and Deborah Arnold, Muriel's two cousins-in-law, had both of them a certain amount of flamboyant beauty allied to a devil-may-care air, well suited to the rather picturesque, if unconventional, costumes they wore.

They were dressed like cowgirls, in short skirts, “wide-awake” hats, and top boots; and round their waists they had cartridge-belts supporting cases containing automatic pistols, while slung on their backs were heavy Winchester repeaters.

“The pelts will be safe enough in the ark,” said old Alf. “The painted rips are not likely to get inside the palisades ag’in our rifles. If they do they’re more welcome to the pelts than to our scalps. Now, sergeant, you and me ’ull defend this ’ere room, the front of the house, with the old woman and Muriel. Abel, my eldest son, will go to his bedroom, and hold the back and the right side of the house with his wife. And, Amos, you will take your stand in the middle room on the right-hand side—your brother Aaron’s room. Aaron and Deborah, you two will take Muriel and Jenny’s room; and, Abner, your mother’s and my room. Jenny, you will remain in the central passage with all the doors open, and be ready to go to the aid of any one who needs you, take round fresh ammunition, or refill the water-buckets if necessary.”

Sergeant Dick, used as he was to the giving and receiving of commands, as well as to prompt decision and arrangement in crises like the present, was surprised in no small measure at the military-like precision of the old trapper, as the latter thus ordered the defense.

He had fully expected that all would look to him to do this.

But, doubtless, Dick told himself, Old Man Arnold had planned the defense of the place repeatedly, and all his sons and daughters were well schooled in the *rôles* they were to play in it.

They had not long been at their posts—with jugs of drinking water and water-buckets, in case of fire, placed handy—when the Indian flotilla came within gunshot in the rapidly deepening darkness.

It at once divided into two parties, each taking opposite sides of the lake, clearly so as to surround the “castle.”

CHAPTER VII
HOWLING WOLF

"They will land on Stable Islet, sure, and try and carry off the horses there," growled Uncle Alf. "They'll tow the beasts off, swimming, behind a canoe."

"Better that," said Muriel, "than that they should kill the animals or burn them alive in the stable. Poor old Dobbin and Betty. I'll never see you again, I expect."

"Wait," said Sergeant Dick. "I will speak to the Indians. It is my duty to. Perhaps I can pacify them—prevail on the mad fools to abandon the warpath and return peacefully to the Reservation."

Alf Arnold guffawed derisively.

"Mout as well try to reason with tigers that hev tasted or smelt blood," he said. "They'll not listen to you, sergeant, but be far more likely to give ye a volley. You'll never be so dodrotted foolish as to put your nose outside the door?"

"It is my duty as an officer of the law to try and avert bloodshed and reason with them, and I mean to," answered Dick quietly. "I am going to unbar the door again."

"Don't show yourself, sergeant, for Heaven's sake," implored Muriel, "or if you must, display a white flag first, and—and stand just within the door, ready to skip behind it if they show any signs of firing on you."

She ran to the table-drawer, as Dick started unbarring the door, and took out a folded, newly washed and ironed white tablecloth.

"Your blood 'ull be on your own head, sergeant," said Uncle Alf. "You are asking for it if you go outside that door. Still, in this darkness you've a chance—just a chance—of coming in again unhurt, mebbe."

"What's that? The sergeant going out to talk to 'em?" called the youngest son, Abner, from his station in his parents' bedroom. "He must be dotty."

"There's one thing you've forgotten, father," sang out the other unmarried son, Amos, from the room opposite. "The skylights."

"Jumping snakes, so I had! Jenny and Muriel—no, Amos, you'd better see to 'em. You can be spared from your loophole long enough to, sure, 'specially as the sergeant here's agoin' to hold 'em in talk an hour or two. Ha, ha, ha!"

His sons within hearing and Jenny echoed his laughter; and Amos came out into the central passage, and, opening a cupboard door in it, passed inside.

Within the cupboard was a sloping ladder leading up to a trap-door in the flat ceiling or inner log-roof.

As soon as he had unfastened the front door, Sergeant Dick stepped out onto the verandah or landing-stage, and waved the tablecloth to and fro. Muriel had tied the improvised flag of truce to the muzzle of his rifle.

Putting his open left hand to his mouth trumpet-fashion, he roared at the top of his voice:

"My redskin brothers, I want speech with you. I am a policeman, a sergeant of the Royal Mounted Police. Can you hear me?"

It was so dark now that he could hardly make out the black smudges the canoes made upon the water; and he feared that the Indians would not be able to discern his figure against the background of the "castle," in spite of his red coat.

No answering hail came back from the canoes; but he was satisfied that his voice had carried to the ears within them.

And the Indians could hardly fail to observe his white flag, if not himself.

"Miss Arnold," he called within the doorway, "will you take this electric torch from me and shine it upon me so that they may be able to see me plainly?"

"Oh, no, no! That will be to make a target of yourself—to show you up plainly as a mark for their bullets."

"Do as I ask. They are coming in; they see the white flag."

"I can't have that there door open too long, sergeant," called out Uncle Alf. "You know redskin cunning, and I ain't agoin' to allow 'em to come in too close with that door open, nor without afirin' on 'em neither."

Muriel, without further demur, tremblingly took the proffered electric torch from Dick and, standing inside the doorway, flashed it upon his red-coated figure.

"You see and hear me, my redskin brothers," John Dick shouted again. "Go back to your wigwams and squaws and papooses, like sensible men, and give up your foolish idea of going on the warpath, and so bringing down upon you the terrible vengeance of Government. What is your quarrel with us white men? It was not the fault of the fathers of this land, of the Canadas, that the money was not paid before. It was the delay of our brothers over the frontier—of the Fathers of the United States. And the money has been sent you now, as I can swear. My redskin brothers know that they can believe the word of an officer of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police."

"The chief, Howling Wolf, will speak to the redcoat officer," came back a faint shout.

"Mind yourself, sergeant. Howlin' Wolf's a chief with no good reputation to lose. He's the wickedest of the hull boilin' lot of 'em red-skinned varmints on Paquita Island, though he ain't there now, more's the pity; for he's to be dreaded more'n all the others yonder."

"Yes, be on your guard, sergeant, for Heaven's sake. We've all heard of Howling Wolf's ferocity and cunning," added Muriel. "I feel sure you are only risking your life to no good. You'll not turn them from their purpose after my uncle and cousins killing some of their number."

"That's right," chimed in Aunt Kate in her deep, siren-like voice. "You and the lads, Alf, just now down the lake, sent some on 'em to the happy hunting-grounds, didn't ye? It looked so to us, anyways."

"Sure we did, a good half-dozen on 'em; and more carry the marks of our bullets on 'em, if they haven't got the lead still under their skins. Haw, haw, haw! You'll never pacify them now, sergeant. They thirst for our blood in revenge, and they're not to be turned away by

mere words, as you may find to your cost. But a willful man will have his way; and, as I said afore, if anything happens to ye, your blood is on your own head."

All the canoes remained as stationary black smudges afar off, except one, which came speeding swiftly towards "Water Castle."

It came on without a word from any of its occupants, who Sergeant Dick was soon able to discern were four in number, to all appearances.

And then suddenly a jet of flame leaped like a fiery bowsprit from the curved prow of the canoe; and, even as the report of a rifle rang over the silent waters, waking echoes far and near out of the black night, Sergeant Dick heard the "zip" of a bullet, felt the wind from it fan his right cheek, and heard it clang against the iron-plated tiller-screen which had been set just within the doorway.

Rebounding upwards on account of the backwardly slanting angle at which the screen stood, the leaden messenger ended its flight by burying itself in the wooden ceiling of the living-room.

Muriel screamed, and Sergeant Dick was within the house at a bound.

"Miss Arnold, are you hurt at all?" he asked, anxiously, catching her in his arms as she reeled against the door.

"No, no; but you?"

His reply that he was untouched was drowned to all other ears but hers by the sharp "crack-crack-crack!" of the rifles of Uncle Alf and Aunt Kate as they returned the treacherous shot, concentrating a ceaseless fire for several seconds upon Howling Wolf's canoe.

But the four paddlers had promptly thrown themselves prone in its bottom, and in the thickening darkness the craft presented but an indifferent mark, so that it was doubtful if a single shot struck it.

Instantly the dreaded war-whoop of the savages pealed forth, awaking still greater echoes than the rifle-fire. And, like a pack of hounds let loose, all the black, indistinct smudges behind the chief's canoe came racing for "Water Castle."

"Quick, secure the door there!" roared Uncle Alf. "Ye see, sergeant, the folly of your attempt to palaver with 'em."

Amos came rushing from the ladder-cupboard in the central passage, and roughly jostled Sergeant Dick aside from the rebarring of the door.

"Get to your loophole," he snarled, resentfully, "and show your mettle wi' your rifle. You mout hev bin the death of the gal. Muriel, you take another window! I'll see to the securing o' the door."

CHAPTER VIII
THE SIEGE OF "WATER CASTLE"

Though inwardly resenting Amos Arnold's behavior and words, Sergeant Dick at once went to one of the windows in the front of the house, and thrust his rifle through the slit in the armored shutter.

Not a rifle "barked" now; all the shooting had ceased. The inmates of the "castle" were reserving their fire until the canoes should draw near enough to allow of their taking fairly accurate aim in the darkness; and the Indians, after that first wild whoop of the onset, gave their whole attention to getting close in.

There were six windows in the front, and two more to either side, of the living-room, which therefore contained ten loopholes, as well as the door.

Uncle Alf had posted himself in the west front corner, and his wife was in the corresponding corner on the east side.

Sergeant Dick and Muriel took a window on either side of the door; and Amos, having quickly made this fast again, rushed back to his prearranged station in his brother Aaron's bedroom.

Howling Wolf and his four companions, lying prostrate in their drifting canoe, were the first to resume firing. Five streams of fire spurted simultaneously from the shapeless smudge their craft now appeared in the gloom, and as many bullets thudded harmlessly against the logs of the "castle," and buried themselves in the thick walls.

At once all four whites in the front room focused their rifles upon the canoe and poured in volley after volley.

In the hope of putting a swift termination to the revolt by killing Howling Wolf, who was evidently, from what he had heard of the man, the chief promoter and fomenter of it, Sergeant Dick aimed at the prow where he believed the Indian chief lay.

All his shots flew true to their mark, and on his third shot striking the craft four dark figures were seen to jump up in it and literally throw themselves overboard.

Such was their mad haste to get into the comparative safety of the water that they overset the canoe, and it floated bottom upwards.

"Hurray! One of 'em's settled, that's pretty sartin," yelled Old Man Arnold, gleefully. "Only four leaped out. The fella in the bows didn't, and that should be Howling Wolf hisself."

"Do you think he'd be fool enough to remain in the bows arter giving himself away with his first shot?" asked his wife, contemptuously. "I thought you knowed Indian cunning better nor that, Alf."

"Anyways, one on 'em's settled, and it's as likely to be him as not," returned the old man testily.

All the defenders could now be heard firing rapidly—from every quarter of the house. The Indians on the east side were the first to reply to the fusillade, and those on the west side and in front quickly chimed in.

But it was so inky dark now that only the flashes of the redmen's rifles revealed their whereabouts to their white foes, who were thus firing almost at random.

Thud, thud, thud! The besiegers' bullets rattled like hail against the stout walls of the castle; but so thick were these that not one entered.

Clang! An occasional shot found the iron-plated door or a shuttered window.

On the other hand, the defenders, sighting swiftly in the direction of a rifle-flash, were gratified again and again by hearing the death-shriek or scream of pain from a stricken enemy; and Sergeant Dick's companions were quick to note that he never fired a single shot but there came such an answer.

He had realized that it would be madness to hold his hand or seek to spare the redmen, in the circumstances. It was their lives or the lives of all in the "castle."

Under cover of the now pitchy darkness the Indians were likely to reach the house; and, once they were swarming about it in their canoes, in such numbers as they were, nothing could prevent some of them getting upon the roof or bursting in the windows and door.

They must be kept at bay at all costs.

Putting all pitying thoughts for the misguided wretches, therefore, out of his heart, he grimly watched the successive rifle-flashes in front of him, and shot back straight for one or another.

None of the other inmates of "Water Castle" knew of the fame and nickname he had won among his fellow-troopers of the Mounted Police for his deadly skill with the rifle, but "Sure-shot Jack Dick" never deserved his reputation and *sobriquet* better than he did now.

"Jumping snakes, sergeant, but you seem to be makin' 'em squeal!" shouted Old Man Arnold delightedly. "Dang me if I don't hear a yelp every time you fires!"

"That's so," cried Muriel, almost proudly. "I don't believe he has thrown away a single shot."

"Good boy! Keep it up," roared the lion-like old woman. "He has cat's eyes, sure. I wish I had. This blamed darkness beats me. Peg away, lads! Keep it up or we'll have the devils on us with this blamed darkness. I wish them palisades outside were higher, Alf."

"Reckon they'll not get over 'em easy all the same, old woman. Say, wish I had put up a searchlight or somethink of that kind on the peak of the roof, so as to show up besiegers at night."

But the hot fire maintained by the defenders, and particularly the amazingly deadly shooting of Sergeant Dick, checked the onset of the Indians. Canoe after canoe ceased paddling forward and turned about, its occupants no longer caring to risk bringing a bullet out of the darkness into their midst by shooting at the black shadow which represented the stronghold of their enemies.

So many of their number had been hit that it seemed as if the pale-faces could see in the dark, and, in their superstition and ignorance, the redmen were inclined to believe that there was witchcraft in such swift retribution whenever they fired a shot.

Their firing dwindled. Instead of pressing on to the storm of their enemies' stronghold, they began to circle futilely round it, firing only an occasional shot and then paddling swiftly away to escape the expected bullet in return.

"We've checked them. They're keeping off, father," yelled Aaron from Jenny and Muriel's bedroom, in the north-east corner of the house.

The words were still ringing in the ears of the four in the front of the house, which, as already explained, faced southward down the lake, when Sergeant Dick saw three or four large, roundish black objects, like pumpkins—or, rather, like Swedish turnips with the leaves sticking up in the air—suddenly appear as if by magic on the edge of the verandah!

The strange spectacle was impressed as it were forever on the retina of his eyes. Ever afterwards he could call up the strange vision at will of those three or four large round, turnip-like, apparently leaf-crowned objects, growing, as it seemed, along the edge of the verandah.

As his startled eyes rested upon them, a horrified gasp burst from Muriel at the window on the other side of the door, and a curse and a roar of rage respectively from the lips of Old Man Arnold and his wife.

The four turnip-like objects were the feather-crowned heads of four Indians, who had swum silently in through the palisades up to the house and had climbed up as many of the piles supporting the verandah.

Even as the four defenders in the living-room of the "castle" discovered them they swung themselves up like cats, by means of the pillars of the verandah, on to this and made a dash at the windows.

Muriel, Aunt Kate, and Sergeant Dick had their rifle-barrels clutched by the invaders. Old Man Arnold managed to whip his back inside his loophole in time.

The assailants would not, of course, have been able to retain hold of the rifle-barrels had the defenders not slackened their fire some time before and allowed the metal to cool.

Swift upon their grab at the protruding tubes, the redmen hurled in with unerring aim through the loophole-slits a knife or a tomahawk.

It was assuredly only because Providence was watching over the fates of Sergeant John Dick and Muriel Arnold in that hour that they did not have a knife apiece buried to the haft in their faces, standing looking out of the loopholes as they were.

As it was, Sergeant Dick had his left cheek gashed open by one knife in its passage; and Muriel felt the missile directed at her pass through her hair.

As for Mrs. Arnold, a tomahawk cleft her gray forelock short off close to her scalp. Flying onward with the force of its fling, the weapon struck and bit deep into the pantry door behind her, where it stuck, quivering from blade to handle-butt.

Her husband, too, had a narrow escape. The tomahawk hurled in at him whizzing close past his head, as he stumbled sideways after pulling in his rifle.

As all four in the living-room stood for the moment appalled by their own narrow escapes, and the belief that one or more of their number must have been struck down, their assailants outside emitted the bloodcurdling war-whoop in chorus.

Then, swift upon it, or, rather, while still giving vent to it, the four daring braves wheeled, abandoned the rifle-barrels they had grabbed, and, darting to pillars, began swarming up these to the sloping roof like monkeys.

At either end of the verandah there was a low railing, and, by stepping on this, two of them were clambering on to the roof almost before the sergeant and his three companions in the living-room could recover from the sudden attack.

The whoops of the quartet just outside were promptly answered by a tremendous yell from the darkness all round about; and it was plain the Indians in the canoes were again tearing towards the house, as fast as they could ply their paddles, to help their intrepid and crafty chief to rush the place.

For, perhaps needless to say, the four braves on the verandah were Howling Wolf and three of those who had been with him in his canoe.

Aunt Kate had been right. The wily young sagamore had withdrawn from the prow of the canoe, and wriggled aft, after firing his treacherous shot at the police-sergeant. And Sergeant Dick might have fired the three shots he put into the canoe's prow

uselessly had his third bullet not struck a rifle left there and been deflected sideways, so that it grazed the head of the fifth warrior in the craft, stunning him.

On that, at the sagamore's order, the others had jumped overboard, and, when the canoe overset, Howling Wolf aided the unconscious man, supported him on his shoulder, and suggested the daring move of swimming silently up to the "castle" and taking the defenders in the front of the house by surprise.

The four, as we have seen, brought off the stratagem fairly successfully. They had put their senseless companion softly across one of the ties of the gate in the palisades, had consulted and laid their plans in the faintest of faint whispers as they had swum up to these, then slipped through them. And only the proverbial white man's luck had saved the four defenders of the living-room from being struck down, dead or dying, by their deftly in-flung tomahawks and knives.

CHAPTER IX
THE ARK IN DANGER

Had the four defenders of the front of the "castle" been slain or disabled through the loopholes by Howling Wolf and his three companions, these would have got on the roof safely enough, and might have been able to cause a sufficient diversion, and hold their own there long enough, to enable their fellow-braves in the canoes to come up.

But Sergeant Dick, quick to recover from the startling *coup de main*, promptly thrust his rifle out through his loophole again, and trained it on the brave nearest him. The man was in the act of clambering up one of the middle pillars of the verandah.

Crack! The weapon spoke almost simultaneously, and, with a shrill howl of pain, the Indian—none other than Howling Wolf himself—let go his grip of the verandah roof, which he had just seized with one hand, and slid down the pole as swiftly as if it were greased. He no sooner touched the verandah again with his heels than he either flung himself or fell headlong off it into the water.

Sergeant Dick swerved his rifle quickly on the man's plunge, and let fly at another of the invaders swarming up a pillar. A second scream, of even bitterer agony, told every ear within hearing that that shot also had found a true billet.

On that, one of the two remaining braves, who had gained the comparative safety of the roof—thanks to the assistance of the side railings and the consternation and unreadiness of the other three defenders of the living-room—took a flying jump or dive into the lake astern of the ark, evidently too scared to take advantage of the situation he had won.

And a second or two later, the fourth Indian, not caring to remain behind by himself, followed suit.

Then, even as Bella and Deborah, the two daughters-in-law of the squatter, came rushing after Jenny into the living-room from the back of the "castle," to learn if their father and mother were hurt,

the rifles of the four brothers rang out and partly drowned the mad yelling of the redmen paddling frantically for the spot.

"It's all right, gals. Me and the old woman air not a bit hurt." Old Alf reassured his daughters-in-law and the weeping Jenny. "The old woman's had her forelock shorn off, but her scalp's safe, and she can wear a false front till the 'air grows ag'in. How are you, Muriel, gal, and you, sergeant?"

"I'm unhurt, uncle," gasped Muriel. "The knife only went through my hair. It's brought some of it down, and cut some of it; but that's all right. Did you escape scot free also, sergeant?"

"Not altogether, I must admit. It is nothing, however; the knife blade just grazed my left cheek. Never mind that. Back to your loops, every one of you, quick, or we'll have the whole band of redskins clambering over the palisades or breaking open the gate in them. Ah! quick! Howling Wolf and the braves with him are trying to make off with the ark!"

He was the only one of the four defenders of the living-room who had not quitted his post or loophole.

The squatter, on hearing his wife cry out as the tomahawk shore away her hair so close to her scalp, had at once turned his eyes in her direction. He saw her fall heavily backwards, for so startled and horrified was she that for the moment she did not quite comprehend the narrow escape she had had and almost believed the top of her skull had been cleft clean away.

The ax tore some of the hairs out by the roots in its passage as well as cut others clean asunder, and the sudden wrench and sharp, poignant pain of it, on top of her surprise and the horror of seeing the ax flashing apparently straight for her forehead, practically deprived her, strong, masculine woman though she generally was, of the power of her limbs, and bowled her over like an actual blow.

Fully believing her killed—brained by the weapon—her husband and Muriel had uttered cries of horror and grief unutterable, and flown to her side. This accounted for Sergeant Dick being the only one to fire upon the four daring invaders of the verandah.

At Dick's fresh admonition and alarm, Aunt Kate, Uncle Alf, Muriel, and the two sisters-in-law, with Jenny—all six—at once rushed to the three loopholes before them—that is on the east side of the front door—and peered out through these.

Before they could do so, there rattled out, above the firing from the other quarters of the house, the sharp incessant popping of Sergeant Dick's service revolver.

Old Alf was the first of his party to look forth, and he saw—first, the brave whom the sergeant had killed while climbing up the pillar, lying stiff and motionless upon the verandah, and then the ark, in the thick darkness, slowly swinging round her stern away from the "castle."

The craft was still fast by her head to the verandah, but she was no longer lying parallel alongside this, but turning her stern away, so as to lie at right angles to it.

Hanging head downwards over the stern bulwark, still in sight, was the form of an Indian, and a great dark stain was growing in size just below him upon the ark's ribs. The hand of a second redskin projected at a sharp, unnatural angle above the bulwark alongside.

Sergeant Dick, keeping watchful vigil at his loop, when the others in the front of the premises had deserted theirs, had suddenly seen three dusky forms rise above the off stern-quarter bulwark of the ark, writhe or bound aboard with the swiftness and silence of cats or snakes, and make a combined rush for the mooring-rope aft.

Before the sergeant had time to draw a bead upon any of the trio, one Indian was slashing at the rope with a tomahawk, while the other two were pushing hard, with their dripping rifles, upon the side of the verandah, so as not only to tauten the mooring rope, and enable their comrade the better to cut it, but also to get "way" or motion on the craft's stern, and force her round "head on" to the "castle" as quickly as possible.

The rope parted at the second slash. The first indeed might have done the trick had the savage wielding the tomahawk only been a little less excited and eager; for no doubt the weapon was as keen-bitted as a razor.

Even as the rope was severed, Sergeant Dick's revolver began to speak, and the two braves thrusting the craft away from the verandah with their rifles crumpled up and fell dead. They dropped their pieces over the side, and one of them nearly followed his weapon.

The third Indian—he who had wielded the ax—did not give the sergeant a chance to hit him. At the first crack of the revolver, he wheeled and stooping low—almost double—bolted, jumping from side to side as he ran, round the deckhouse, and got behind it.

Along either side of the deckhouse ran a foot-board, about a foot wide, on top of the bulwarks, with a handrail above to enable a person to pass safely from stem to stern. Short ladders, fore and aft, also gave easy access to the roof of the ark, which was not high peaked or gabled like the conventional toy ark, but gently rounded like a railway carriage-roof, or that of the cabin of a small yacht.

It was Howling Wolf, the intrepid and enterprising, if ferocious, Indian chief, who had again escaped the deadly fire of Sergeant Dick. He had been only slightly wounded in his attempt to scale the roof of the "castle." The bullet had grazed his thigh, but the sudden smart had momentarily paralyzed the muscles of the leg, and so brought him down at a run.

The limb was now almost as good as his other leg—warmed up, as he was with the battle fever, and thirsting to avenge the smart and the loss of his braves.

This was the position of affairs when the other occupants of the living-room of the "castle" looked out of the loopholes.

Before them was the ark, still held fast by the mooring-rope in the bows, turning slowly at right angles to them with the drift of the current, accelerated by the little "way" or push given to her stern by the two Indians whom the sergeant had shot down. And round the other side of the deckhouse, screened by it from the rifle-fire of the rightful owners of the craft, was Howling Wolf, whose ax could already be heard crashing upon the stout, sheet-iron-lined shutter of the cabin window beside him.

All around, in the inky blackness, invisible canoes were speeding up, propelled by madly whooping redskins, none of whom was replying save by shouting, to the wild random shooting of the besieged.

CHAPTER X
AN UNEXPECTED ILLUMINATION

Old Alf Arnold gave vent to a roar of anger when he saw the position of the ark.

"Thousand furies! That varmint will carry off the scow if he's not stopped. Help me unbar the door, quick, some of you! I'm going out to purvent it. You two girls, Bella and Deborah, take your brothers', Amos and Abner's, places in the side bedrooms, and tell the lads to follow me. Sergeant, you'll come too, won't you? Kate, Muriel, and Jenny, you three guard the loops here."

"Oh, no, no, father, don't go out! You are bound to be shot if you show yourselves outside!" cried Jenny, in the wildest alarm.

"Yes. Let the ark take care of itself, uncle," exclaimed Muriel, also in the deepest anxiety. "The Indians in the canoes will pick you off if you go out, and that one on the ark is powerless to run off with her while she is fast by her head to the verandah. He will not venture to show himself, to cut her loose."

"No, but it will shelter the riptiles behind it at the palisades, and a dozen of 'em may git over and swim to it; and then where'd we be?" growled Aunt Kate, who had quite recovered apparently from the shock of the loss of her forelock.

And the old woman rushed to the door with her husband, and began hurriedly unbarring it.

Bella and Deborah raced off to take the places of their brothers-in-law in the side rooms; and Muriel turned and whispered something in Jenny's ear.

"I'm with you, Arnold," Sergeant Dick said quietly, though he still stood at his loop, revolver in hand, refilling the discharged chambers in the weapon, and, with his eye on the stern of the scow, ready to fire if Howling Wolf showed himself.

The front door was thrown open, and instantly out rushed the old squatter, automatic in one hand and rifle atrail in the other; and after him ran Sergeant Dick, likewise armed.

Then, after a short pause, followed Abner and Amos, the two unmarried sons.

The instant Old Alf and the sergeant appeared upon the verandah, there were infuriated yells from the canoes in front of the "castle" and a scattered volley was fired at them. But all the bullets imbedded themselves harmlessly in the stout logs of the "castle"; and, racing along the verandah unscathed, the two white men gained the head of the ark, which, however, was now a good six feet or more from the verandah—the full length of the mooring-rope there.

The squatter, balked, pounced upon the mooring-rope, and hauled desperately upon it, bawling to the sergeant to lay hold also and pull.

Instead, John Dick backed quickly to the "castle," took a run, and leaped out beside the rope towards the broad bluff bow of the scow.

He landed just within it on both feet. But he fell forward on his hands and knees.

Up again the next second, he dashed towards the deckhouse, and, before the cheer that greeted his fine jump from all who witnessed it, was bounding up the forward ladder to the roof of the cabin.

He was now fully exposed to the fire of the Indians in the canoes, but his form was not very distinct in the blackness of the night. Moreover, the rapidity of his movements made him a still more difficult target.

Panning along the same side of the deckhouse on which Howling Wolf had been sheltering, Dick peered over, revolver ready cocked and presented for a shot.

But the Indian chief was no longer on the side of the scow.

The sternmost shutter, swinging loose and wide open, told Dick where he was—that he had forced the window and got into the cabin.

The ark was now at right angles with the verandah, and was slowly swinging round into an obtuse angle with it. If permitted, the current would eventually swing her right round, end for end—lay her thus, parallel with the verandah again, but beyond it to the southward.

"He's got inside the cabin," shouted Dick.

He sprang down the aft ladder, rushed to the door there, and thundered upon it with his rifle-butt, on failing to burst it in with his shoulder.

There were two loopholes in the stern bulkhead of the cabin, one on either side of the door. But the Indian chief inside had had his ammunition and firearms rendered useless by his immersions, and so could not fire out on his daring white foe.

The deckhouse door was giving way before Dick's frantic battering upon it with his rifle-butt, and he could feel the ark moving through the water up to the "castle," as the old squatter and Amos and Abner, lying prone on the verandah, pulled upon the bow-rope, when there was a scrambling noise at the broken window, succeeded by a loud plunge and splash in the water alongside.

Realizing that his position was getting too warm for him, Howling Wolf had leaped out through the window into the lake again.

Sergeant Dick at once rushed to that side, but, filled with generous admiration for the daring and persevering enterprise of the redman, forbore to shoot at him when his head rose above the surface—showing like a black ball upon the less dark surface of the water.

Howling Wolf dived again immediately, and the shots, fired at random in his direction by the less chivalrous squatters, only hit the water harmlessly.

And now there burst a great flood of lurid light upon the scene—an illumination which lit up the surroundings of the "castle" for a considerable distance all round, beyond the palisading.

Sergeant Dick, astonished beyond measure, turned his head swiftly in the direction whence the light emanated, half expecting to see the "castle" on fire.

Instead, he saw, reared above the skylight on his side of the apex-like roof of the "castle," a great blazing tar barrel, suspended by a small chain from a boathook stuck up through the skylight.

The glare cast an awe-inspiring ruddy glow on everything, and seemed to strike fire itself from the dark water flowing within the "dock."

Not only did it show up the canoes, but their redskinned occupants in the act, for the most part, of getting upon the palisades, and lifting their light craft over into the “dock.”

Some of the Indians had slipped through the palisades, and were swimming everywhere, all round, for the “castle.” But by far the great majority were trying to get the canoes over. The top of nearly every palisade was crowned by a half-nude copper-colored, befeathered human form, lifting and straining, while around him, within and without the palisading, others were swimming or clinging to the timbers and trying to help him.

Two canoes had been lifted over and their late occupants were clambering into them again, preparatory to following those swimming for the verandah.

Sergeant Dick was unable to do more for a moment or two than stare helplessly at the thrilling spectacle. But he was speedily brought to a sense of his own danger by the crackle of over a dozen rifles from the canoes beyond the storming line, and the thudding of as many bullets into the bulkhead of the ark’s cabin behind him.

Muriel Arnold had bethought herself of the tar-barrel, faced as she was with the problem how to provide an illumination which would show up the besiegers—prevent them getting in their canoes within the “dock,” and thus rushing the “castle” or ark. It was of the tar-barrel she had whispered to Jenny; and, leaving Aunt Kate to guard the partly open door of the “castle,” the two girls had rushed to the ladder leading up to the loft.

The tar-barrel was stored there with other lumber. They had hurriedly looped a chain round it and through the bunghole, and put it, on the end of the boathook, through the skylight on the verandah side of the house.

Jenny dropped a lighted match into the contents, and then she and Muriel, exerting all their strength, thrust the boathook up, and jammed it firmly so that it might not slip.

They had raced back, down the ladder, to the living-room, little suspecting how near they came to costing Sergeant Dick his life by the sudden and wholly unexpected illumination.

As the apex roof of the "castle" was covered with corrugated iron, there was no risk of any fragments of the blazing barrel setting it on fire; and the barrel swung well clear of the wooden staff of the boathook, which was tipped with iron a good third of its length.

Sergeant Dick saw and felt that the ark was being drawn back by the squatter and his two sons into its late moored position alongside the verandah; and so he at once ran round to that side of the deckhouse.

He stepped upon the narrow footboard bordering the cabin wall, and was safe from the fire of all the Indians except those on the west side of the "castle." And as he sidled swiftly along the plank, holding to the rail, like the driver or fireman of a locomotive clambering round it, he presented a difficult mark again, particularly in the dancing, uncertain glare of the tar-barrel.

He could see Old Alf, Amos, and Abner pulling on the inside bow and shifting their grip along as the craft swung her stern slowly in towards the verandah again.

But the sight of the swimmers making for the verandah, as well as the two canoes within the palisading, told Sergeant Dick that the best thing he and the three men heaving on the ark's bow could do would be to take refuge inside her.

The hail of bullets now being poured upon the ark and the front of the "castle" from the reserve canoes outside the palisades seemed to forbid the smallest hope of him or the other three getting back safely within the house.

He therefore bawled at the top of his voice:

"Bar the door, Mrs. Arnold—Muriel—Jenny! Never mind us out here! Arnold, we four must get inside the ark, and hold it."

CHAPTER XI
THE DEFENSE OF THE ARK

Sergeant Dick knew that the old squatter had the keys of the cabin doors upon him; that there would be no necessity for them to force an entrance.

"Right you are, sergeant!" Arnold answered; and, as the side of the ark bumped heavily against the verandah, the old man and his two sons vaulted hurriedly aboard, and dashed at the door near them.

Even as the key rattled in the lock, and Old Alf pushed the door in, Sergeant Dick sprang round the corner of the "house" or cabin. Nevertheless, inside he was within an ace of being shut out—purposely or accidentally—by Abner Arnold, who was slamming the door in his face, when he flung himself bodily against it, and, by main force, thrust it open sufficiently to slip inside.

"Did you want to shut me out?" he demanded, in fierce suspicion of the young squatter. Then, without waiting for an answer, he turned and helped to shoot home the bolts and put up the heavy wooden bars which stood ready for the purpose.

Old Alf and Amos were rushing through into the second cabin, to make sure of the door and broken window there.

The rattling of musketry continued unabatedly outside, and bullets thudded against the door and the stout log-walls of the cabin like hail. As soon as the door was secure, Sergeant Dick sprang to the first loop on the south, or offside, of the craft, and looked forth.

He saw the plumed heads of several savage warriors ranged along the bulwark of the scow. They were in the very act of clambering aboard!

As in the attack on the "castle," he instantly decided to use his automatic instead of his rifle, which, however, he had carried hung upon his right shoulder, ready for instant use. While hurrying along the footboard at the side of the cabin, he had seen to his pistol—made sure that it was reloaded to its utmost capacity.

With ten lives in the deadly little weapon, he thrust its short barrel out through the loophole, and opened a merciless fusillade upon the Indians clambering aboard.

At every bark of the weapon there was an agonized scream outside. Four of the redmen either lay head downwards over the bulwarks or had fallen back into the lake, in less than as many seconds. The others, with screams of dismay, whipped down again out of sight—all, that is, in front of his loop.

But in the scow's waist, and at her far end John Dick could hear the triumphant yells of the Indians mingled with the crackle of his fellow defenders' revolvers.

Abner Arnold had remained at the door by which they had got in, and was firing out through a loophole he had uncovered in it. A steel slide was fitted into grooves over a horizontal slit, about two inches wide, and six or eight long. Through this aperture the young squatter had his revolver thrust, and was potting fiercely at the Indians trying to climb over that end of the scow.

"You can hold your own, Abner?" the sergeant asked.

"Yes, curse you, yes!" was the fierce reply.

"Right. Then I'll go along to the next cabin and see if your father and brother need me."

The cabin he was in was fitted up, in rather primitive style, as a dining-compartment, or "saloon" and kitchen in one. A table-top was hooked up within a couple of inches of the slightly rounded, coach-like roof, and might be lowered by cords passing through rings to the level of an ordinary table.

On either side of the cabin ran a banked seat, which could be converted into two beds or berths—that is four in all—while there were hooks for hammocks if there were any call for additional sleeping accommodation.

Under the banked seats were lockers and drawers, most neatly made, and on the four walls—over the doors and flanking these, as well as on the two side walls—were little cupboards and all manner of cooking utensils and other domestic equipage.

In one corner of the apartment stood a small American iron stove, the pipe of which passed out through a hole in the eaves of the roof.

Pursuant to his expressed intention, Sergeant Dick passed hurriedly through the inner door into the other cabin, which was much better furnished, and evidently reserved for the womenfolk. There was no table hooked up, nor any stove, but there were banked seats for four beds, as well as hooks for hammocks, a couple of looking-glasses—the worse for frequent use—on the walls, a couple of lift-up dressing ledges, etc., and four wardrobe cupboards, one in each corner, for storage purposes, in addition to more lockers and little cupboards.

John Dick took in only the faintest idea of the apartment, of course. Naturally his thoughts were elsewhere at that moment than with the structure of Old Alf Arnold's strange houseboat.

He saw the old man firing out sideways, with a revolver, through a loophole nearer him than the window with the broken shutter, and Amos kneeling at the end-door, shooting through the lower loophole in it. The younger man was casting anxious glances, 'tween whiles, at the broken window, which gaped open—a square foot and more—for any redskin foe to shoot in at.

As a matter of fact, several bullets whizzed in through it and buried themselves with loud thuds in the opposite wall.

It was to prevent any of the Indians reaching the window that his father was firing sideways, chiefly through the adjacent loops. Amos had clearly run past the open window on hands and knees.

Neither he nor his father, Sergeant Dick saw, could be spared from their posts to try to cover the broken window. Both men had their hands full, for the time being at any rate, keeping the assailants from getting aboard.

On the other hand it would not do for the sergeant himself to leave Abner Arnold too long alone to hold the other cabin. Some of the foe would be bound to return to the quarter left undefended, and if not checked would smash in the two loops or shuttered windows at the point.

With his usual promptitude and decision, the young sergeant of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police at once acted. He rushed forward to where, by the light from without, he saw the dislodged shutter lying upon the cabin floor, caught it up, and, stooping so as

not to let his head show above the sill of the opening, dashed up under this and clapped the shutter, still fairly serviceable and intact, save for its lack of fastenings, over the aperture.

As he thus closed this several bullets rattled on the outside of the shutter, almost knocking it out of his hands. But he kept it pressed tightly over the opening with one hand, and turned and shouted to Old Alf:

"You run and help Abner in the other cabin, Mr. Arnold. I can manage here."

He knocked up the hook which held the slide over the loop or slit in the shutter, with his pistol muzzle, while he kept the shutter pressed over the open window with his left hand. Then he pushed aside the slide and thrust the weapon out, peering forth at the same time.

There came a loud shout of alarm from Abner, and Old Man Arnold, wheeling, rushed back to the other cabin.

"They've cut us loose, father—Amos!" Abner bawled.

A redskin's knife or tomahawk had slashed through the solitary mooring-rope holding his end of the scow to the "castle" verandah, and the craft began to drift on the current towards the southern side of the "dock," or palisaded enclosure.

It was no easy task Sergeant Dick had set himself—to hold up the heavy steel shutter over the window, and at the same time fire out through the loophole in it.

All the windows aboard the ark were constructed alike. They were merely square casements, and in the ordinary way they would be left open for light or air. The shutters—solid plates of steel an inch or more in thickness—were fitted in grooves, which rose above them, and could be dropped down easily over them on the inside and hooked into position thus.

Howling Wolf had, of course, beaten the steel plate bodily out of its grooves, and burst the hook away—no light achievement in the circumstances.

Old Man Arnold had kept that quarter of the scow free of boarders, but now, on the closing of the open window, which all the Indians in the canoes opposite had been making their target, several

redskins, swimming alongside, attempted again to board.

The two canoes within the “dock” at the same time closed up and ranged alongside on that same quarter, and every warrior in them at once stood up and gripped the side of the scow, making to draw himself up and over into it.

But in this intention the majority of them were frustrated by the sudden and by them, as well as by the defenders, the unexpected release of the scow. This, borne upon by the current as it was, ceased merely turning or veering round as if pivoted at its bow, and instead began to move away sidelong, bodily.

How it happened the occupants of the canoes themselves hardly had time to comprehend, but their dangling feet helped no doubt in the catastrophe which followed. For coming in contact with the offside gunwales of their frail craft, they helped to kick these under water as the inside gunwales rose up with the scow pressing hard upon them.

In an instant both canoes had filled and sunk, leaving half their late occupants clinging to the scow, and the other half struggling in the water, into which they had dropped either from fright or for lack of a secure hold on the bulwark over them.

CHAPTER XII
SAVED BY A WOMAN'S WIT

Sergeant Dick's automatic at once spoke rapidly; and, shot through the brain, three of the would-be invaders fell back from the bulwark, while the others, fearing the same fate, voluntarily let go and likewise disappeared.

"Hooray!" shouted Amos. "We've done 'em yit again. Keep the shutter up just a little longer, sergeant, and I'll be able to help ye."

He vacated his kneeling posture at the door, slamming and hooking the slide over the loop in it, and turned and looked wildly about the cabin for a means of fastening up the shutter. But his dull wits could think of none on the spur of the moment.

"You'll have to drop it and let it sweat, sergeant," he said. "I don't see how we can manage it arter all. Look ahere, I'll take the loop beside it and guard it that way, and you can take the door 'stead o' me. The women in the 'castle' will pick off all the red varmints who try to board us on t'other side, you see."

Sergeant Dick could not help smiling grimly at the young man resigning the post at the door to him. It was far the more perilous position if the window he was at had to be left unshuttered.

None of these young squatters commended himself very much to the police officer. One and all, though fierce and plucky enough, he had already had plenty of evidence, would prefer to save his own skin at his (the sergeant's) expense.

Without a word, however, John Dick at once dropped the shutter again to the floor, and almost heaved a sigh of relief at being thus rid of its most tiring weight.

Then he flitted to the door, and knelt by the loop Amos had just left. Amos, however, redeemed himself somewhat now in the sergeant's eyes, for seeing from the loop his father had been so lately firing through that that side of the craft was free of invaders or boarders, he at once rushed across the cabin to the other, and looked out on that side also.

"Hooray! Hooray, sergeant!" he yelled. "There's not a redskin aboard on either side. I can see from end to end of the scow, and there can't be none at t'other end of cabin neither. I should say, Abner and the Old Man air firing at the skunks in the water. Ay, give it to 'em hot, now, sergeant! Don't spare the skunks. Put a bullet through every head in sight. Thunder! What's that blaze out in the middle of the lake? Cuss it! It's on Stable Islet! The skunks have landed a party there an' fired the stables with the 'osses inside."

"No, they are carrying off the horses, I can see from here, on two rafts they have evidently made from some of the timber of the stables."

"We'll have to let 'em go; we can do nothing to purvent 'em. We've got our hands full with the varmints round us. Let 'em have it, sergeant! Wipe out all who are inside the dock! Hooray! They're done, and air all trying to get away now."

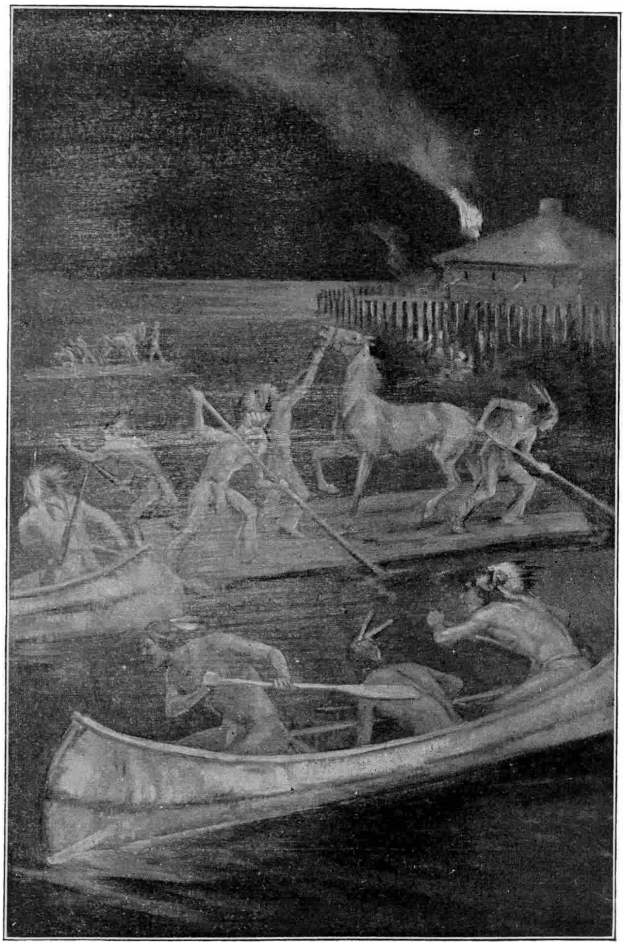
It was true. From the upper loophole in the door, Dick could see all the redmen in the enclosure before him swimming away desperately for the palisades, or clambering over these into the canoes waiting outside.

Such of the Indians as had remained in the canoes were firing through the palisades at both the ark and the "castle," to try to cover the retreat. But both these structures were bullet-proof, and the excitement, flurry, and exasperation of the red sharpshooters militated against any likelihood of their getting a shot home through the tiny slits of loopholes in the shutters.

Almost directly in front of him, the sergeant could see out upon the lake two large rafts—made of beams and boards, and what had evidently been partitions between stalls in the stable and the buggy-house, as well as doors, bound roughly together with rawhide lariats.

The rafts were beyond Stable Islet, and so beyond the radius of the illumination of the blazing tar-barrel hung out by Muriel and Jenny. But a huge bonfire, composed of the flaming remains of the looted and half dismantled stable and buggy-house lit up another great patch of the lake, and showed the two captured horses, one on either raft, surrounded by several Indian warriors paddling and steering for the western shore.

A couple of canoes were also towing each raft, which, therefore, for all its clumsy make, moved fairly quickly over the lake.



A HUGE BONFIRE SHOWED THE TWO CAPTURED HORSES.

Amos Arnold, sharp on his own last words, had thrust his Winchester repeater through the loop he stood beside, and started vengefully to take potshots at every plumed head bobbing upon the water before him.

Sergeant Dick, however, held his fire. He did not believe in such cruel butchery as that, retribution though it might be called.

"Let the misguided poor wretches go," he cried. "They've had enough of it. We've given them a drubbing—a thrashing they are not likely to get over in a hurry."

He was pleased to note that only one rifle seemed to be firing now from the front or verandah side of the house, although three rifles had been until the besiegers turned tail. The single rifle could only belong to the fierce old wife and mother of this tigerish family.

Muriel and Jenny had been firing out upon the assailants up to now, but, seeing their foes fleeing, they too were humanely forbearing to shoot.

"What's that?" howled Amos. "Let the wretches go! Spare 'em 'cos they're runnin'. Not much! Not me!"

And he continued to pot away. But with indifferent success, for the light from the blazing tar-barrel was getting very bad—very jumpy and feeble. The barrel was falling to pieces and dropping in flaming fragments with loud hisses into the water, or rebounding from and sliding down the iron roof of the "castle."

Moreover, the swimmers dived incessantly or swam under water until they reached the palisades, where many of them managed to slip through instead of having to climb over.

For all their vindictiveness, too, the squatter and his two sons saw that the current was carrying the ark against the southern end of the enclosure, and comprehended the peril of allowing this to happen. Partly screened from the fire of those within the ark by the palisades, the redmen outside these would easily be able to board, if it drifted alongside them. The little craft would be bound to be taken. The Indians, by mounting on the palisades, would be able to leap aboard in overwhelming numbers, get on the roof where they could not be reached, and break through with their tomahawks.

"Quick!" shouted Sergeant Dick, on noting the danger simultaneously with the other three. "We shall drift against the palisades if we are not careful, and then it will be all up with us. Quick! The other door! We must get out at all risks and use the sweeps, or we are done for."

As one man, the four defenders of the ark rushed to the door by which they had entered its "house"—which door was still the nearer to the "castle," and now almost directly facing it.

Frenziedly the whole quartet flung themselves upon the bolts and bars. One wrenched back the top bolt; another the bottom. Another turned the key, and the fourth whipped out the top great wooden bar. Then the other two bars were removed in like haste and the door was thrown open.

Out into that end of the scow the four men burst, and seized upon the two big oars or "sweeps" lying to either side. The cabin screened them from their nearest foes—those lining the palisading at the point whither they were drifting. But they were wholly exposed, save when they stooped double, to the Indians on either side of them, and in order to use the "sweeps," they would have to expose themselves. Not only that. They were now so close up to the palisading that they might not be able to overcome the inertia of their craft, plus the resistance of the current, which was dead against them, in time to avert the threatened calamity.

Woman's wit proved their salvation. But for it they must assuredly have, all four, fallen victims to the fury of the already exulting savages waiting for them. Using the sweeps, they would not have been able to get back inside the "house" or cabin, and shut out their foes before these were upon them, once they touched the palisades.

A rope came sailing through the air from the direction of the "castle." It fell across both bulwarks of the scow, and in an instant all four inmates of this had sprung upon it and grabbed it.

As they did so a storm of bullets "criss-crossed" through the space they had just been occupying. The Indians on the broken arc of palisading in sight of them had opened a cross fire upon them. The air above them, as they crouched on all fours, grasping the rope—below the bulwarks of the scow—was alive with lead flying in different directions.

To stand upright again would have meant instant annihilation, for the range was not twenty feet.

"Back inside the cabin! Crawl on your hands and knees. We can haul on the rope through the doorway!" cried Sergeant Dick.

The four men scrambled madly back inside the open door behind them, holding tightly, all, to the rope which was pulled hard against them. It was an experience none of them would wish to go through a second time.

The leaden storm over their heads never abated for a moment, but whistled past, thudded against the bulkhead, whizzed in at the open door of the cabin or came smashing through the sides of the scow, incessantly.

But once inside the cabin door, they pushed this three quarters to, and, standing behind it, heaved their hardest, in concert, on the rope, which they passed around the foot of the mast in the middle of the compartment.

As the rope had come sailing through the air towards them, one and all had seen that it emanated from the "castle" window nearest them, looking out onto the verandah.

Muriel Arnold had seen their imminent deadly peril, and with a woman's quick wit had realized that only a rope thrown them from the "castle" could save them.

"Aaron! Abel!" she had screamed to her two married cousins. "Quick, here! Quick! Drop everything and come quick!"

The two brothers came tearing from their respective posts and found her gripping a coil of rope. She then thrust the rope into the eldest brother, Abel's, hands, threw up the shutter within the embrasure of the window, and hurriedly explained that he must toss the rope to his father and two brothers on the ark.

An adept at throwing the lasso, it was the easiest thing in the world for Abel Arnold to send the rope sailing out through the open window into the near end of the scow. And the moment he and Aaron felt it tugged upon, they began to haul with all their might upon it, aided by their mother, Muriel, and Jenny, overcoming the "way" on the craft, and drawing it back towards the verandah.

CHAPTER XIII
SERGEANT DICK'S DETERMINATION

The Indians howled with baffled fury and concentrated their fire upon the open window of the "castle." Several of their bullets actually frayed the rope, while others entered the open window.

But Abel and Aaron's wives rushed in, and, from the other, shuttered, windows looking on to the verandah, opened a dropping fire upon the discomforted redmen. In less time almost than it takes to tell it, the near end of the ark bumped against the verandah, and the craft was safe.

Hurriedly making fast the rope in the "castle" and the ark, the occupants of both were able to man their loopholes again in full strength. They fired into the besiegers with such effect that these saw the hopelessness of continuing the struggle and broke and paddled away for dear life out of the radius of the light.

"We'll have our horses back. If we are sharp we can manage it," roared the squatter inside the ark. "Quick! Amos, Abner, sergeant, let us get up the sail."

"No, no, uncle, you'll be captured—you'll all go to your certain capture or death!" screamed Muriel, inside the "castle."

"Not us!" cried Amos. "The Injins air all running like sheep. We'll chase 'em. The burnin' stable will give us all the light we need."

"It would be the height of folly, squatter," said Sergeant Dick quietly. "Out in the open lake and darkness the canoes would be buzzing round you immediately, like wasps around a jampot. Besides, do you think for a moment the Indians would let you recover the horses *alive*? No, they would cut the animals' throats if they had to abandon them. And, look at the distance the rafts are from us, and how near to the shore. We couldn't possibly do it, fast as I know the scow sails, with the delay in opening and warping out through your dock-gate."

"You hold your tongue until you are asked for your advice, me bold policeman," snarled Abner.

"All the same it would be downright, dod-rotted madness, Alf, and you'll do no such thing!" bawled the squatter's wife. "Let the 'osses go. They're not wu'th my brave lads' lives, if you don't vally your own. Ain't you got the sense to know when to come in out of the rain?"

That settled it.

Old Man Arnold grinned a little sheepishly at Sergeant Dick, then faced sharply upon his son Abner.

"You hold *your* tongue, me lad, and l'arn a little more respec' for a man who's proved hisself to be a man all through this 'ere night. Never you mind him, sergeant. He allus had a spiteful tongue. Don't know why 'zactly. Didn't get it from me, anyways, though he mout from the old 'ooman."

The redmen were now in full retreat on all sides, and the majority of them were already swallowed up in the inky shadows surrounding the circle of light still feebly cast by the almost burnt-out tar-barrel.

Without fear of being shot at, therefore, Sergeant Dick, the squatter, and Amos and Abner emerged from the open door of the ark, and followed each other on to the verandah of the "castle," to the accompaniment of sounds of the door of this being hastily unbarred and unbolted.

Jenny was the first to rush forth, and greet her father and brothers. She threw herself, sobbing and laughing together hysterically, into the old man's arms, while her cousin Muriel advanced to the young police officer, and said:

"Sergeant, on behalf of my uncle and aunt and cousins, as well as myself, I thank you sincerely for the excellent help you gave us. I am sure we are all very grateful to you."

"What did he do more'n the rest of us?" asked Abner. "Wasn't it for his own life as much as yourn or anybody else's, he was fightin'? He on'y done wot we all done, and had to do."

"You are ungenerous, Abner. At least have the decency to hold your tongue if you can't be grateful for the excellent service our guest rendered us, and remember that he is our guest."

"Hoity-toity, gal! Can't the lad speak in his own 'ome? Since when did you put up to l'arn my sons manners?"

This from the aunt and mother.

"That'll do—that'll do, Kate! The gal was quite right, and Abner's an ungrateful young pup as wants l'arnin' different. Come, let's git indoors. Mother, and you, gals, put the pot on, and let's have somethink to eat, and give us somethink to drink while it's a-cookin'. I'm that thirsty I could nigh drink the lake dry, and you must be the same, sergeant."

Dick admitted that he was dry, but said that a glass of water would serve him. Whereupon Muriel at once rushed off and brought him one, to the scowling and muttered resentment of Abner.

The old woman promptly put a big pot on an oilstove, and Muriel and she proceeded to lay the table, while her husband and sons, throwing themselves into chairs, were served with tin mugs of whisky by Jenny and the two daughters-in-law, Bella and Deborah.

Occasionally one of the young men would rise and look out through a loophole in front or at the side, to see that all was well without; and while they drank and filled and smoked their pipes, they agreed that it was most unlikely that the rebellious Indians would renew the attack upon them.

"They've had their bellyful of fightin' with us, there's no doubt aboot that," guffawed Abel, the eldest brother. "They've gone off right enough; they'll not show up here again in a 'urry, though I 'spects they'll carry on their devilish games elsewheres—range all over the country, raisin' Cain. But that don't matter a red cent to us s'long as they leaves us alone."

"It matters a lot to me, though," said Sergeant Dick. "As one of the custodians of law and order in the country, my duty demands that I delay no longer here, but hurry at once back to the nearest police-station, an' put myself at the disposal of my superiors—assist them in whatever measure they see fit to take to cope with this revolt."

"You must stay the night with us, sergeant," said the old squatter. "Don't go and say later on as 'ow we druv you away. You mustn't take no heed of that surly young pup, Abner, there."

"No, I don't think I ought to wait until morning. It makes my blood run cold when I think of the atrocities these rebel braves may be guilty of all over the defenseless country while I am snug and safe here. I couldn't sleep comfortably in my bed, Mr. Arnold. My plain duty is to get away back to my fellow-troopers, and help in checking these redskin raiders—putting a stop to their wild work. And so you must really excuse me for apparently running away from you and not availing myself of your kind invitation. I will partake of your hospitality, however, so far as to remain until after supper, for I am just about famished, and it's no use starting out on the back-trail faint with hunger. But, after that, I will trouble one or more of your sons"—he purposely did not look at Abner—"to put me ashore somewhere, on the north shore preferably, when I will make the best of my way on shank's pony to Lonewater, the nearest of our stations about here, I believe."

"Please yourself, sergeant," responded the old man, "but, harkee! You needn't go on foot. There's an old fellow lives wi' his wife, and no 'un else, back of the cliffs wot the echo comes from on this lake. You heerd the echo, no doubt?"

"I did."

"Waal, this old chap—name of Seymour—is an old shepherd on the big sheep ranch that stretches for miles on miles t'other side of them cliffs—the Lonewater Ranch it's known as; and he keeps a couple of horses allus for gallopin' round looking arter stray sheep, and if you tells him or his missus you comes from me they'll let you have one of the nags 'ithout a word."

He was frowning in a strange, deprecatory way at his four sons, who had all looked quickly and suspiciously at him and one another when he first mentioned about the shepherd.

Abel, Aaron, and Amos nodded back at him, plainly reassured. But Abner shrugged a shoulder and turned away, the gesture signifying, as plain as plain could be, in the vernacular of the country, "Oh, the old man's fair dotty, and, as for me, I give him up as hopeless."

Sergeant Dick did not fail to notice these strange looks and signs passing between the father and sons. It was his business to be observant, to keep his eyes about him and notice such little things.

But he could not understand the meaning of them, the reason for them, and was considerably puzzled.

He feigned, however, not to notice anything, to be absorbed in the contemplation of the glass of milk which Muriel had insisted on his having.

He was to wonder afterwards why he was not sharper—why he did not tumble to the significance of this wireless telegraphy.

"Oh, thank you!" he said. "I shall be glad if you will direct me to this Seymour's cabin. But possibly the poor old man and his wife have fallen victims to the Indians' fury. The fiends are bound to scour the country all round, and murder every living soul they come across."

"They'll not get hold of old Bill Seymour or his missus. You can lay to that."

Again his sons frowned and shook their heads at him, and he frowned back at them in a way that clearly meant, "Mind your own business, lads. I know what I'm doing."

"I don't mind a-tellin' *you*, sergeant, that he's had his cabin burnt over the heads of his missus and hisself afore now by redskins, and bad whites, an' nary a 'air of either of 'em has been singed. And for why? Waal, as I said I don't mind a-tellin' *you*, but it mustn't go no further, mind. Acause the cabin's abuilt close by the cliffs, not thirty yards from 'em, and he and his missus hev a hunderground passage that they dug out a-runnin' from th' 'ut to a hidden cave in the rocks —a cave that the redmen wouldn't find if they s'arched for donkeys' years."

His sons on this, exchanged nods that implied, like Abner's shrug, that their father was clean crazy thus to give away Seymour's secret. Aaron jumped up quickly and noisily, and shouted, clearly in order to put a stop to the old man's confidences:

"Come on, mother, Deb, Bella, Muriel, Jenny! What are you all so long about? Let's have something to eat for goodness' sake. I'm just starved. Hurry up, do!"

CHAPTER XIV
THE AMBUSH

Thus exhorted, the women, with many protests that they had been getting the supper ready as quickly as they could, set an appetizing stew on the table and all eleven of them sat round and fell to, with exceeding relish after their late terrible fight for life.

As before, one or other of the party from time to time rose during the meal, and looked out upon the lake to guard against any surprise attack by some of their late besiegers. Sergeant Dick sat between Muriel and Jenny, and was scowled at the whole time by Abner, who sat opposite him.

The two girls did their best to dissuade the sergeant from starting out before daylight, when, as they said, he might be able by a little reconnoitering, to learn whether the Indians were still in the neighborhood and likely to intercept him.

"And if they were," he answered, "I should then be stuck here until nightfall again; it would be hopeless to think of getting away. But, if I slip off now, I have everything in my favor, and should be able to get ashore safely and reach Seymour's cabin before daybreak."

All the men and the other women agreed with him; and, at his request, old Alf Arnold, exchanging again sundry mysterious winks and nods with not only his sons, but his wife and daughters-in-law as well, proceeded to give him minute instructions how he would get to the shepherd Bill Seymour's lonely dwelling.

And then, the meal being at an end, Dick asked which of the young men would put him ashore in a canoe.

"Oh, we'll take you ashore in the ark, sergeant—me and three of the lads—you, Aaron, Amos, and Abner. Abel, you and the women ought to be able to hold the 'castle' until our return, although I doan't for a minute think as 'ow it's likely to be attacked ag'in, or us

either, for that matter. So get ready you three, Aaron, Amos, Abner! Buckle on your cartridge belts ag'in and let's be moving, for I can see the sergeant wants to be off."

John Dick offered his hand to each of the women in succession, and he could not help noticing what flabby handshakes all save Muriel and Jenny gave him.

"Good-by! I hope to see you all again soon, under better circumstances," he said, as he followed the squatter and his three sons out the door on to the verandah.

It was quite dark outside now. The tar-barrel had long since burnt itself out, as had also the stable and buggy-shed on Stable Islet; and the light had been extinguished in the front or living-room of the "castle," so that any watchful eyes on the shores of the lake might not see the door open, and what was ado.

As all the adieux had been said inside the house, the five men did not linger on the verandah, but ran at once to the near end of the ark and sprang aboard.

Old Alf unlocked the cabin door in case of a sudden necessary retreat. Then while Abel, inside the "castle," cast off the mooring-rope secured through the window, Abner hauled it in, and Aaron, Amos, and Sergeant Dick hoisted the sail on the mast, and got out two long sweeps as well.

As silently as possible the scow was worked towards the dock-gate, which was found considerably the worse for the siege.

One of the padlocks was smashed, and the other so battered that the key would hardly fit the lock, while the stout oaken beams and pales were all hacked and chipped from the free use of Indian tomahawks.

Unfastening and opening the gate, they warped the ark out. Then Arnold *pater* secured the gate again and, spreading their sail fully to what breeze there was, they shipped their sweeps and stood silently away round the east side of the "castle," so as to deceive any Indian eyes that might have them under observation.

They made as if for the landing-spit on the east side for a short distance, then tacked and steered northward up the lake, and, when they were approaching the narrow curving neck there, they shifted

sail again and headed at top speed for the western shore.

By this erratic course they hoped to deceive and leave behind any Indian canoes that might be out on the lake spying about.

It yet wanted a good two hours to daylight, as they backed in slowly to the western bank, and gently grounded their broad stern on a little jutting point similar to the landing-place on the opposite bank.

All was still save for the low murmuring of the trees in the night breeze, and an occasional ripple of the placidly lapping water against the bank and the sides of the scow. The trees were very dense at the point, the same as everywhere else round the lake, and in the darkness they seemed to present an impenetrable wall.

But as Old Alf had explained to the sergeant of mounted police, a trail of blazed trees, which would show up white and thus be plainly visible even on so dark a night, led right from the point to the foot of the high cliffs behind the woods. On reaching the cliffs all he had to do was to skirt their base northward, turn with them and follow them round, and he could not miss Seymour's hut on their farther side.

"Well, good-by, sergeant, I 'opes as 'ow you've enjoyed yourself while you've bin 'ere," said Old Alf, in grim humor, as he shook Dick's hand. "Now, your trail's as cl'ar as daylight, and ye'll only hev yourself to blame if you go astray."

"He can't go astray nohow, onless he doan't know his right 'and from his left," growled Aaron. "So long, sergeant! Don't forgit to give us a call next time you are in these parts."

"Ay, don't fail to drop in next time you're passin' the lake," grinned Amos, cracking an old chestnut which had done hoary service in the family since one of their early visitors first cracked it.

Abner was not present. He had purposely kept to the other end of the scow.

Sergeant Dick pressed the hands of the three men again, and sprang lightly ashore. He turned and waved his hand, then plunged into the bushes out of sight—to be seized suddenly by the throat with a strangling grip by a dark form which appeared to spring out of the ground itself!

At the same time his arms were pinned to his sides by other shadowy, plume-bedecked forms.

Sergeant Dick was unable to utter a cry with that choking grip upon his throat, and he was powerless to wrench his arms free. But he had been in many a similar predicament before—in drinking saloons and other wild places into which his profession took him in chase of the malefactor, or the maintenance of law and order—and he had learned certain tricks of defense even when taken at such a disadvantage.

Quick as thought he jerked up his right knee with all his strength. It came in contact with something soft and yielding—the chest of the man gripping him by the throat of course.

There was a gasp, and the Indian relaxed his grip upon his windpipe.

Immediately he sent up a ringing warning shout to the occupants of the ark.

"Help! Redskins!"

At the same time he ducked his head and drove it forward at the winded savage's face, while wrenching with all his strength to free his arms, and curling one of his legs round in a sweeping motion sideways and backwards.

His maneuvers were highly successful. In fully a dozen cases he had found them work just as well before.

The winded savage was sent flying headlong backwards against a tree with his nose nearly flattened by the top of the white captive's head; and another redman, with legs scooped clean from under him, went down sidelong, amongst the bushes on the brave young police officer's right hand.

With that hand thus released, Sergeant Dick promptly drove it into the chest of the Indian, pinning his left hand. And as the man staggered back, tripping over the bushes and nearly falling, the thicket rang to the piercing war-whoop of the Indians, and became alive with madly rushing, be-plumed shadows.

Two of these aimed fierce blows at Sergeant Dick's head, but, luckily for him, in striking down the Indian on his left, he had slipped upon a fallen twig. He fell heavily upon the broad of his

back, and the tomahawks of the two fresh assailants missed him.

One of the pair, indeed, fell over him, and the second man, satisfied that he could not escape with his late captors also to reckon with, ran on after the others towards the ark.

There came the sharp popping of revolvers from that craft, and several screams of agony intermingled with the Indian whooping.

Old Alf Arnold and his sons were not taken unawares. They had caught the alarm from Sergeant Dick's devoted shout, and instantly wheeled about and dropped, crouching upon one knee in the stern, in the act of pushing the craft off the point.

All three had their holster flaps open, so that they might whip out their automatics instantly. In fact, as they had approached the shore every man had his pistol ready cocked in his hand.

Partly screened, in their kneeling attitudes, by the high sloping stern and sides of the scow, they met the onrush of the Indians with a fusillade which quickly checked it.

Old Alf, Aaron and Amos were in the stern, as already stated. Abner was in the bows with the long, double-roomed cabin between him and them.

He was out of the fight so to speak, but, a quick glance round the side of the "house" or cabin showed him the forms of his father and brothers firing at the redskins ashore, and hurriedly he grabbed a rope that came in over the bow and was attached to an anchor some little way out in the lake.

He heaved upon this rope quickly, hand over hand, with all his might, and drew the light, easily moved ark, swiftly through the water away from the shore.

This was another of the many "wrinkles" or ideas that Old Alf Arnold had taken from the famous American author, Fenimore Cooper's story, "The Deerslayer." Like "Floating Tom Hutter" in that novel, Arnold and his sons always dropped an anchor well away from the shore of the lake when about to land from the ark, and paid out the rope. By hauling on the rope a prompt retreat, if necessary, from the shore could always be easily effected.

CHAPTER XV
LOST IN THE WOODS

Even as Sergeant Dick went down under the redskin armed with the tomahawk, he had whipped out his revolver and retained a firm grip of the butt.

His antagonist aimed a furious stroke at his head, but the blow missed through his falling, and the keen blade only bit deep into the mold beside his left ear.

Swift as thought the young police officer clapped the revolver to the broad, naked, painted chest lying over him and pressed the trigger.

The crack of the weapon was instantaneously followed by the death-shriek of the foeman, who rolled limply off him, and lay spread-eagled, face upward, upon the ground alongside.

John Dick was on his knees in a flash, pointing the revolver at the Indian whom he had only sent staggering on his left hand, and who was now rushing at him with clubbed rifle.

A swift stab of flame, accompanied by the whip-like report, and the redman crumpled up in his tracks, and tumbled on top of his dead companion.

Only one more enemy in sight remained to be dealt with—the man on the right, whom Sergeant Dick had tripped up. The fourth savage, the one in front of him, was still *hors de combat*—too winded and stunned to take a hand in the fight as yet.

A shot through the brain ended the life of the third man, while in the act of sighting at him with a rifle. Then the sergeant scrambled upright, and looked wildly about him, with smoking revolver ready to pot at the first fresh assailant he saw.

He meant to rush back to the aid of those in the scow, feeling that to do so was his duty—that he could not consider his own safety and leave them to be butchered possibly.

But in the same instant, through an opening in the trees before him, he saw the ark some fifteen feet away from the bank. The craft was slipping swiftly out towards the middle of the lake, with three dark figures in the stern—almost indistinguishable from the background of the cabin—spitting fire rapidly, evidently with automatics, at a howling pack of plumed forms waist-high, and deeper, in the water.

The squatter and his sons were safe, and there was no hope of his rejoining them. He must consult his own safety by immediate and headlong flight in the opposite direction.

Wheeling promptly, therefore, Sergeant Dick fled away through the timber, and only in the nick of time. Half a dozen braves, alarmed by the shooting and death-shrieks of their comrades in the rear, were rushing back to learn the cause.

They just caught sight of his vanishing red coat, and with yells of rage sent a hasty, scattered volley after him, ere starting in hot and furious pursuit.

One of the bullets went through the skirts of his red tunic, but all the other messengers of death only smacked against the trees behind or around him, or went swishing, equally as harmlessly, through the bushes.

Sergeant Dick ran as he probably never ran before in his life. He could not pick his way in the intense darkness of the woods, nor had he time or the inclination to do so.

He just hurled himself bodily at the thick, high-growing bushes, burst through them anyhow, leaving fragments of his garments attaching to them, and sustaining pricks and scratches all over his body and legs, even through his clothing.

He protected his face with his hands and rifle held up before him, and his keen eyes were just able to discern the trunks of the trees—a blacker black than the darkness itself.

Guided by the crashing he thus unavoidably made, the Indians followed hard on his heels, uttering the most blood-curdling war-whoops and threats of vengeance, occasionally firing in the direction of the sounds ahead of them.

They were so close upon him he could hear what they threatened to do to him quite plainly in the otherwise still night air; and he did not need any better incentive to try and increase the distance between them.

Presently the dense, tangled undergrowth came to an end. Such is generally found only on the outskirts of colonial forests.

In the deeper depths there is hardly any, and the great boles of the trees stand up nakedly like so many mighty poles stuck in the ground, often rising to an immense height before a single branch juts out.

Now his boots made next to no noise on the soft pine-needles, and he flitted as noiselessly as a shadow through the thick-growing trees and the darkness. Even though running at top speed, he trod with the caution and silence he had learnt to do on many a trail farther north—the stealth his like and all backswoodsmen have picked up from the redmen themselves.

Here, therefore, his pursuers were at fault—could not longer follow him by the sounds he made; and so they halted to make torches of the pine wood around, with which to try and follow his tracks.

This was so much loss of time, which the quarry made good use of in covering ground; and very shortly he came to some hard and rocky ground on which his feet would leave no impression.

The trees here were fewer, but the night was so dark he felt he might safely trust to its screen, and he ran forward at increased speed, still as softly as possible, the ground all the time rising under his feet and growing more rugged and difficult.

He stumbled suddenly down a deep water-course, which he did not discover until he was over its edge.

It ran at right angles to the way he was making. But as he had already lost all sense of locality, knew not in which direction—north, east, west or south—that he was making, he decided at once to keep to the stream and walk up it.

To go down it, he knew would take him back to the lake, for no doubt the stream ran into the lake.

He wanted to put as wide a distance between himself and the lake as he could before daylight, and run no risk of capture by the redmen.

If he had no longer any real idea as to where he was, he had also lost all trace of his pursuers, left them far in the rear; and he could breathe more freely and take things more quietly.

The stream did not reach to his knees, and so his service boots kept him dry. But it was running very fast, its rocky bed rising steadily in a steep incline.

Soon he came to where the water boiled and frothed and roared in a great cauldron-like basin, above which was a positive slide of water, the stream pouring down a smoothly-worn slope of rock at something like thirty degrees.

Sergeant Dick could not see the top of this slope or slide of water with the darkness, and the fact that the banks were shut in by trees which completely over-arched it.

The banks themselves, too, were high and rocky, in places beetling. Just beside him they overhung the water to a height of twenty feet or more.

"I've come to the cliffs of the Wonderful Echo, that's evident," he murmured; "but it would be madness to try and follow them to the right now. Besides I'd have a job just here I should say, and I'm dead beat—just about done up. And for another thing, I might only blunder into the arms of the redskins I have escaped from. Better stay where I am until the morning's light, anyway. 'Go farther and fare worse' is an old saying I believe in. Still, I can't stay here exactly. I'll have to go back a bit and scale the bank."

He did so, and climbed out where the ground was easy. Then, satisfied that he had thrown off all pursuit, he hunted about him among the rocks for some sort of a niche or cave into which he might crawl, and so be safe, while he slept, from any prowling bear or equally to be dreaded bull-moose.

By the greatest good fortune, he came across a kind of grot formed by two mighty, tabular-shaped fragments of rock having been thrown up against each other at some time in the world's

history. A triangular shaped archway ran between the two rocks, and strewn all round in front of it were a number of fair-sized boulders, some as much as he could roll along, others smaller.

"Eureka! The very thing," he crowed jubilantly at sight of the place, "it might have been made for me."

He crawled inside the archway, and found that it went back for about twenty feet, then narrowed so much that nothing bigger than a rat could possibly get in at that end.

Delighted beyond measure, he returned to the entrance, and, rolling some of the heavier stones in front of it, made himself a bed of dry leaves and brushwood within it.

He piled more stones on top of his barricade, and then, with his rifle and revolver beside him, stretched himself comfortably on his litter and composed himself for sleep.

Dead tired as he was, hardly able indeed within the past quarter of an hour or so to keep his eyes open or prevent himself sinking exhausted to the ground, he was immediately in the land of dreams —slumbering heavily and soundly.

When he opened his eyes again, he lay for some minutes in a pleasant half doze, unable to realize fully, and, in fact, careless of, where he was, too comfortable to move.

And then gradually, as his wits came together, he became conscious of a bright reddish golden glow surrounding him.

He opened his eyes again, saw the slanting rocks above, and comprehended where he was, and that the reddish light filling the cave must come from the sun *setting again in the west*.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed, as he pushed some of the stones of his barricade over, and looked out for confirmation of his belief, "I have slept the clock round nearly—been asleep, let me see, a good sixteen hours at least."

CHAPTER XVI
A STARTLING DISCOVERY

He crawled out of the cavity and looked about him.

Away to the southeast he could see the lake gleaming like a sheet of molten fire in the rays of the setting sun. Between him and it, as well as stretching all round as far as he could see, were densely-wooded declivities backed by equally densely-wooded heights.

The view northward was cut off by a high ridge of splintered scaurs, or cliff-like rocks, rising in terraces upon one another.

"H'm!" he said, "my way to Bill Seymour's hut lies over those rocks, or else round them to west or east. Across the ridge, due northward, I should say, would be the quicker route, if it can be done; and I haven't too much time to spare if I would do it before darkness is on me again. But how am I going to get up those cliffs?"

Piercing right through the ridge, he saw, was the tree-arched water-slide. It cleft its way cleanly through all the rocky terraces. From where he was standing close beside the water-course, he could see the blue sky on the other side of the ridge through the chasm or gorge it had carved or channeled for itself, probably through countless ages.

"If I could get up the water-course against the stream," he muttered, "I should be past those unscalable cliffs anyway, and possibly on a plateau which I might easily get across to the farther side, where I want to go."

He walked to the edge of the water-course, just where the first of the terraced cliffs began and prevented him keeping on the bank itself any longer.

A tree overhung the swift flowing current below. He climbed out on to the branches as far as he could in safety—until they began to dip and crack under him.

Parting the leaves around him, and craning his neck, he looked up-stream. He saw that the slide went up—if such an expression may be rightly used—about fifty more feet, overshadowed the whole

way by stunted trees clinging to the almost perpendicular sides of the cleft.

It would be impossible to try to walk up the bed of the stream. The slope was too acute, the power of the current would sweep his legs from under him, and he would have absolutely nothing to drag himself up by.

But there was nothing to prevent him clambering from tree to tree up the cleft like a monkey, passing from one branch to another! The trees all grew so close together and their branches were so intertwined it would be easy enough.

He had his rifle slung upon his back. He slackened the sling somewhat, and gave it a twist round his left arm near the shoulder so as to guard against its being knocked off his back by a branch or creeper entangling it. Then, making sure that his pistol-holster was securely buttoned, he started on the gorilla-like feat.

It was, as he expected, the easiest task imaginable to swing himself along and up, from branch to branch and tree to tree. He was quite enjoying it, and telling himself laughingly that he was certainly acting out the theory that men came from monkeys originally, when his head rose above the top of the water-slide or sloped fall.

He could see over it and through the cleft in the gorge on to the plateau beyond. And what he saw filled him, at first, with the greatest astonishment, and then with supreme satisfaction.

The water-course continued on the level for only some ten feet; then it swerved sharply to the right hand, and was a mountain torrent, fed by several little rills around, tumbling from the greater heights of the ridge in easy cascades.

Beyond where the stream curves round, the ground rose suddenly again for a few yards, consisting of bare and fairly smooth rock; then it fell away apparently like a precipice.

And across the wide valley, past this drop, on the gentle grassy slopes of his opposite side, which rose considerably higher, *a number of horses and cattle and sheep were peacefully grazing*!

"I must have reached Lonewater Ranch; be close to it," Sergeant Dick muttered, delightedly. "I must have traveled much farther than I thought I had last night, and I've saved myself the trouble of calling on Bill Seymour, the shepherd, and borrowing his horse.

"And yet—yet I can hardly credit that I've got so far—and I understood Arnold to say that the ranch was northward—fifteen miles or thereabouts northward of these cliffs. It can't be Lonewater after all that I have struck. But—but they did not mention any other farm or ranch. In fact, they assured me there was no other nearer than twenty miles."

Puzzled beyond measure, therefore, he clambered on through the remaining trees until he was over the verge of the slide, when he swung himself down lightly and dropped into the bed of the stream.

In another minute he was standing on the rock at the edge of the precipice, staring stupidly at what lay before him.

It was a great cup-like valley, completely enclosed by the high circular ridge upon which he stood. There seemed to be no outlet whatever to it, and the only sign of a human habitation that he could see was a lean-to shed, or log-hut, built against the face of a scaur or cliff just below on his left hand.

As he looked towards this hut, he discovered to his further surprise that a zigzag track led down to it *from where he stood*.

He turned and looked about him in quest of where the path began, and he saw that rude steps had been cut in the rocky escarpment beside the cascading torrent on his right hand to the top of the ridge.

It was only on his side of the valley that the earth fell away precipitously. The other three sides rose in the gentlest of slopes to a greater height.

All over the great cup were scattered horses and cattle. There were fully two hundred head of cattle, twice as many sheep, and some fifty or sixty horses.

"Well, this is an enigma to me—a puzzling riddle if you like," he was murmuring, when, like light from heaven, came the startling reading of the mystery, the true solution of the strange problem.

His eye had rested inadvertently—casually—upon the brands of three of the sheep closest to him—just below near the hut. Their brands were plainly visible in the rarefied mountain air, and—*they were not the same; they were different*.

One was a circle with lines radiating from it all round—evidently the sun in glory—with an eight-pointed star inside it.

Another was B.E. in a triangle, all three angles of which were cut by a circle.

The third brand seemed much older and simpler than the other two, and consisted merely of a triangle with P.F. within it.

"My Heaven!" gasped Sergeant Dick, recoiling a step under the shock. "The place is plainly a cattle-thieves' 'duffing-yard' or ground—the secret place where they conceal the stolen cattle, sheep, and horses, and change the brands on these before taking them to some other part of the country and selling them.

"And—and there can be only one gang operating on such a scale as this—the mysterious White Hood Bandits."

The thought had no sooner occurred to him than he realized the danger he was in, standing there exposed upon the ridge to any of the desperate band who might be in the valley or on the cliffs around.

Without a doubt the log-hut below was occupied by some of the gang.

It was fairly commodious, and would contain at least three apartments. A stovepipe protruded from the sloping roof, but there was no smoke issuing from it.

Sergeant Dick promptly whipped back into the cleft or little gorge again, out of sight of any one who might possibly be in the valley.

Flattening himself against the rock, he hurriedly freed the flap of his holster and drew his revolver, looking anxiously the while to either side and behind him towards the water-slide.

No whistle or other alarming signal was heard.

He breathed more freely again, but with all his pulses throbbing excitedly, he removed his Stetson hat from his head and unslung his rifle from his back. Carrying the revolver and his hat together in his

left hand, his rifle in his right, he crawled back on his knees to the edge of the precipice.

He close-hugged the side of the cleft as he went, and kept his eyes ranging warily, searchingly, over the ridge down which the pathway came.

Reaching the precipice again, he crouched behind a convenient boulder close to its edge, peering cautiously round the rock, so as only to show the side of his face and one eye. He surveyed the hut again, closely.

"There can't be any one at home!" he told himself presently, "or else the gang deem themselves so secure as not to trouble about keeping any watch. And really I don't suppose any one but themselves knows about this valley—has ever been inside it.

"There must be some other way they use for the ingress and egress of the cattle. It is probably on the extreme west or northwest side of the valley; the ridges seem rather tangled over there.

"Well, I can do nothing alone—single-handed. The gang are said to number nine in full strength. I couldn't possibly hope to tackle so many at once. I'll go back the way I came, and try in some way to communicate with the Arnolds again. I shouldn't be surprised that the redskins have left the vicinity of the lake by this, realizing the hard nut 'Water Castle' is to crack. The Arnolds, father and sons, are five in number, and with myself would make six.

"If we crept up this water-slide in the dead of to-night or at dawn to-morrow we ought to have all the advantages of a surprise, and wipe out or round up the entire gang. If not all at once, well, in two affrays—by lying in wait for the rest of the gang after settling the batch we catch at home."

With this design, he wriggled back to the edge of the water-slide and, still keeping his chin on his shoulder and his eyes scanning the ridges in sight, he climbed up into one of the trees overhanging the water and began hurriedly to descend the side as he had ascended it, that is, by clambering down from branch to branch and tree to tree.

"Yes," he said, half aloud to himself, when about halfway down, "that brand 'B.E.' in a triangle, with a circle cutting the angles, was undoubtedly originally 'P.F.' inside a triangle—was faked from it.

"What could be simpler than to alter a 'P' into a 'B,' and an 'F' into an 'E,' and then stamp a circle over the triangle. 'P.F.' is plainly the Pelson-Fellowes ranch brand—the next ranch, as Arnold told me, to the Lonewater. And I shouldn't be surprised that the other brand I saw was Lonewater's, faked or altered in some similar way so as to render it unrecognizable."

He was soon at the bottom of the water-slide again and then, with the setting sun as his guide, he struck away down the mountain-side and through the dense forest clothing it, due east.

Keeping on long after the sun had sunk to rest and it was night again, he at length saw the lake gleaming faintly through the trees ahead of him.

CHAPTER XVII
A SURPRISE, AND A RESCUE

In another minute Sergeant John Dick was standing on the western shore of the lake, looking across its dark waters at a bright light shining out in the middle of these, almost directly opposite him.

The light came, of course, from a window of "Water Castle." It was so small and ray-like that he knew it must be issuing from the open loophole of a closed shutter.

He was considering whether it would be quite safe to fire the three shots that Muriel Arnold had told him was the signal "want to come off shore," when suddenly a guttural voice spoke quite close to him—a word or two in the Indian tongue.

Startled beyond measure, he faced in the direction of the sound, and crouched down instinctively as he did so, pointing his revolver, which he was already gripping in case of need, and breathing hard and fast.

A light flared, and became a great blaze of dancing flame, amid the loud crackling of burning brushwood. Some one had lit a bonfire —no ordinary camp fire that—within a hundred feet or so of him!

The guttural Indian words told him that he had to deal with foes. He thanked his stars that he had been prudent enough to approach the lakeside with every caution of woodcraft.

Softly parting the bushes beside him, he craned his neck round a tree which partly stood in the way, and saw that the fire had been made in a fairly open space abutting right on the lakeside—a sort of wide glade or avenue extending some thirty feet or more back from the water's edge.

The flames were shooting high into the air, lighting up the glade and casting a ruddy glow out over the dark waters of the lake.

And in the lurid, flickering glare, Sergeant Dick saw a sight which filled him with consternation.

Being set against three trees by a number of the rebellious redmen, were Muriel Arnold, her uncle, and his son Amos, while just in front, nearer the water's edge that is, was poor half-witted Jenny in the grip of several more hideously painted braves!

Near by, evidently directing operations, was a most truculent looking athletic young sagamore or chief!

Some two score or more warriors stood, leaning on their rifles and looking on, on the farther side of the glade.

Muriel and her uncle and cousin were being bound to the three trees, with their faces towards the lake and the distant light in "Water Castle." The fire being slightly to one side of them would reveal them plainly to anybody looking out of "Water Castle" on that side.

"Ugh! The white girl, beloved by Manito, and therefore sacred to all true redmen, will now go in canoe to her home on the water, dat is when I have fired my rifle to attract the attention of her friends. She will then, on arriving at her home, say that all within 'Water Castle' must come ashore in the ark and give themselves up, when we will spare their lives and the lives of their friends here. But if they do not agree to this—do not come ashore and surrender, then they will see their friends here—that is the two white men, not the beautiful white girl—put to the torture. The beautiful white girl, the Lily o' the Valley, she become my squaw. I have spoken—I, Howling Wolf, the War Chief of the Ogalcrees."

The Indian chief made this declaration in a slow, deliberate, and dignified manner, with his rifle-butt resting on the ground, and the weapon held in his left hand at arm's length.

With the last word he caught up the piece, put it to his shoulder, and, pointing it into the air and out over the lake, pulled the trigger.

Sharp on the report, a flood of light streamed forth from the southern side of "Water Castle"—its front really—displaying part of the verandah. And then out on to this, in the glare of the light, rushed in a body the rest of the squatter's family—his wife, and three other sons, and his two daughters-in-law.

The six stood as if transfixed, staring across the water at the spectacle on the lakeside, which must have been plainly visible to them.

It was too far for even a modern rifle to carry with effect, and the light on both sides, of course, was of the poorest for such long range. Moreover, the men and women on the verandah were partly screened by the waist-high, boarded-in end of this.

"Put the child of the Manito in the canoe and let her depart with the message of Howling Wolf," said the chief, with a grim chuckle.

The North American Indians have always considered persons of feeble intellect as under the direct protection of the Almighty —"Manito" as they call Him—and therefore invariably treat them with respect, and a reverence that is half-pity, half-awe. What a lesson for our own much-vaunted civilization, where the half-witted are too often regarded as fair butts for all manner of rough practical joking!

Jenny Arnold was led to the water's edge, where Sergeant Dick now saw a score and more canoes had been beached. His eye noted in the same glance that some half-dozen of the canoes—farthermost from him—which could not be drawn up on the limited strip of shelving sand under the bank like the others, were floating, moored to trees by their painters.

Jenny was put in the nearest canoe and given the paddles. Then three of the Indians pushed the craft off, and she paddled away frantically across the lake towards "Water Castle."

Sergeant Dick racked his brains to think how he might effect a rescue of the three prisoners. His heart was full of bitter grief and anxiety as regarded the sweet girl before him, whom he now knew he loved with all the strength of his deep-feeling, but not easily moved, nature.

"I would sooner see her dead before me—kill her with my own hands than that she should become the squaw of that villainous young chief, Howling Wolf," he reflected, his heart surcharged with poignant rage. "He would treat her worse than his dog after awhile,

and her life would be a misery to her. I will deliver her and her uncle and cousin, or share their fate. But how to effect my purpose? That's the question."

He could think of no plan which at all held out a promise of success, and he was still hopelessly regarding the scene in the glade and ransacking his brains, when suddenly three spears of flame darted from the thicket on the opposite side of the glade to him, and the reports of as many rifle-shots rang out almost as one.

Howling Wolf had been standing, leaning on his rifle, and peering out under his shading left hand after Jenny. He reeled, clapping his left hand to the back of his feather-plumed head, and then crashed heavily upon his side.

Two other redskins standing near, also fell and rolled over, then lay still with feebly twitching limbs. And the forest aisles promptly resounded with furious shouts of "Down with them! Give 'em it, boys! Let 'em have it," and the swift popping of revolvers.

But the redskins, though taken so completely by surprise, were quick to note that they had apparently only three foemen to deal with. Even as they broke and scattered for the nearest trees, they shouted this to one another.

In a flash every redskin except the chief and some half-dozen others who had been shot down by the first volley or by the quick revolver-shots, had vanished behind a tree; and a brisk fusillade now took place between the unseen trio in the thicket and the Indians.

Only a few seconds, however, did the fusillade last—just while the redmen were reassuring themselves that they had but three foes to deal with. Then with a ringing war-whoop one of them burst from his tree and ran, doubled up, and jumping from side to side towards the surprisers' place of concealment.

As one man the rest of the band followed him, yelling like so many railway engines; and, to Sergeant Dick's astonishment, Howling Wolf bounded to his feet as if unhurt and raced after them, adding his quota to the terrific whooping.

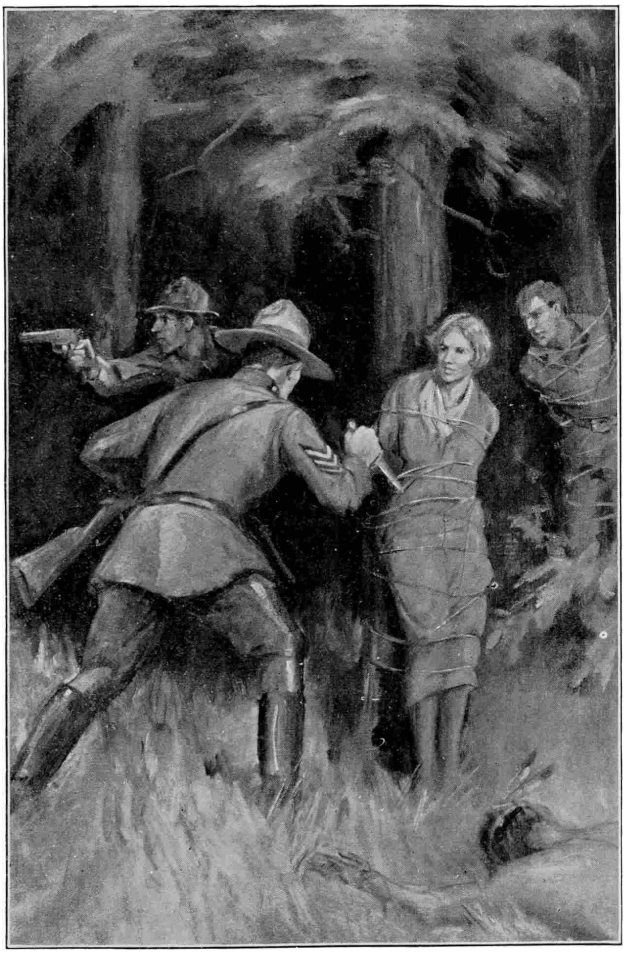
The three men in the bushes fled incontinently before that overwhelming rush. The police officer could hear them tearing away madly through the undergrowth without waiting to shoot back.

Quick as thought, he himself darted forward towards the open space. He ran at full speed, and yet made hardly the slightest sound, on account of his backwoods' training, and with the firelight showing him his path.

Into the glade he burst, just as two of the Indians lying there showed symptoms of life and struggled into reclining postures.

Paying no heed to them, he flew to the prisoners, and hurriedly began to slash through the ropes, which bound Amos, the nearest of the trio. He used his clasp knife, which he had opened even as he sprang into the glade; and the blade was as sharp as any razor.

As the cords parted, and Amos stood free in body and limb, Sergeant Dick handed him his revolver, exclaiming:



HE FLEW TO THE PRISONERS, AND HURRIEDLY BEGAN TO SLASH THRU THE ROPES.

"Get one of the redskins' knives, and free your father, while I free Muriel. If you are quick we should get away in one of their canoes."

Without a word, Amos grabbed the revolver, and, rushing to the nearest dead Indian, snatched his scalping-knife from his belt, then ran to liberate the old man; what time Sergeant Dick had sprung to Muriel's side, and was cutting the cords confining her wrists.

CHAPTER XVIII
BACK AT "WATER CASTLE"

"Courage! Courage, Miss Arnold! You know me. It's all right. Keep silent, and we'll get away in safety."

"Oh, thank Heaven—thank Heaven!" the girl breathed in tones of ineffable relief, as he drew her free from the tree.

Something bright and shining whizzed past his head, and struck with a loud thud against the tree.

It was a tomahawk, and it remained with the blade imbedded deep in the tree-trunk, the haft quivering with the force with which it had been thrown.

Simultaneously, a shrill, peculiar, ear-piercing cry rang out close behind him. He wheeled—to see one of the wounded Ogalcrees kneeling, bleeding like a stuck pig from a wound in the chest, and still in the final attitude of hurling the hatchet at him.

The Indian made to catch up his rifle lying beside him. But, before his fingers could close upon the weapon, there was a whiplike crack, and he doubled up and fell forward, writhing, upon his face.

Amos had shot him with the revolver.

Sergeant Dick threw one arm quickly around Muriel to support her, and, carrying his rifle "a-trail," ran with her at full speed for the nearest canoe. The police officer saw Amos finish freeing his father in the same instant, and put a second well-aimed bullet from the revolver through the head of the other wounded redskin, who was weakly sighting at him with a rifle.

All four fugitives reached the canoes practically together, for Old Alf and Amos got over the ground more quickly than Dick, hampered as he was with the girl.

Amos brought up the rear, ready to fire the revolver again at the first foeman to reappear.

Sergeant Dick hurriedly lifted Muriel in, then pushed the craft off the sandy strip, retaining hold of it, however, so as to enable the other two to get in.

"To the far end—to the bow, gal!" panted her uncle. And Muriel went scrambling across the thwarts to the other extremity of the canoe.

Then with a curt "Thank 'ee, sergeant," he leaped in, and scrambled after her. Amos clambered in on the other side; and, throwing one leg in, Dick thrust off well with the other.

Muriel and the old man had already caught up and dipped a paddle apiece, and, propelled by their deft strokes, away the canoe shot across the lake, just as there came a furious howl ashore, and loud tramping of the bushes.

Amos promptly shot with the revolver, twice in rapid succession, at the dark, plumed figures he saw amongst the trees, and the sergeant swung his rifle to his shoulder, and sighted it, but forbore to press the trigger.

"Fire—fire into them. Why don't you?" screamed Amos.

His question was drowned by the noise of the discharge of the police officer's piece a fraction of a second before that of one of their enraged foes on the bank.

Dick, who could see as well in the dark as any man—a matter of practice always—had noted an Ogalcree about to shoot at them, and had promptly anticipated the man.

He was not in time to prevent the shot being fired, but his bullet pierced the Indian's brain even as the trigger was pressed, with the result that the hostile bullet flew wide of them.

Such deadly accuracy checked the ardor of the rest of the three or four braves in the view of the fugitives. One hurriedly took shelter behind a tree, and potted at the fleeing craft, while the others rushed to launch more canoes and follow in pursuit.

Both Amos and Sergeant Dick, however, banged away wildly in the direction of the solitary marksman to distract his aim. The first-mentioned fired off the two remaining cartridges in the revolver, and then, catching up a paddle, assisted in propelling the canoe.

Light as a feather, and with next to no draught of water, it skimmed along swiftly. It was speedily out of reach of the firelight in the glade, and hidden by the dense shadows of the night from the marksman on the bank.

The three paddlers, however, did not relax their exertions. They still paddled desperately on, and the sergeant now laid down his rifle, no longer of any use, and likewise took up a paddle, and plied it.

"We all three owe you our lives, sergeant," growled Old Man Arnold. "You and the boys planned it well, and no error. You couldn't hev arranged it neater, nohow. But I do hope as 'ow the lads hev got cl'ar as well, I much bedoubt that they hev. And yet if they hadn't a-gotten cl'ar we'd hev surely heerd the riptiles acrowin' and hooraying like, don't ye think?"

"Yus, that's so," said Amos. "They've got cl'ar right enough, or we'd ha' heerd the painted demons a-screechin' with joy. Strange, though, none of the riptiles seem to be coming off arter *us*. How's that?"

"I should say the sergeant's straight shooting is the deterrent," said Muriel, who spoke considerably better than her uncle and cousins.

"H'm! P'raps," growled her cousin, "but I don't hear the ark neither—nor see anythink of her."

"You can hardly expect to see anythink of her in this darkness," said his father, adding no less anxiously, however, "I could wish it weren't quite so pesky dark now, so's we might be able to look round us and see if they've got cl'ar. How did you manage to get to the 'castle,' sergeant? And wot brought ye back 'ere again? Did ye lose your way? Didn't ye find Bill Seymour's place, then?"

"No, I only escaped last night from the ambush by the skin of my teeth, so to speak," John Dick answered. "I had to run my hardest through the woods to get away from the Indians, who followed me hard and long. When they abandoned the chase I was lost, and dead beat; I crawled in between two rocks and I didn't wake until near sundown to-day. Then I climbed a height, and saw the lake, and something else I will tell you about later, and so returned here. I haven't been to the 'castle,' and your rescue was none of my planning. Who are the boys you mentioned as having planned it, you thought, with me? Who are those you hope are in the ark?"

"Who are them we hope are in the ark! Why, my other three sons, Abel, Aaron and Abner," replied the old squatter.

"But I saw them on the verandah of 'Water Castle' just before the attack, along with your wife and your two daughters-in-law," was John Dick's rather astonished remark, for surely, he thought, the three ex-prisoners must likewise have seen the six on the verandah.

The police-sergeant's astonishment was increased when his three companions gave vent to subdued half-laughs and chuckles.

"You *thought you saw* my three cousins on the verandah with my aunt and cousins," said Muriel, softly, "but really you only saw Aunt Kate and Bella and Deborah, with three dressed-up dummies to represent my cousins Abel, Aaron, and Abner. It is an old dodge that we often resort to when we don't want undesirable parties on the lakeside to know exactly how many are at home in the 'castle.'"

"I see. Well, well, I was completely taken in, as also it is evident were all the redmen. A rare ruse, squatter! I congratulate you upon it."

"Oh, it worn't my idea; it wor Muriel's," chuckled Old Alf. "But you say you weren't actin' in partnership with my three lads?"

"No; or at least our partnership was quite accidental. I didn't know they were there, though it's just on the cards that they may have seen me on the other side of the glade, and have acted as they did, knowing I would be bound to set you free if they succeeded in drawing off the band in pursuit."

"That's more'n likely," grunted Amos. "I wish I was sure, though, that they had got away all right ag'in, in the ark."

"How did you come to be captured by the Indians?" asked Dick. "Before I made off into the woods last night, I saw you and your sons had got clear of the ambush, Mr. Arnold."

"It was all on account of Jenny, confound her," replied the old man. "She thought she might do the same as Hetty Hutter did in that blamed story of 'The Deerslayer,' you know, that we all think so much of, and got the idea of our water-abode out of. What does she do but slip off just at dusk in one of the canoes to have a talk with the Indians and try and bring 'em to see the evil of their ways—make them abandon their wicked designs upon the 'castle' and our lives,

and go back peaceful, like lambs, ag'in to their Reservation. Muriel spied her when she was more'n halfway ashore. We could see the redskins' campfire towards the southwest of the 'castle,' and the foolish child was making for it. O' course some of us had to follow her, at once, and stop her; and so, Amos and Muriel and me, we jumped into another canoe and started arter her for all we were worth."

"My three brothers were to follow in the ark if we didn't overtake her," Amos took up the narrative. "We didn't; she was too near the bank. But we were close behind her when she landed, almost right on her, and so we all three risked jumping ashore and chasing after her into the bushes, when we was immediately pounced upon and made prisoners of by Howling Wolf and a good score or more of his bucks, who had seen us a-chasin' of her, and hurried along the bank to ambush us, which they did neat enough, cuss 'em."

They had nearly reached the palisading around "Water Castle," and Muriel and the old man now hailed Aunt Kate and Jenny, who were standing together in the doorway of the house. The girl's mother seemed to be abusing her roundly for what she had done. As Muriel hailed her aunt, the old woman pushed Jenny angrily inside the house, and called back anxiously to know if they were all there and unhurt.

"We are all here—all, that is, 'cept Abel, Aaron, and Abner, mother," answered Old Alf, "and nary a one of us 'as as much as a scratch. The ark will be along presently, I've no doubt. The lads worked it fine, though it couldn't ha' bin worked so well, and we mightn't ha' got cl'ar, if it hadn't bin for Sergeant Dick here."

"He's come back ag'in, and he come just in the nick o' time whar we was consarned—jist in time to set us three free arter the boys had drawn the redskins off. But you saw it all, like as not, from 'ere in the light o' the fire they'd lit, so's ye might—the painted varmints."

"Yus, yus, the gals and I seen it all from 'ere, but we didn't recognize the sergeant; we thought it must be Abner. The light was so bad, and it was too far off. Ye're doubly welcome this time, sergeant, arter what father's just told me."

They had passed through the gate in the palisading, which Jenny had left open for them; and they in their turn also left it open in the hope of the ark's speedy arrival. Paddling up to the verandah, Dick was giving his hand to Muriel, to help her to step on to the little landing-ladder, when her aunt and uncle and Amos simultaneously cried out in tones of relief and satisfaction:

"Hooray! Here's the ark. They got clear all right. Abel, Aaron, Abner, are you all right?"

Sergeant Dick followed Muriel quickly on to the ladder, and up it on to the verandah. He turned then and saw the ark working in through the stockade-gate in rather a clumsy way.

Three dark forms in cowboy hats and long great-coats could be dimly seen warping the craft in behind the cabin.

No answer was returned from the ark, however, to the anxious inquiries of the squatter and his wife, who now called out again to know if all three aboard were quite all right.

Again no answer was vouchsafed, but the ark, having cleared the gateway, came shooting swiftly, still propelled by its sail, straight for the verandah.

CHAPTER XIX
THE SECOND SIEGE OF "WATER CASTLE"

Sergeant Dick, in vague suspicion that all was not as it should be on the ark, when no answer was returned to the second hail by the squatter and his wife, hurriedly bundled Muriel and the old woman inside the open door of the castle.

Deborah and Bella and Jenny had run to the edge of the verandah to greet the supposed occupants of the scow.

The craft's broad nose struck the landing-stage close by the little ladder, just missing running into the canoe in which the old man and Amos still were.

In the same instant the rear door of the cabin of the ark was thrown open and out poured a great throng of redskins, led by Howling Wolf himself.

Shrieking their war-whoop exultantly, they rushed *en masse* for the bow and bounded on to the verandah. The three women lining its edge were nearly knocked down by the rush, and were promptly secured by some, while the chief, with the main body, tore across to the door of the castle.

Half a dozen of the redskins leaped down into the canoe and seized Old Alf and Amos, upsetting the frail craft, however, in their eagerness and wild haste, and plunging them all, captors and captured, into the water.

Sergeant Dick, as may be supposed, was not taken so completely by surprise as the others. As he stood in the doorway, suspicious and alarmed at the strange silence aboard the ark, he held his rifle at the ready.

On the rush of the Ogalcrees he promptly aimed from the hip at the foremost and pressed the trigger, then hastily retreated inside the door—seeing the others outside taken and no hope of rescuing them. He slammed it to, flinging his whole weight against it while he turned the key.

"Guard the left window, quick!" he yelled. "Muriel, you shoot the bolts. Fire out on them, Mrs. Arnold, or they'll be in."

He darted himself to the right-hand loophole, leaving the door only on the lock. But Muriel at once sprang to it and thrust home first the bottom bolt and then the top, while a dozen musket-butts battered thunderously, but otherwise fruitlessly, upon its armored iron plating outside.

All the steel shutters had been drawn and secured over the windows, and, thrusting open the loophole in his, Dick poked the muzzle of his rifle quickly through. He pointed it at a sharp angle across the doorway without, and pressed the trigger.

Without waiting to hear the three simultaneous screams of agony that followed the shot, he whipped back the bolt of his rifle, ejecting his spent cartridge, then forced it home again, bringing another cartridge into play from the magazine, and pressed the trigger again.

Two agonized howls answered the shot this time. And old Mrs. Arnold's revolver cracked rapidly out of the left-hand window, eliciting more yells of pain and terror from the Indians attacking the door.

Through the narrow slit before him, the young police officer saw the redskins give back from the door, some running to either side along the verandah, ducking as they went; others—the greater body—retreating across to the ark.

Five of their number lay in their death-throes just outside the door, and three more were dragging themselves after the others, badly wounded.

Not only had all the shots from the house told amongst the densely packed assailants around the door, but Sergeant Dick's first shot through the window, being fired at such close range, went through the bodies of two men and mortally wounded a third behind them, while his second, in the same way, accounted for two more.

His keen eyes, used to seeing in the dark and ranging quickly over the retreating Ogalcrees, saw some of them carrying the body of their chief, who lay as one dead in their arms.

Howling Wolf had paid the penalty of his crimes at last—had been shot dead by the sergeant's hastily but well aimed shot from the hip.

Both Mrs. Arnold and Sergeant Dick held their fire the moment their foes fell back from the door, for fear of hitting the three girls taken prisoners, and who were being hurried by some of their captors aboard the ark.

"Oh, my cousins! Jenny, and Deborah and Bella! What has become of them? Are they killed—murdered?" panted Muriel wildly, in horrified accents.

"No, and they won't be. Calm yourself, Miss Arnold, and lend a further hand. You can help by handing me a brace of revolvers or automatics. They are better than a rifle for close quarters like this."

"Yes. Help, gal! Help! Your cousins air taken prisoners, and—and your uncle and my brave boys must—must be slaughtered. Oh, the fiends—the cutthroat villains! I'll have two Indian lives for every one of theirs—ay, and more!"

And the grief-frenzied old woman thrust the barrel of her six-shooter out again through her loophole and blazed away whenever she saw a foeman, turning her weapon upon the three wounded wretches trying to drag themselves aboard the ark when the others had all vanished behind shelter.

She shot the three dead. One tumbled into the lake, another lay across the bulwark of the ark, and the third just in front of its fore cabin, inside which he was lugged by his comrades the next moment.

"Watch all the windows on your side, Mrs. Arnold," said the sergeant. "Some of the Ogalcrees have fled along the verandah to either end. They may try and force one or other of our loop-holes. I'll be ready for them on this."

"And I'll take the door," said Muriel, quietly. "I'll fire through the lower loop in it if the Indians attempt a second rush."

"Be careful, and don't unnecessarily expose yourself, Miss Arnold," cautioned Dick. "If they come on, strong, you'd better abandon the loop and secure it, or they may, if they get up again, be able to fire in through it on us."

"Oh, my man and our fine lads!" moaned the squatter's wife.

Then with a savage execration she blazed away again rapidly through the loop before her. Three of the half-dozen Ogalcrees who had jumped into the canoe to capture Amos and his father, and had been soused into the lake with the pair by the craft capsizing, were to be seen peering cautiously over the edge of the verandah where the ladder was.

All six had got upon the steps and were cowering there, dripping wet, collecting their energies for another rush upon the door in concert with their comrades cowering at either end of the verandah, when those aboard the ark should return to the attack.

The scow had not been made fast, of course, to the verandah. Being run bow on against this, it had hitherto merely been kept in place by the impulse of the sail.

When, however, the assailants all came tumbling pell-mell aboard again to escape the deadly fire from the house, the craft had sheered off and was now a good ten feet and more from the platform.

The death of their intrepid and resourceful leader—a host in himself—as well as their being shut out of the "castle," when they had fully counted on being able to get in by their quick rush, besides their fresh losses, had considerably damped the Ogalcrees' ardor.

If it had not been that they could not very well abandon the men left on the verandah, they were so heartily sick of the whole siege by now, they would probably have raised this and cleared off in the ark, satisfied with its contents and the prisoners they had managed to secure. They would probably have paid no heed to the exhortations of the Black Panther, the next in authority to the dead chief, and who now assumed command and was all eagerness—as it was the first of any importance he had ever held—to retrieve their previous defeats and win glory for himself.

As it was they decided upon another attack. One of their number, without exposing himself, flung a rope out of a window in the cabin to the gang on the landing-ladder.

Drawing very little water, but just skimming along the surface, as before explained, the ark was very easily moved. All six Ogalcrees on the steps, keeping their heads well below the level of the platform—

out of sight and reach of Aunt Kate—began promptly hauling on the rope.

"They are returning to the attack. They've got a rope to the steps, and the fellows there are pulling them in," Sergeant Dick said. And leveling his rifle again through his loop, he took steady aim at the taut rope stretching between the ark and the verandah.

As he was about to press the trigger there came a loud, persistent knocking upon the floor of "Water Castle"—*somewhere underneath it*.

Muriel and her aunt uttered cries of astonishment, if not alarm, likewise helping to distract his aim somewhat as he pulled the trigger. Nevertheless, his shot struck the rope, severing a couple of the strands.

"Well done, sergeant!" cried Mrs. Arnold. "Shoot again and cut it in two—foil 'em! Muriel, that must be your uncle and Amos knocking underneath. They have swum below the house and are at the trapdoor for sartin. Go and see girl, quick!"

"Be careful, though, Miss Arnold. It may be some of the Ogalcrees," said Sergeant Dick, hurriedly ejecting his used cartridge and bringing another into the breech. "Call out—ask who is there—before you open the trap."

Muriel flew towards the central passage where the trapdoor was; and Sergeant Dick again dwelt carefully upon his aim.

Crack! His piece spoke and the rope parted, the severed ends flying up and backwards, like black snakes in the darkness.

"Hooray! You are indeed a dandy shot, sergeant," cried Mrs. Arnold. "To hit and cut a rope in this blamed darkness! But, look out! You've not stopped the ark's 'way.'"

The "way" or impetus the ark had, made that light though clumsy craft come on towards the landing-stage, and the next moment it had again bumped into this.

CHAPTER XX
A COOLER FOR THE INVADERS

The Indians, however, did not make another immediate rush, but opened a terrific fusillade upon the two open loops from the door and side-window of the ark's cabin. The craft swung broadside on to the verandah; and the gang on the steps, grasping the dangling rope, made this fast again.

Sergeant Dick and Mrs. Arnold blazed back fiercely with a brace of pistols each, keeping well to the side of their loops, and so escaping being shot down by the bullets that now occasionally came winging their way in.

The voice of the Black Panther rang out, issuing an unintelligible order.

Sharp upon it, the two doors of the ark, the one in the bow and the other aft, were thrown open and out poured the Ogalcrees in two dense crowds.

Yelling and whooping, the one in the bows came swarming on to the verandah, led by the six dripping braves from the stairs, who brandished their wet and useless rifles and now more serviceable tomahawks.

Sergeant Dick and Aunt Kate concentrated the fire of their four pistols upon this band—fired into it as fast as they could.

The foremost red men stumbled and dropped rapidly, tripping up or otherwise incommoding those behind, several of whom fell over them. But, bounding over the fallen, others dashed up to the loopholes, and the sergeant and Aunt Kate had only just time to slam the sliding covers over these, to prevent being shot in at and the apertures taken.

Hastily the two defenders hooked the loop-covers, then ran to the adjacent windows, which also commanded the verandah.

Quickly, but cautiously, opening the loops there, the pair fired out again at an inward angle, towards one another, so as to sweep the doorway once more with a cross fire.

But the angle at which they were both obliged to fire being greater now, they could not hit the men attacking the door, only pot at those farther back. The door was trembling and groaning under the energetic onslaught being made upon it.

And then, all at once, a rifle-barrel was thrust in at Aunt Kate's loop, and the deadly muzzle spurted a jet of flame and smoke almost into her cheek.

A second rifle was quickly beside the first. The brave old woman managed to push both rifles aside and fire out and wound one of their redskin owners. But she could not dislodge or thrust the weapons back, nor close the loop cover altogether.

"To the inner room! Retreat to the middle passage, sergeant," she screamed. "They've got my loophole."

She turned and ran for the nearest of the three doors behind her, firing back as she did so at the loop she was thus forced to abandon in order to distract the aim of the marksmen outside.

Two bullets followed her, but the shots only imbedded themselves on either side of the inner door, through which she vanished the next moment.

Sergeant Dick saw through his loop some half a dozen of the Indians staggering up the landing steps from the ark, hugging between them a stout spar—a spare mast-yard—with the evident intention of using it as a battering-ram against the door.

He turned his two revolvers upon the gang and shot down three men. Then the same number of rifles were thrust in at *his* loop, and a knife and a tomahawk came whizzing in, just missing his face.

Desperately he shot out, at the same time as he pushed the rifle-barrels aside. All three of these discharged their deadly contents in the same instant close past his head, the bullets thudding into the logs of the roof.

One of the rifle-barrels was withdrawn—fell out again, as its owner slid down with a rubbing, scraping noise and a deep groan, shot through the shoulder by Dick. But the other two remained, and their owners strove to work their muzzles round towards him.

"Come away! Run for the inner rooms, sergeant! We can hold them there," screamed Aunt Kate. "Quit, and leave 'em the loop!"

Seeing the futility of trying any longer to hold it, the police officer reluctantly obeyed her, wheeling and darting, crouched, for the door just behind him.

He fired back as *he* ran and jumped from side to side, and the old woman also covered his retreat by firing at his loop inside of the one she herself had abandoned.

She had closed and locked and bolted the door inside which she had fled, and was now at the door of the central passage, looking out through a loop in it. Needless to say, she had closed and was fastening this door also.

The reader, perhaps, may need reminding that there were three doors in a line along the inner wall of the living-room of "Water Castle"—all on the opposite side to the entrance. The middle one led into the central passage or compartment, and the other two into Aaron's and the old couples' bedrooms respectively, on either side of it.

Several shots were fired in through the two captured loopholes at Dick as he darted for the inner door, but, thanks to his own tactics and Mrs. Arnold's covering fire, he gained it untouched.

It had been left open for the convenience of passing quickly in the defense of the house, if necessary, from one room to another—and, in fact, all round this—and, darting within, he swung it to behind him, then promptly locked and bolted it.

He was about to open the loop in it—for every door in the house was provided with such, covered over with a little steel slide that could be hooked to when shut—when Mrs. Arnold, Muriel, and Old Alf appeared in the door beside him communicating with the central passage.

"You are safe, sergeant? Oh, thank heaven!" cried Muriel.

As she spoke, Sergeant Dick saw behind her, inside the central passage, Amos Arnold on hands and knees in the act of dropping a trapdoor in the floor into its place.

The squatter and his son on being thrown into the water by the capsizing of the canoe had contrived below the surface to throw off the grasp of their coppery antagonists, and with sharpened wits,

and, strong swimmers as both were, they promptly struck away under the water and rose beneath the verandah.

Under there they were safe, of course, from being seen by their foes in the ark or on the platform; and, being unpursued by their late captors, the natural idea occurred to both to slip inside the piles and braces below the house itself and try and gain admission to this through the trapdoor.

The darkness, of course, was also in their favor. Indeed, it was so dark under the "Castle" that they both mistook each other for a foe when they caught sight of one another crawling through the piles.

Recognizing each other in time, however, they then swam silently to one of the canoes moored under the house and the trapdoor, and, clambering into it, tried the trap. As they expected, it was fast, and they were unable to force it; so, waiting for a lull in the fighting over their heads, they knocked to let the inmates know of their whereabouts.

"Sergeant, you're a brick! The most dandy fighter and man I've ever struck yet," shouted the old squatter. "Let 'em break in, the painted rips—the cutthroat varmints! They'll get a reception they don't at all expect—one as 'ill rather cool their ardor and put a damper on their spirits. Hee, hee, hee!"

"But we've got to pay 'em," screamed his wife. "There are the other three lads and the three girls to avenge if we can't rescue 'em."

"We'll rescue 'em if they're still alive, mother," growled Amos. "And if my brothers are not, the girls are sure to be."

He disappeared inside the door of his parents' bedroom, while they went to the door leading into the living-room. Muriel stepped inside the room where Dick was and crossed to his side as he threw open the loop in the door before him and hurriedly proceeded to reload his two automatics to their fullest capacity.

"You had better stand to one side, Mu—Miss Arnold," he said, "so as to be out of the way of any shots that may come through the door. It will hardly keep shots out like the front one."

"The door's stouter than you think. It's double, with a plate of steel between the two sheathings," she answered. "And the Ogalcrees will get the biggest surprise of their lives when they burst

in."

Thunderous crashes were resounding through the house from the front door, upon which the Indians were using the improvised battering-ram with effect. A couple of their number at either of the captured loops were firing into the castle, and the living-room was full of smoke and the acrid fumes of burnt gunpowder.

More of the assailants were trying to force the shutters upon the other front windows.

Crash! One of the hinges of the front door gave, and a long triangular crack showed some of the Indians outside.

Crack, crack, crack, crack! spoke the rifles of the four defenders, and the bullets, surging across the intervening room, rattled upon the window shutters or flew out the widening gap of the door.

A scream of pain outside told that the sergeant's shot, as usual, had found its human billet. The Indians, using the spar—carrying it by means of short ropes noosed round it—retreated until their rearmost man was on the very edge of the verandah; then forward they all rushed again and dashed the "ram" once more violently against the door.

With another splintering, rending crash the second hinge was burst from its hold, and the door rolled open, precipitating the foremost of the ram-bearers inside the living-room.

Two of them were at once shot down by the sergeant and Amos, while two more fell back, dropping their end of the log and clasping their arms.

With a united yell of triumph the rest of the Ogalcrees came swarming in, however, and charged across the room for the three doors opposite. Out rang six revolvers as rapidly as such weapons can speak, and as many ceaseless streams of fire flew at different angles through the rushing ranks of the foe.

A man fell or staggered at every shot. Nevertheless, the intruders were not to be checked by the hottest fire now, believing that victory was within their grasp.

They poured into the room, jostling each other, crowding upon one another until the apartment was nearly full and there were not half a dozen warriors left outside.

The fast-speaking six revolvers, however, prevented the front ranks from reaching the three doors within. And suddenly, as if by magic, to the rattle of a bolt wrenched back, the whole floor of the living-room *dropped like a trapdoor*, plunging all the surging, tightly packed invaders, feet first, into the water below the stronghold!

CHAPTER XXI
THE DASH FOR THE ARK

Sergeant Dick was as much astonished as the trapped Indians themselves—so much so that he held his fire for some few moments after their fall through the floor.

Not so Amos or Mrs. Arnold, nor even old Alf.

The first two, Amos yelling exultantly like any redskin, pumped bullets thick and fast, automatic in either hand, into the huddle of feather-plumed, half-shaven heads bobbing about helplessly in the water-trap.

And the old squatter, quitting his lever, darted back to the trapdoor in the central passage, and, hurriedly unfastening it, lifted it and bent down over it, firing at the swimmers near him.

"Oh, oh!" wailed Muriel in deep distress and magnanimous pity. "It—it is a horrid butchery now. Oh, let them go—let them get clear, uncle, aunt, Amos!"

It was indeed nothing short of butchery, as she said. The Ogalcrees were caught in a terrible death-trap.

Forced to swim for their lives and with their firearms no longer of the slightest use, they were penned in under the house by the fenced-in piles. These, as has before been explained, were interlaced by cross braces all along the outside edge of the premises, so that the Indians were shut in by so many closed gates, as it were.

It was, of course, possible to scramble out through this open-work fencing, for had not Amos and his father got in that way? And the Ogalcrees on the outside fringe of the mob trapped inside were quick to start clambering out.

The rest made to follow, that is, the great majority, but some clung to the piles and cross-bracing under the middle of the house, and tried to shelter behind the beams from the deadly and merciless shooting of the defenders.

At such close range nearly every shot of the latter told, for they could coolly pick their targets and take steady aim. Moreover, the swimmers were all so tightly packed, a miss was almost impossible.

No wonder Muriel Arnold's gentle nature revolted from the slaughter. Redskin after redskin, shot through the brain, would throw up his arms and slide, an inert mass, under water.

Her kinsfolk paid no heed to her outcry—her prayer for mercy to the trapped wretches—but continued their deadly shooting, sending another and yet another copper-colored foeman to the bottom.

Old Alf, at the trapdoor in the middle of the castle, was shooting almost as many as his son or wife were from the loops in the living-room inner wall, when—whiz! thud! A tomahawk shot past his face like a streak of silver light, missing it by little more than a hair's breadth, the keen blade striking and sticking quivering in the door-frame of Aaron's bedroom alongside him.

He whipped back, startled and just in time to escape being pierced to the brain by a knife, thrown with equally unerring skill at his head. The knife stuck, quivering like the tomahawk, in the frame of his own bedroom on the opposite side of the central passage.

Two of the trapped braves had swum to either side of him under the bedrooms, where they were sheltered from his son's and wife's fire. There, clinging to piles, and thus partially covered from his fire, they had shied the hatchet and knife at him with the skill born of continual practice.

The old man thought it advisable to slam down the trapdoor and shoot home the sunken bolts upon it.

Sergeant Dick had not fired another shot after the plunging of the invaders into the water; but he still stood by his loop in Aaron's bedroom, ready to shoot if any of the trapped redmen showed any likelihood of scaling the living-room floor and attempting to continue the attack on the house. Muriel stood by him, gazing also through the loop and uttering groans of anguish, and clasping her hands in horror at the slaughter going on.

Then, all at once, Sergeant Dick woke from the trance that seemed to possess him, and he shouted:

"Arnold, put back the floor, quick, if you can, and let us attempt a dash-out to recover the ark before it is too late. There can only be a few Indians left on the verandah and the ark."

"You're right, sergeant. I was nigh forgettin' about the ark. That'll do, Kate—Amos. Get ready to rush out and seize the ark now."

And the old man darted to the lever beside the ladder in the cupboard and dragged it back, straining upon it with all his strength. The trapdoor of the living-room rose slowly into place again, but the only way the old man had of securing it in position for the time being was by hooking a chain on to a ring on the lever, and so keeping this forced back. The bolts that fastened the floor in place could only be got at through little traps in the floor itself. All these bolts were connected by a chain which passed through an iron pipe in the thickness of the flooring to another lever in the cupboard.

As the floor of the living-room rose into place again, Amos and his mother hastily wrenched back the fastenings upon the door in the central passage.

Sergeant Dick was about to unfasten the door before him when Muriel exclaimed:

"No, no, don't open this door. One's sufficient, in case we have to retreat. We'll go out the middle one."

She and Dick thereupon joined Amos and his mother at the middle door, and as they got it open and were darting through on to the trembling floor of the living-room, old Alf stepped out of the cupboard and followed them.

Across the living-room, its floor shaking and vibrating in its insecure state under them, the five of them raced to the dismantled verandah and open front door.

The sergeant held the two women back for a moment while he put out his head and reconnoitered.

Some seven or eight Indians were at either end of the verandah, the majority of them dripping with water and more or less exhausted. More were clambering up all along the verandah front, and some four or five were clustered on the steps, while as many more were standing in the bow and stern of the ark, apparently making ready to cast off.

While the fight had been going on inside the house a nearly full moon had risen and was now bathing the lake and its distant shores with the most effulgent rays, lighting it up in an enchantingly lovely way.

Sergeant Dick was glad of that bright moon—although he had no eyes at the moment for the beauties of the landscape—for it showed him the positions of all his enemies. And he beheld outside the "dock," or outer ring of palisading, a great number of canoes, filled with Indian warriors, as well as several great log-rafts. Some of the occupants of the canoes were engaged in trying to force the gate in the palisades, so as to admit the flotilla to the aid of their comrades in front of the castle.

The recapture of the ark, therefore, promised to be anything but an easy task. It looked as if the defenders had waited too long—lost too much time in slaughtering the wretches they had trapped by their drop-floor.

But Sergeant Dick and those with him were not the sort to be easily daunted, flushed with triumph as they were.

As the young police officer put his face out of the open door, some of the redmen on the verandah saw it, and, yelling in terror, immediately plunged off into the water.

Encouraged by this evident sign of demoralization and panic, Dick echoed their yells with a triumphant shout. And springing out on the verandah, a revolver in either hand, he banged away right and left as fast as he could pull trigger, hardly waiting to take aim.

His companions poured after him pell-mell, automatics also in either hand, and even Muriel seemed carried away by the battle-fever now and fired right and left as fast and well as any of the others.

The Ogalcrees upon the verandah howled in deadly fear, and one and all followed the example of the first three or four—tumbled helter-skelter into the water and swam away for the outer palisading. Those on the ark broke and fled, in equally abject dismay, round to the opposite side of the cabin, falling over one another in their wild scramble.

"Back to the central passage, Muriel, Mrs. Arnold, and you, too, Squatter, and hold the house still. Drop the trap-floor again. Amos, you and I will do to take the ark. Come on!"

Sergeant Dick tore across the verandah, closely followed by Amos Arnold, and jumped on to the bulwark of the scow and down into its bows.

The door of the cabin stood open. Both men were inside it, had slammed it to behind them, and were shooting the bolts upon it, before a shot could be fired at them by the Ogalcrees in the canoes and on the rafts outside the "dock," much less before the terrified cravens who had fled round the cabin could pluck up courage and oppose them.

Muriel and her uncle and aunt had, in like manner, hastily retired within the "castle" again, run back to the security of the central passage, and closed the inner door there.

Then Muriel and her aunt "manned" the loops again, commanding the living-room as before, while old Alf rushed to the cupboard, to be ready to drop the trap-floor again if necessary.

A moment later, amid howls of baffled rage, the occupants of the rafts and canoes poured in their shot at the "castle." But the bullets only imbedded themselves harmlessly in the thick logs.

CHAPTER XXII
THE ROUT OF THE BESIEGERS

Sergeant Dick and Amos had no sooner shot the bolts on the inside of the bow door of the ark than they turned and made for the after-cabin, glancing about them as they did so in quest of the three girls.

They saw, instead, Amos's three brothers—Aaron, Abel and Abner—lying, bound hand and foot and gagged, upon the seats running along either side of the cabin. None of the three appeared to be wounded or injured in any way. Rejoicing at the sight, but unable to do anything for the trio just then, the two rescuers gained the door between the two cabins and looked through.

The aft door was open and there was no one outside it. They could see the silvery moonlight streaming in and flooding the stern-sheets of the scow without.

By the same ghostly radiance they beheld Jenny and her two sisters-in-law lying, like the three in the fore-cabin, bound and gagged, in the berths to either side.

The moon's rays shot into both cabins, also, through the open loops in the shuttered windows. The Ogalcrees had left the shutters fast, but had opened the loopholes in case they had to besiege the "castle" from the ark.

"Stand there and guard the loops, Amos," whispered the sergeant. "Shoot at the first one that darkens, while I secure the aft door."

Amos, accordingly, remained in the doorway between the two cabins, a foot in either as well as a hand grasping a smoking pistol, his eyes ranging quickly along all four windows, ready to fire at any one of them; and the sergeant of police ran towards the aft door.

But as the young trooper and squatter believed, they had heard splashes follow upon their leaping aboard the scow. All the Ogalcrees who had run round the cabin were so scared, they had jumped immediately, one after the other, into the lake, on hearing the white men come aboard.

They, too, were now swimming their hardest for the palisades, the same as were all their exhausted fellow-braves who had escaped from the water-trap in the "castle"—who had wriggled through the open work fencing under it.

It was a complete, panic-stricken rout this time. Black Panther, the new war chief, and fully half of his leading and stoutest sub-chiefs and braves, were floating—shot dead, or drowned—among the piles supporting "Water Castle"; and the rest of the band had had quite a surfeit of fighting for a time at least—had enough of the siege of that impregnable lake-dwelling, anyhow.

Unhindered in any way, therefore, John Dick, the dashing young sergeant of Mounted Police, reached the aft door of the ark's cabin, or "house," shut it, and bolted and barred it.

Then he ran to the nearer window, on the side farther from the "castle," and peered out through the loophole.

He could see no one on the footboard, or bulwark, of the scow outside, but all the Ogalcrees swimming away for dear life—for the safety of the canoes and rafts outside the palisades.

"Hurrah, Amos! We have conquered. The Indians are in full flight everywhere once more, and I don't think they will come back again for many a long day. They've had a defeat this last time that they will not get over in a hurry. Release your brothers, while I attend to your sisters."

But Amos thought his brothers could remain tied up a little longer. He was not going to lose the opportunity of still further punishing the assailants by the delay it would entail releasing them.

And, as his fellow-rescuer turned from the window in the after cabin, his rifle cracked out from one in the fore cabin.

He fired again and again at the bobbing heads of the Indians in the moonlight, and "crack, crack!" in rapid succession came also the rifles of his mother and father from the front windows of the "castle," what time Sergeant Dick cut the cords which bound Jenny and her sisters-in-law and removed the gags from their mouths.

Leaving the three women, then, to pull themselves together and restore the circulation of the blood in their cramped limbs, the trooper hurried through into the fore-cabin and freed Amos's

brothers.

They all three at once began roundly abusing Amos for not having released them before, and given them an opportunity of having a parting and vengeful shot or two at the hated foemen.

"Because I knowed it would only purvent *me* having a shot," he grinned back at them, while slipping a fresh clip of five cartridges into the breech of his smoking rifle, ere thrusting it again out the loophole and sighting at the enemy. "And look at ye. Ye can't use your legs or arms yet, so what good would it ha' bin? Ye couldn't ha' done nothink sure."

"Confound it! My legs mightn't belong to me, or my arms neither," growled Aaron, stamping and tumbling about and rubbing his arms vigorously, with his face distorted with the pain the stagnant blood caused him as it began to course again through his veins.

Abel and Abner likewise indulged in anathemas, not loud but deep, against their late captors for the discomfort and suffering they were now enduring, and, with Aaron, stumbled towards the other window and the door to get a shot at the Indians.

But by the time they were able to poke their rifles through the openings the last redman had swum up to the palisades, passed through, and been drawn into a canoe or on to one of the rafts. The Ogalcrees were soon in full retreat, paddling away to the nearer shore, the eastern one.

Abel and Aaron had armed themselves with the rifles of their wives. The weapons had been placed in a corner of the cabin by the Indians after capturing the women.

Abner coolly appropriated Sergeant Dick's rifle, for the police officer had slipped the piece from his shoulder to free him and his brothers.

Sending a couple of shots apiece whizzing after the canoes and rafts—without any success on account of the deceptive moonlight, the distance the craft were away, and the pain and awkwardness still of their limbs—the three baffled marksmen cursed their ill-luck and their brother Amos again for denying them the better chance. Then their father was heard hailing the ark.

"Amos! Sergeant! Are the girls safe? And are the other lads there?"

"Ay, ay, Squatter! They are all here, quite safe—none the worse, any of them," called back Dick, merrily, adding with a light laugh, "Can't you hear your sons cussing because they've been cheated by Amos of having a last smack at the redskins?"

"Ay, ay, we're here, and all on us all right, dad," shouted Abel, the eldest of the sons, turning from the window to clasp his wife Bella in his arms and exchange mutual gratulations with her.

Aaron—the second and other married brother—greeted *his* wife Deborah in like manner; while Abner, the youngest of the four sons, restored Sergeant Dick his rifle in a sulky way, without so much as a "Thank you."

For that matter neither had he or either of the other two young squatters in any way acknowledged the police-sergeant's kindness in setting them free. But their apparent ingratitude, or want of common politeness, might be excused by their over-eagerness to have a slap at their late captors.

With the dread enemy in full retreat to the shore, there was no need for them to linger inside the ark; and they all now made a move towards the bow-door, Abner and Amos bringing up the rear after closing and fastening the loops on all the windows, and then locking the fore door.

Muriel and her uncle and aunt came out of the "castle" on to the verandah to greet them, and old man Arnold sent a parting shot with his rifle in the direction of the Indians, who could be seen just landing on the eastern shore, shadowy silhouettes against the less dusky background.

As they all reëntered "Water Castle," chattering and laughing like so many magpies, Muriel and the sergeant fell to the rear, and clasped hands silently but eloquently.

Muriel's eyes shone brightly in the moonlight, and John Dick thought he had never seen her look quite so lovely as in that silvery radiance upon the white-bathed verandah with its clean-cut shadows.

Neither noticed how Abner, the youngest son, watched them with scowling, jealous-distorted face and fiercely gleaming eyes.

"The painted rips'll not come back ag'in," declared old Alf, decidedly. "We gev 'em their bellyful this last time, anyways. Ho, ho! They don't want another such gruelling, I'll swar. Bust 'em! They've sp'iled our front door, lads and lassies; but we'll patch it up just for to-night and make it all right, as good as ever, to-morrow. Just see what you can do with it, Abel, Aaron, and Abner. Amos and you girls, Muriel and Jenny, lend me a hand and help fix up the drop-floor as it should be. Bella and Deb, mebbe you will aid mother to get us all somethink to eat and drink, 'specially drink, arter the hot and thirsty work we've had."

"Can't I be of any assistance?" asked Sergeant Dick.

"Ye've done more'n enough, I should say, sergeant, but ye can help the gals and me and Amos to fix up the floor as ye're such a glutton for work."

The old trapper or squatter and his daughter and niece and Amos got down on their hands and knees upon the strip of flooring which had remained in position when the rest of the floor dropped.

This strip, of course, was a mere ledge, only a couple of feet wide, just inside the front door and bordering the front wall.

Pressing upon a board, each, the quartet caused it to slide partly out of sight under the front wall, and disclosed a solid steel bar, some four feet long and more than two inches in diameter, lying in the cavity. Attached to the back of the steel bolts was a chain which ran out of sight into an iron pipe under the board.

Opposite the other end of the bolt, in the thickness of the edge of the portion of flooring which had dropped, was a socket, and Muriel tried to push her bolt home in this.

The sergeant promptly insisted on saving her the trouble. He forced the bolt inside the socket as far as it would go, then helped Jenny to push hers home, what time old man Arnold and Amos had shot theirs and gone on to a fifth and sixth, and the other three brothers were fixing the dismantled outer door in place again by piling all manner of things against it, including the armored tiller-screen from the ark.

The drop-floor was still anything but quite firm under their feet, even with the six great bolts shot, and the old man asked Sergeant Dick to follow him through to the central passage and see him finish fixing it.

Full of curiosity, the young police officer accompanied him to the cupboard where the levers were, and the old man explained that, by wrenching back one, all six bolts they had just shot were drawn out simultaneously, but that the floor in the ordinary way would not give until six more pivoted iron buttons, also hidden in the flooring, were drawn aside.

A second lever contrived this, and a third would draw them back again. This third lever was now pulled, while all in the living-room were told to stand off the drop part of the floor. And then Arnold went on to tell John Dick that he had contrived to raise the trap-floor by means of yet a fourth lever, which dragged on a chain, that always hung slacked under the house, attached to the edge of the trap-floor and passing through a ring or socket in the stationary part of the flooring opposite and round back to the lever.

"By pulling on this 'ere fourth lever, then, you see, sergeant, the trap-floor is raised and kin be held in place until we can fix up all the reg'lar fastenings. Come now, let's join the others ag'in, and have somethink to eat and drink."

"And I've got something to tell you all that will astonish you very much, Squatter—something I discovered among the cliffs on the west shore."

CHAPTER XXIII
THE PLAN TO ROUND UP THE WHITE HOODS

Sergeant Dick did not notice the startled, anxious glance that old Arnold gave him as they went back to the living-room. There they found a substantial meal spread for them.

Ere they all sat down to it, some of their number took a look out through the loops on all four sides of the house. The lake was still bathed in moonlight, and not an Indian canoe or raft was to be seen anywhere.

"Well, now, sergeant, what's this astonishing news that you've got to tell us?" asked the old squatter, with his mouth full. "What's this something that you said you had discovered among the cliffs on the west shore, and which I presumes brought ye back so timely here ag'in?"

His sons and their mother all started and exchanged covert, alarmed glances, then eyed the young police officer keenly and by no means favorably.

As it happened, he had his eyes bent upon his plate at the time, and did not observe the strange, gloomy looks, which, after all, as before, were most veiled.

"I've discovered the 'duffing-den' of the White Hoods, I believe," he quietly replied.

"What!"

And Amos Arnold sprang up, nearly upsetting his chair.

"Yes, I believe so," said Sergeant Dick. And he went on to relate in full his experiences of the previous night after his escape from the Indian ambush; how he climbed the water-slide and found the cup-shaped valley and saw several hundred head of cattle, sheep, and horses grazing within it.

His companions listened in silence, Muriel and Jenny in breathless interest. None interrupted him, the young men only contriving to steal questioning glances at one another behind their mugs, and particularly at their father.

Muriel and Jenny hung excitedly upon Dick's every word; and when he had told them all, the first-mentioned cried out:

"Oh, uncle—boys, what a grand discovery! It must be the outlaws' secret duffing-den right enough. You and Sergeant Dick now can capture the gang and claim the reward offered. What is it—five hundred pounds, isn't it?"

"I had instructions to increase the reward to a thousand pounds," said Dick.

"A thousand pounds; and not only that, but you will rid these parts of these murderous robbers who have so long terrorized us. In fact, I believe their plundering has helped to incite the Ogalcrees to rebel and go on the warpath, for they, besides suffering heavily at the gang's hands, have been blamed for some of its misdeeds, as we know."

"Yes, yes," chimed in Jenny. "It will be a grand thing for all round here when those awful White Hoods are put down; the poor farmers and ranchmen will sleep more easily in their beds. You will be doing humanity a service, father—brothers—if you help the sergeant to lay the gang by the heels."

"We shall be doing ourselves a big sarvice, too, if we make a thousand pounds over the job," guffawed her father. "By thunder, lads—mother, we'll have a shot at it; we'll help the sergeant to capture these fellows. But only on one condition, sergeant, and that is, that you let no one else into the secret; that we keep it to ourselves. I don't want no others to share the thousand quid, you understand?"

"That's so—that's so," cried his wife. "A thousand pounds divided equally between six on you—the four lads, you Alf, and the sergeant here, ain't two hundred apiece. Lemme see, how much would it be? Six into a thousand goes what, Muriel—Bella?"

"Oh, never mind, aunt. The reward is not ours yet to divide," said Muriel hastily, and blushing a deep crimson. "And don't you think that Sergeant Dick should have more than any one else, as he discovered the gang's lair?"

"Come, come, we won't discuss that," laughed Dick. "In any case it will be for Government to apportion the reward. All right, Arnold, we'll keep it to ourselves, and you and the lads will help me to lay these white-robed rustlers by the heels, as Jenny put it. Let me see, they are supposed to number either nine or ten at full strength."

"That's so. And we are six," said Abel, the eldest son, "but then we ought to catch 'em napping, and not in full strength."

"When shall we make the attempt?" asked Aaron, the second son. "We've evidently routed the redskins for good and all this time. They're not likely to give us any further trouble. And the sooner we go the better, say I."

And he exchanged a meaning glance with his father and mother.

"Oh, there's no immediate hurry," said Dick. "With the Ogalcrees out on the warpath, the gang will be bound to lie snug and not try to remove their stolen cattle and sheep for fear of being attacked on the march by the Indians. Besides, it will be as well, first, to make sure that the redmen have abandoned the siege here for good and all. We don't want them to attack the house in our absence while only the ladies are here, nor attack us, for that matter, while landing, as they did before—nor yet in the woods. A day more or less can't make any difference one way or the other as regards the White Hoods, while it may mean a great deal as regards your home here."

"The sergeant is right," observed Bella, Abel's wife; and Deborah and Muriel murmured approval. "And you all need a good night's rest before setting out on so risky an expedition."

"Wait till to-morrow night," said Muriel, "then we'll know for certain whether the Indians have abandoned the warpath, and we may be able to send word to the soldiers at the nearest fort, if word has not already gone there, of the rising."

This was sensible advice, and it was unanimously agreed on; and, shortly after, all declared for bed. The supper things were cleared away; the living-room was divided off into three compartments by

the shabby curtains on the rods being drawn across, and a hammock slung in each compartment for Amos, the sergeant, and Abner respectively.

All the others then retired to their bedrooms, and silence and darkness speedily enwrapped the stronghold in the lake.

Sergeant Dick slept soundly in his hammock; but he was accustomed to sleeping on a hair-trigger, as one might say, and from time to time he awoke, rose, and went to the front door or the window on either side of it and looked forth.

All was still and peaceful. The lake and the woods south and east and west seemed slumbering under the silvery moon.

Thoroughly refreshed, he was up before the dawn, and went to the bathroom at the back of the house to wash himself. When he returned to the living-room he found that Amos and Abner had arisen, the curtains had been drawn back, and Mrs. Arnold, Muriel and Jenny were already preparing breakfast, with front door and windows open to admit the sweet warm morning air.

They all—even the surly Abner—greeted him cordially; and he thought Muriel prettier than ever in the rosy light of the dawn.

Bella and Deborah, the two married daughters-in-law, made their appearance shortly, and then old Alf and their husbands.

All the men went out on the verandah to smoke a morning pipe before breakfast; and, seated upon it, looking out across the water and scanning the shore in all directions for any sign of their late besiegers, they discussed at length their plans for the "rounding-up" of the White Hoods.

They were at breakfast when they heard the plash of paddles and men hailing the "castle."

As the morning was so warm and fine they had the door wide open and all the windows, too, but no foes could have stolen on them unawares very well.

Rushing forth, they saw approaching the "castle" from the direction of the landing-spit on the east shore four canoes carrying three white men apiece.

Through the field-glasses they recognized the new comers as Foulkes, the Indian agent, a couple of the local police troopers, two of the officers from the nearest fort, and some ranchmen and cowboys of the neighborhood.

All twelve visitors were warmly welcomed by the inmates of "Water Castle," who plied them eagerly with questions as to how matters had gone in the district—the doings elsewhere, of course.

The Ogalcrees, it appeared, had committed a few isolated outrages, burning and plundering some half-dozen or more farms. But for the most part they had spared the inmates, or these had escaped and they had contented themselves with the drink and valuables they got.

Word had been conveyed to the troops, however, and these had now arrived at the Reservation on Paquita Island and were holding all the chiefs who had not followed Howling Wolf on the warpath as hostages for the good behavior of the rebels.

These last had fled *en masse* across the frontier into the United States, and were expected to be shortly rounded up and forced to submit by Uncle Sam's troops.

Sergeant Dick was wanted at the Reservation to help to satisfy the Indians there that Government had acted in good faith by them, and already sent the money due upon their claims, but that it had been intercepted and stolen by the White Hood rustlers, or road-agents, and that it would be made good later.

Accordingly, he went off with the visitors in one of their canoes an hour or so later, promising old Alf and his two elder sons quietly aside, however, before he did so, that he would return at nightfall and go with them to the gang's secret lair, and in the meantime not tell another soul about it.

Sure enough, just as dusk was falling over the lake and the wooded hills embosoming it, a canoe containing a single occupant was seen by the inmates of "Water Castle" to be approaching from the southern end of the sheet of water; that is from the direction of the Indian Reservation.

Old Alf and his sons had been out the best part of the day visiting the traps that they had set the evening of the Ogalcree rising, and had just got back. Most of their traps they had found interfered with by the redskin raiders, but those which had not been so molested had contained furred victims sufficient to repay them well for the trouble and time taken in setting them.

They had reset the traps for the night, and then returned home. Bella and Deborah did not always accompany the men on their trapping expeditions, though they frequently did so, as sometimes also did Muriel and Jenny, and even Aunt Kate.

The canoe coming from the south end of the lake was speedily near enough for the squatters to see that Sergeant Dick was in it, and soon after he was partaking of some light refreshments in the "castle" living-room, preparatory to leading the expedition.

CHAPTER XXIV
IN THE HANDS OF MERCILESS FOES

The sky was overcast and there was no moon, as they set forth in two canoes, the one Sergeant Dick had come back in and one of the craft kept beneath the house.

Old Alf, Abel, and the sergeant went in the first canoe, and Aaron, Amos and Abner in the second.

Paddling softly to the western shore, they landed with equal stealth, for there was no saying what watch the rustlers were in the habit of keeping on the woods thereabouts.

They hauled their two craft ashore, and concealed them amongst the bushes.

"I suggest," said Abel, then, "that we march in single file, you leading the way, sergeant."

"Very good," answered the police officer.

They threaded their way warily through the dense woods; and, in spite of the darkness, Dick led them unerringly to the foot of the waterslide.

For that matter, they all of course knew where it was, had frequently seen and passed it, but, according to their own story, had never had the curiosity to climb it as he had done, or explore the perpendicular, terraced rocks behind it.

"We had better climb up in the same way as I did—by means of the trees over-arching the water," John Dick whispered. "Sling your rifles securely now, and make sure your pistol-holsters are—"

"Hands up, all, or you're dead men!"

The unexpected mandate made even Sergeant Dick jump.

He whipped round and saw five awful, ghostly, white-hooded, white-clad forms confronting him and his companions, with two pointed automatics each.

It would have been madness—certain death to have attempted resistance or defiance in the teeth of those ten leveled little tubes. Nevertheless, Sergeant Dick was the last of the punitive force to put up his hands.

The five squatters hoisted theirs promptly.

None of the prisoners had his rifle unslung or a pistol drawn.

"Tie them up, Bud," ordered the leader of the White Hoods.

And one of the five ghostly forms thrust his pistols into his belt and advanced. The gang had clearly been posted behind a large rock close by the water-slide.

In their ghostly disguise the fellows did not look human. Their high-peaked hoods, drawn down to their chins so as to conceal the face, had only two holes cut for the eyes, and their long, white, shapeless smocks descending to the tops of their knee-boots completely concealed their figures, and added to their spectral appearance.

"Let's see who they be," said the leader in a voice which sounded *feminine* and also familiar to the sergeant's ears.

He flashed an electric torch, and shone it first upon Dick's face and form.

"Curses! A trooper, and a sergeant at that! So the cops have tumbled to whar we hang out, lads. That's bad. Hullo! You are the squatter of the lake, Old Alf Arnold, the father of 'Water Castle.' And you're his son, and you, and you," as he flashed his torchlight in turn upon the faces of the young men.

"You dodrotted fools! What are you doing roving round here at this hour of the night? Don't tell me a lie, you were out arter us?"

"Nothing of the kind," lied old Alf. "'Ow should we know as 'ow we'd run up agin you 'ereabouts? We are out a-settin' of our traps, and the sergeant's come with us just acause he's bin a-stayin' wi' us at 'Water Castle' durin' this 'ere Injun risin'. Didn't you 'ear 'ow he helped us to beat 'em off? They besieged us hot and 'eavy in the 'Castle' several nights runnin'."

"Yus, I heerd all about that, but your comin' here looks darned suspicious-like, all the same, and so I'm not agoin' to let ye go yet awhile. Tie 'em up, Bud, and blindfold 'em, too. We can't take no

risks."

"Bud" proceeded to bind the sergeant's hands behind his back, and then to blindfold him, after which he was relieved of all his weapons and valuables.

He was then kept waiting while his fellow-prisoners were, apparently, likewise being attended to.

"'Urry up, 'urry up, Bud!" the chief at last said, impatiently; and a minute or two later a heavy hand fell on Dick's shoulder and he was told to step out.

Almost immediately he felt the ground rising steeply as he was conducted along, and he was climbing up a slope which obliged his captors to give him a helping hand. The gang were now evidently joined by as many more men, for he heard them moving in front and around him as well as whispering to one another.

Up and up the steepest of paths or rocky defiles they climbed, until presently a halt was called, and the voice of the leader added:

"Now put the rope round his neck, and throw it over the branch, and I'll jist scribble the message to pin on his breast. You kin remove the bandage from his eyes, one of ye. I mout as well tell you, sergeant, we're a-going to hang you, as a hexample to your fellow-cops, to show 'em what they've to expect from us if they try to hunt us down. Your fellow-prisoners we've let go, without their arms, watches, money, and other trifles. We've no great grudge agin them, and we allus likes to keep in wi' men like Squatter Arnold, as ain't got much to lose or tempt us, and who can be of great sarvice to us by giving us information when the cops are arter us."

The cloth was removed from the young police officer's eyes, at the same time as a noosed rope was slipped round his neck.

He saw that he was standing under a tree at the edge of a ravine, some forty feet deep, through which ran a fairly wide and level road. On either side of him were his captors, the dreaded White Hoods—nine now in number. A tenth ghostly form was climbing into the tree, to pass the rope over a stout branch.

Not one of the Arnolds was to be seen.

The chief put a paper flat against the tree-trunk, and, while a companion flashed an electric torch, proceeded to write something upon it.

Sergeant John Dick gave himself up for lost. It was plain that the murderous ruffians meant to hang him there above the mountain road, where his dead body would be found on the morrow by the first ranchman or homesteader who chanced to ride that way.

Nevertheless, he scorned to ask for mercy from the villainous gang—to beg for his life.

"Ho! ho! me bowld trooper, your goose is cooked now, anyways," gloatingly jeered the White Hood above him—in the tree.

Sergeant Dick could barely suppress a start, *for he knew that voice also*.

"You may hang me, you atrocious scoundrels," he said, boldly and fearlessly, "but, as sure as there is a heaven above me, you will reap a terrible reward for such a crime. Heaven will not let you go unpunished. You—"

For the second time that night he was not allowed to finish a sentence. There were startled cries in the ravine below—two exclamations of horror and anger. And, as all eyes were turned in the direction of the unexpected sounds, Sergeant Dick beheld, to his infinite relief and joy, two police troopers, in the familiar Stetson hats and red coats, sitting astride horses at the turn in the road.

Their sudden appearance there, without a sound having broken the stillness, except their startled ejaculations at the sight of the terrible drama about to be enacted above them, was quite spectral. And so several moments the White Hoods stood staring aghast at them.

The troopers, indeed, were the first to act. They had their rifles at the ready in front of them. Promptly jerking the butts to their shoulders, they fired upwards at the gang on the cliff.

In spite of the haste of the marksmen, the bullets were well aimed. Two of the White Hoods staggered and nearly fell, and Sergeant Dick heard, he believed, *two distinct clangs* as if the bullets had struck against iron or steel!

Flinging themselves from the saddles immediately on firing, the two troopers sheltered behind their horses and let drive again up at the gang. And the fellow in the tree over Dick's head came clambering down so hurriedly that his long white smock caught on one of the branches and was lifted up, exposing a coat of dull, gleaming iron.

He was unable to free the entangled garment for a moment or two, and the amazed young police-sergeant saw plainly that he was wearing under it a rudely made breastplate and backpiece of armor, fastened together with straps at the side—a perfect iron corselet such as knights or rather men-at-arms wore in medieval days!

Furthermore, hanging from the lower edges of this coat of iron were rounded pieces to cover the thighs, both back and front, almost to the knees.

Surprised beyond measure at the revelation that the gang wore armor, Sergeant Dick remembered, however, at the same time that the notorious Ned Kelly gang of bushrangers in Australia in 1880 wore similar protection, and so were able for a long period to laugh at the bullets of the Mounted Police.

Without a doubt these White Hood rustlers had got the idea of armoring themselves from the well-known story of the Kelly gang.

Two more of the ruffians had staggered under the well-directed shots of the two troopers in the ravine. But now the gang had got over its surprise. It fired back in a volley, and one of the policemen's horses reared, plunged wildly, and, breaking away, tore off down the road.

Its master dodged quickly behind his companion's horse. Some dozen or more troopers, now, however, came galloping noiselessly, like so many specters, round the bend in the ravine. They ranged themselves alongside the first two and poured in a deadly fire at the bandits.

It was plain that the hoofs of all the police-horses were muffled.

"Furies! Fly, lads! Run! We can't fight so many," shouted one of the White Hoods.

The fellow hanging by his white smock from the tree wrenched himself free with a desperate effort and a savage oath, leaving a strip of the garment clinging to the branch. He made as if to spring upon Sergeant Dick, but two of the others dragged him off.

"Dead min tell no tales," howled another bandit, however, rushing at the prisoner with upraised knife in one hand and smoking rifle in the other.

The knife would have been sheathed in the young police-sergeant's breast; but, swift as thought, he raised his right foot and dashed it with all his force into the chest of his would-be murderer, even as the idea struck him that *the voice sounded strangely like a woman's*. Woman or man, the White Hood was sent reeling heavily backwards, Sergeant Dick's boot eliciting a ringing clang from the concealed coat of iron under the white smock. The knife went flying over the edge of the cliff into the ravine.

Its owner went down flat on the back, but was promptly dragged upright by another of the gang who snarled:

"Cuss it! ain't ye got no sinse, Martha? Afore their very eyes! We must git, *woman*!"

And then all ten fled, crouching, into the bushes, and were quickly swallowed up by these and the darkness.

CHAPTER XXV
ON THE TRACK

"Up the rocks, men, quick!" cried the inspector in command of the little *posse* of police.

Promptly the troopers swarmed forward from behind their horses, rushed to the side of the ravine, and began clambering up it. The majority of them chose a place where the cliff sloped gently back and was broken up into shelves and ledges like a natural stairway.

A couple remained entrenched behind the horses, with their rifles leveled across their own animals' backs, covering their comrades.

The inspector led the rush up the rocks. No shots were fired at them, and it was plain that the White Hoods had fled the scene.

The inspector topped the cliff first, a revolver in either hand. With eyes fiercely peering into the bushes and the darkness before him, he sidled up hurriedly to Sergeant Dick.

"Thank heaven, we came this way, sergeant. We were just in the nick o' time."

In another half-minute John Dick was free in body and limb again, and the inspector was shaking him by the hand, while the troopers could be heard beating the bushes all about and searching these with bulls'-eyes and electric torches to find the trail of the rustlers.

A pleased shout denoted a discovery, and the inspector and Sergeant Dick at once made for the spot.

"Inspector," said Dick, quietly, as they went, "we needn't trouble about following their trail. I know who two of the band are, or, at any rate, I believe I know who they are. And, what is more, I have discovered the band's secret duffing-den, and can lead you to it."

"You know two of them, and where their duffing-yard is? Excellent! Who are the pair?"

"Bill Seymour, the shepherd hereabouts on Lonewater Ranch, *and his wife*. At least, as I said, I have reason to believe that they are two of the gang."

"*And his wife!*"

"Yes. And she's not the only woman in the gang. There are several. They disguise themselves as men, of course, and are the wives and—and daughters, I believe, of the others."

"You suspect others than the Seymours, then?"

"I do; but I will not name any others yet for fear I am making a dreadful mistake. If you will allow me *carte blanche* in the matter, however, inspector, and not ask me to name these other suspects right away, I will take means to verify my suspicions within the next twenty-four hours."

"Do as you please, sergeant. I will not interfere with you," replied the inspector, whose name was Medhurst. "Now what we must do is at once divide our forces, I suppose, and let one party make for the Seymours' hut, to lay them by the heels, and the other accompany you to this duffing-yard you say you've discovered."

"I think we can kill the two birds with the one stone, inspector," replied Sergeant Dick, who had been studying the positions of the stars while he was talking. "We are on the northwest side of the cliffs of the Wonderful Echo, are we not? And not far from the Seymours' shanty?"

"That is so. The Indians and trappers round here call these curious terraced heights just along to our right the Cliffs of the Wonderful Echo. Their name on the map, and of the whole range, is the Waikuta Hills."

"Well, I believe the entrance to the secret duffing-yard of the gang is close beside the Seymour shanty. Let us make a move thither at once. If we lose no time we may find the entire gang at the shanty, for they can have no idea, I think, that I suspect even the two Seymours."

"You wouldn't advise dividing our force—sending a few of the men along the trail the fellows have left?"

"No, for two reasons, inspector. First, because I must tell you the band wear armor under their white smocks and hoods."

"What!"

"It is true. They wear coats of mail, capable of stopping a bullet, just like the Kelly Gang of bushrangers did in Australia. You've read of Ned Kelly, the iron bushranger?"

"Yes, yes."

"Well, this gang all wear a similar kind of armor. Evidently they got their idea from the Kelly Gang. And with them thus protected, we'll need all the men we've got, inspector, if not more, to capture or wipe them out."

"By Jove, yes, in that case."

"My other reason against your sending any of the troopers to follow the trail is that the fellows are bound to blind it effectually, as they have done before."

"Just so, or it might mean sending the men to their death; the White Hoods might form an ambush, and, iron-clad as they are—" He broke off, and added, "I will send a man on to Paquita for reënforcements, and we'll make for the Seymours' place."

Without further delay, one of the two troopers with the horses in the ravine was sent galloping on down the road, south towards the Indian Reservation. Inspector Medhurst, Sergeant Dick, and the troopers around them returned to the man's companion; and, all mounted, Dick being taken up behind the inspector, who rode a big, powerful bay, strong enough to carry them both a good few miles without turning a hair.

Northward, then, they struck, back along the road leading towards Lonewater, the way they had come.

Only a short distance did the road skirt the line of hills, then these turned sharply eastward, while the road continued on northward.

The hoofs of the horses, being muffled, had made no sound on the road. And the party now quitted this and followed the cliff-line, striking across an undulating meadow-like country, or prairie, broken up here and there by wooded hills or "buttes."

As they rode at the gallop, it was not easy to carry on a conversation. Nevertheless, Sergeant Dick and Inspector Medhurst were able to exchange occasional remarks on account of the way

they were riding; and the former explained that he had heard the ringleader of the White Hoods call one of the others "Bud."

"Bud!" exclaimed the inspector. "That's Bill Seymour right enough. He goes by the nickname of 'Bud' among his friends. He's better known as 'Bud' Seymour than Bill, as a matter of fact."

"That so? I didn't know that, but when the Arnolds were directing me as to my best way of getting to Lonewater, they mentioned Bill Seymour—I was to make a half-way call at his place—and one of the sons chanced to refer to him once as 'Bud' Seymour. His wife, too, I understand, is named Martha, and one of the White Hoods, who was certainly a woman, the fellow 'Bud' called 'Martha,' as he helped her to her feet just before they vamoosed."

"That's good enough," gleefully crowed Inspector Medhurst. "Seymour and his wife are members of the gang, sure enough."

Medhurst went on to explain that the foreman of the Lonewater Ranch had been visiting the Seymours earlier in the evening, and, on his way eastward to pay his respects to the Arnolds, had seen three of the White Hoods riding towards him.

"They did not see him," said the inspector. "He had just pulled up among some trees to light his pipe, and he hid himself and his horse, and waited until they had passed by. Then he postponed his call at 'Water Castle,' and made back to Lonewater at top-speed to rouse us out after the fellows. From the direction the three were taking, he concluded they were making round the hills for the Paquita Road, and so we came this way. I thought they might be after the Paquita and Lonewater stage, and so ordered the horses to be muffled, and lucky for you, sergeant, that I did, eh?"

"Yes, indeed, sir. The foreman of Lonewater saw only *three* of the gang. H'm!"

Neither of the pair said anything further until, presently, the inspector whispered that they were close to the Seymours' shanty, and silently signaled to the troopers behind to halt and dismount.

"We'll creep up to the place on foot and try to carry it at a rush, in case they are all inside," he added.

As before, two troopers were left with the horses, and the pair were instructed to prevent the animals from neighing. Ten in number, the rest of the police were spread out in a long line, with the inspector at one end of it and Sergeant Dick at the other, and they crept forward through the darkness and the billowy grass.

The pace was purposely slow, and each man put his heel on the ground before the toe at every step, thus making no noise.

The high, beetling cliffs on the right hand overshadowed them all, but, before they had advanced fifty yards, Sergeant Dick saw the blacker outline of the log-hut cutting the skyline.

All was in darkness as if the inmates were asleep or absent.

Stealthily the police deployed still more, so as to enclose the hut—throw their line from one side of it to the other, and hem it in against the cliff-wall at its back. Then the whispered word was passed along from man to man to close in upon it, as they advanced again.

Not a sound broke the stillness of the night. The grass now was short, and the ground hard and rocky in places, so the troopers put their toes first to earth and raised their feet high with each step, in accordance with the rules taught them for moving silently under such conditions.

They got up close to the hut—within half a dozen strides of it—and then with a swift rush reached the door and windows—were around it.

Unceremoniously, the troopers in front of the door immediately battered at it with their rifle-butts, waking a hundred echoes from the cliffs and hills while those at the windows thrust their rifle-barrels in under the shutters to pry these open.

In less time almost than it takes to relate it, a window-shutter at either side of the premises had been forced open, and the assailants were ready to pour as many volleys into the house.

Everything remained silent within, however, and Sergeant Dick called out, softly:

“They are not back yet, inspector. The place is deserted, I should say.”

It was as he said, and, abandoning the assault on the stout, strongly barred door, all the police flocked to the unshuttered windows. These were forced in their turn, but with as little noise as possible now, and the troopers climbed in and ranged through the rooms.

“There’s an underground passage leading from the hut to a secret cave within the cliffs, inspector. Do you know?” Sergeant Dick said, as he and the inspector met inside the kitchen, entering through opposite windows.

“Look for it, men. It will be in one of the inner rooms. There’s no sign of it here.”

“Here it is, sir!” immediately sang out one of the troopers from the bedroom.

Sergeant Dick and his superior officer ran in and saw the troopers raising a trapdoor in the floor. It had been covered by a strip of druggeting, and, moreover, by the bed.

These had been dragged aside before the troopers entered, evidently by the Seymours, who had gone out that way.

A square, box-like hole, timbered all round, about four feet deep, was uncovered.

CHAPTER XXVI
THE THREATENING LETTER

"It was Alf Arnold, the squatter of the lake, who told me of this underground passage," said Sergeant Dick. "I see it has a concrete flooring. As sure as a button, inspector, Seymour and his wife will return this way, unless they have caught the alarm—heard us breaking in, or, for some other reason, don't intend coming back. Will you remain here with half the men, and I will take the rest through the passage to the cave and wait there for awhile in hopes of their coming? Do you know, I've an idea, too, that that cave will tell us something."

"You don't think they were in the house and fled through the passage?"

"No, sir; they couldn't have got here before us, I'm certain."

"Very good, sergeant! Select your men. I hope the pretty pair haven't given us the slip—*will* return to their nest. Of course, many of these log huts in the wilds, as you know, both here in Canada and across the border in the United States, have underground passages like this to provide a means of escape for the occupants in case of attack by any desperadoes, so its existence proves nothing."

Sergeant Dick chose his five men, and they dropped down one after the other through the trapdoor in the floor, and followed him on hands and knees along the little tunnel under the ground.

These subterranean galleries in the wild and woolly West are very simply and easily contrived. A trench, some four feet deep and as many wide, is dug in the soil from the house, the floor made hard with concrete or something similar, and the sides boarded up and over. Then the earth and sods of grass are replaced.

As a rule, the exit is in the middle of a thick clump of bushes some forty or fifty feet from the hut, and may be used as a rifle-pit, of course, in case of an attack on the house, the inmates contriving thus to take the assailants in the rear.

Crawling along on all fours in the inky blackness of the tunnel, Sergeant Dick came to a similar trapdoor to that he had descended. Faint rays of light penetrated through cracks in it.

He pushed upward upon it, and it rose on hinges. Standing upright within the aperture, he flashed an electric torch he had been given by Inspector Medhurst, and saw that he was within a small cave, the mouth of which was covered over outside by a thick mass of creeper, through which, however, silvery light faintly struggled.

The moon had peeped out through a break in the clouds and was flooding the plain outside with its ghostly radiance.

Dick scrambled out of the hole, and, turning to the back of the cave, proceeded to flash his torch over it.

All at once he switched off the light, and, stooping over the trap and the trooper getting upon his feet in it, whispered:

"S'sh, I heard something. They are coming, I believe—our quarry! Bid the others come out softly."

A noise as of heavily booted feet on hard rock had reached his quick, trained ear. It came not from outside the cave, *but from the roof at the back*.

Or was it only his fancy that it did?

Silently the troopers drew themselves up out of the hole in the cave floor, and lowered the trap in place again behind them. The moon-light, which entered through the interstices of the creeper marking the entrance to the cave, was just sufficient to show each man his neighbor's dim silhouette or outline.

The noise without or beyond the cave continued, and grew louder, now changing to the sounds that a man makes in climbing a ladder —the sound of heavy boots clumping up wooden rungs.

And then to the amazement and momentary superstitious horror of the troopers a bright light shot into the cave above a ledge close to the roof at the back!

The light grew stronger, and danced about, accompanied by a rubbing, rustling noise, then resolved itself into a glowing orb, which moved about on top of the shelf and almost immediately turned its back, so to speak, on the cave.

"I'm all right now, Martha," said a gruff voice. "Here's the torch if you wants it, and shove the ladder along."

Sergeant Dick and his fellow-troopers were all standing around the cave, with rifles at the ready and eyes riveted upon that lighted shelf over their heads. They were invisible in the darkness to the fellow on the ledge. He had his own light in his eyes for one thing, and, as related, he did not flash his torch around the cave but handed it back to his companion in the inner depths.

His dark, shapeless figure could just be discerned in the halo of the torch, squirming and pulling at something within another little tunnel measuring about three feet in diameter.

The end of a ladder protruded from this second tunnel.

He and his companion were pulling it through, and he now proceeded to lower it to the floor of the cave.

As he placed it in position, Sergeant Dick sprang forward, revolver in hand, and bounded swiftly up it.

The young police officer's swiftness, however, was almost a case of more haste less speed. For the ladder, insecurely set half turned under him. But he saved himself by clutching the shelf of rock with his left hand, and luckily the ladder did not slip aside, so that he was not thrown off it.

He promptly grabbed then with his left hand at the man, even as the latter uttered a yell of fright and made to wriggle back inside the tunnel.

Sergeant Dick caught the man by the collar, and, holding him tightly, sprang up the remaining rungs of the ladder and thrust his head, shoulders, and revolver into the tunnel at the second human form he could dimly perceive within it by the light of the electric torch.

"Keep still, you in there, or I shoot," he roared. "Keep as you are. Put your hands in front of you. I've got the drop on you, as you can see. Come up, men some of you, quick, and relieve me of the husband here."

Three of the troopers sprang up the ladder behind him, while the other two held it firm. Bill, or "Bud" Seymour, too amazed, apparently, to be able to offer any resistance, was hauled down from

the shelf, neck and crop, and head first, by the three troopers, allowing the sergeant to crawl into the narrow tunnel and lay hold of Martha Seymour.

Fierce and bold as the woman was in the ordinary way, she had not dared to disobey John Dick's mandate to lie still and keep where she was. As a matter of fact, she, like her husband, seemed to have her energies paralyzed—to be bereft of the power of volition or action by the unexpected attack.

Sergeant Dick, too, had promptly snatched the electric torch from the outstretched hand and was shining the light blindingly in her bewildered, horror-stricken eyes.

The tunnel was so narrow the pair had had to wriggle along it on their stomachs and her prone position was therefore also against her.

Leaning still farther in, Sergeant Dick grasped her by the wrist now, and, backing and exerting all his strength, began to pull her bodily out of the tunnel.

He had got her half out of it when two of the troopers came to his aid, and, between them, they dragged her helplessly forth on to the shelf, then bore her down the ladder to the cave floor.

She was dressed as a man, and in the dark it really would have been hard to tell that she was not one. Like her husband, she was big and burly, and her face was red and coarse, and bloated even worse than his, while her eyes and mouth were hard and cruel-looking, whereas his were weakly vicious.

They both wore overcoats, "wide-awake" hats, and topboots.

"So you've got us, have ye? Well, what are ye goin' to do with us now you've caught us?" asked the woman with an attempt at mockery, as if she entertained some faint hope that their captors did not associate them with the dreaded White Hood gang, or might very easily be imposed upon. "Who do you think ye've got hold of, anyway? What fules you all are! Don't you know us? Yon's Bill Seymour, and I'm his wife."

"We are quite aware of that, Mrs. Seymour, and we also know you to be two of the White Hood gang. You two are alone, I take it. There are no more of you coming through that interesting little tunnel?"

"Curse you! I recognizes you. You are the police sergeant we was —"

The woman stopped and bit her tongue, in evident concern at having so unequivocally betrayed herself.

"Why don't you finish, Mrs. Seymour? Whom you and your ruffianly fellow-rustlers were going to hang, when my comrades here came up so unexpectedly and timely."

"Curse you! Oh, curse you!" was all the infuriated and mortified woman could find to say.

Her husband broke out into bitter reproaches against her, for having let her tongue run away with her and betray them both as it had done.

Sergeant Dick sent one of the troopers across the open space outside the cave to the hut to fetch Inspector Medhurst, and that officer came quickly. Needless to say, he was delighted over the capture.

"Search their pockets, men," he ordered. "We may find evidence upon them of their own guilt and the identities of their late companions."

A brace of automatic pistols was found upon either prisoner. The pair had already been relieved of their rifles of course.

And then one of the troopers, searching Bill Seymour, found in an inner pocket a folded scrap of paper, which he handed to Medhurst.

The inspector unfolded it eagerly, and flashed an electric torch upon it.

In a reddish fluid, presumably blood, was scrawled upon it:

> "To old Alf Arnold and his little lot at 'Water Carstle,'—
> We was fules to let you and your sons orf so light, and, now that cussed policeman who was a-stayin' wid you 'as escaped us, we believes some of you set the traps on to us. So, look out! The White Hoods hev sworn revenge upon all on you, and we ull burn the b'ilin' lot on you one night afore long in your bloomin' 'Water Carstle.' Ef you did beat orf the redskins, you won't us, so, again we says, look out!"

Inspector Medhurst read this precious effusion out aloud.

"H'm! Ha!" he observed. "We must take means at once, sergeant, to protect the Arnolds and entrap the rest of these ruffians around 'Water Castle.' They may strike there at once when they learn of the arrest of these two. Take your five men again, now, and explore this second tunnel—see where it leads to. If you come upon the trail of others of the band, let me know at once, and we'll try to run the wretches down. Let me know immediately in any case what's on the other side of this tunnel."

John Dick saluted without a word, and, bidding the five troopers follow him again, mounted the ladder and wriggled head first, inside the hole behind the rocky shelf.

CHAPTER XXVII
THE CLEW OF THE LAMP

The tunnel in the rock proved to be some ten feet long. It was blocked at the end by small-sized bowlders piled upon each other.

Clearing them aside, Sergeant Dick put out his head. He saw a deep gully, or dried-up water-course, ascending at right angles to him, at a gentle gradient, between overhanging cliffs which only permitted of a faint glimpse of the night sky.

Sergeant Dick told the man behind him what he could see, and to pass the word back along their line to Inspector Medhurst. Then he proceeded to climb out of the tunnel.

His men followed him; and they started searching the ground at their feet for tracks.

Where the ground was soft were innumerable cattle and sheep tracks, and a few horse tracks. Nearly all of these led upwards. One or two tracks, nearly obliterated by the others and by rain and wind and dust, led downwards.

"These downward tracks are weeks old, that's plain," said Sergeant Dick. "The others are more recent, but still all the cattle tracks are several days old. It's plain to me—"

"Dick!" It was the inspector's voice. And, raising his head with a respectful "Yes, sir," Dick saw Medhurst wriggling out of the tunnel mouth above them.

"You've found tracks?"

"Yes, sir. Mostly cattle tracks. It's pretty evident, inspector, that this gully is the secret way to and from the gang's duffing-yard, which is above us. Judging from the tracks they can't have taken any of the stolen cattle out for some time—several weeks—so we ought to make a grand haul."

"I'm coming through with the rest of the men, except Morton and Geddes, who are guarding our prisoners."

The inspector and the other five police troopers climbed down beside their comrades; and Medhurst said they would first ascend the gully to the rustlers' duffing-yard.

Falling into line, the troopers followed their two officers up the winding water-course. It took them a good twenty minutes to come to its upper end. Then they suddenly debouched upon a fairly level expanse of ground, and, beyond a slight intervening ridge, they looked into the same cup-shaped valley which Sergeant John Dick had discovered from the other or southern side of the range.

And his skill as a tracker was also verified; for there, sure enough, were the horses, steers, and sheep he had seen before dotted about the valley, darker blurs against the dark background in the faint light of the stars and overclouded moon.

"Excellent!" exclaimed the inspector. "This is a coup. The gang evidently recognized the hopelessness of getting the beasts away before our coming, and decided to consult only their own safety by getting back to their homes as quickly as possible."

"We may find something that may tell us who the rest of them are in the log-hut on the other side of the valley, inspector," said Sergeant Dick.

"Quite so," agreed Medhurst. "Yes, we'll see what the hut contains. Be in readiness for an ambush, men! There's no saying that some of the gang haven't entrenched themselves in the valley, although I don't think it is likely. Spread out more, and walk stooping, carrying your rifles at the ready!"

But they crossed the valley to the other side without any molestation, except that they disturbed some of the sleeping horses and cattle.

The moon shone out bright and full again from a fairly clear sky as they drew near the "lean-to," which, as its name explains, was built up against the cliff.

The door stood half open! But still, fearful that this might only be a ruse to lure him and his *posse* into some diabolically arranged death-trap, Inspector Medhurst called a halt and asked for a volunteer to go forward and make sure that the hut was empty.

"I'll go, inspector," Sergeant Dick answered, promptly.

Medhurst would have been exceedingly sorry to have lost his capable young subordinate, but he did not like to pass him over for one of the troopers.

"Very good! I don't need to tell you to be careful, I think."

John Dick advanced, bending nearly double, and ready to drop flat to the earth at the first gleam of a rifle at either of the two windows in sight, or any suspicious sign within the half-open door.

He was within twenty feet of the hut when his keen sense of smell detected the strong, unpleasant odor of an oil-lamp burning badly.

For a moment he hesitated, half scenting in this a trap for their destruction. Then he determined to risk it, and flew swiftly forward to the door of the hut.

But instead of at once thrusting it wide open, as five men out of six would naturally have done in the circumstances, he did not touch the door at all. He simply stepped half round it, and flashed his electric torch about the room.

And then he saw what a terrible trap had been laid for them—*how a touch upon the door would have blown him to atoms*!

Behind the half-open door was a barrel on end, three-parts full of gunpowder, as he could see through a hole knocked in its top. And balanced on a strip of wood across the hole was a vilely smoking lamp screened about with a square of cardboard so that its light only showed upon the roof.

Just touching the cardboard screen was a short plank of wood resting on heaped-up boxes, its other end set against the door.

If the door had been pushed back, the plank must have been, and the lamp overturned into the gunpowder, and any one entering would never have known what had hurt him—not in this world at least.

Sergeant Dick felt himself go cold all over, as he comprehended the awful doom which might so easily have been his.

He stepped forward promptly, however, gingerly lifted the lamp from its dangerous position, and set it upon the table, turning it higher to put an end to its vile aroma.

It smoked badly, and the chimney was all black. He therefore took it outside and blew it out, and called to his comrades to come up.

When they did so, and he pointed out to Inspector Medhurst the diabolical trap that had been laid for them, one and all the troopers indulged in furious anathemas against the dastardly White Hoods.

"Look round the hut, lads, and see what you can find," ordered their leader.

"The lamp, I think, will prove a clew, inspector," quietly said Sergeant Dick. "As a matter of fact, I have seen it before, and that quite recently."

"You have—where?"

"*At 'Water Castle.'* Inspector, I believe the Arnold family make up the rest of the gang of White Hoods. I have believed so ever since you rescued me from the gang's hands this evening, but I had no real proof beyond my own vague suspicions until now. The leader's voice it was that first made me suspect the family. I could take my oath it was *Aunt Kate's—Mrs. Arnold's*! And I know that the fellow who climbed the tree was Abner Arnold; while this lamp I can swear to having seen in Aaron Arnold's bedroom during the siege of the 'castle' by the Ogalcrees."

"Thunder! You don't say! But—but what about the letter written in blood we found on Seymour, threatening the gang's vengeance against all at 'Water Castle'? And, again, weren't all the male members of the family with you when you were captured by the gang? Ah, I see, I see! You think that the letter was only an artful ruse to avert suspicion, and Old Alf and his sons promptly disguised themselves—donned white hoods and smocks—when you were blindfolded."

"Exactly, sir! And put on their primitive armor, too. It was probably hidden, close by the scene of our hold-up by their womenfolk."

"But—but, good heavens, you don't mean to infer that all the women of the family are also mixed up in this? That, that lovely girl—Old Alf's niece—and his daughter, that weak-minded, poor girl—Jenny I think they call her—have helped in the atrocities the gang have committed, and could lend themselves to—to such a diabolical scheme of vengeance as you have just frustrated?"

"Don't ask me, sir—don't ask me," John Dick replied in such a heartwrung voice as made Medhurst look surprisedly at him.

Then a look of sympathetic intelligence swiftly crossed the inspector's face.

"Some of the women of the family are in the gang, undoubtedly, as I told you before, sir, but—but it is just possible that the—the two you mention, the niece and the daughter, are innocent of all complicity. God only grant it be so," he added in tones not meant for his superior's ears.

"Yes," John Dick went on, "it's pretty plain to me, now, how they worked the oracle—how the gang worked matters to-night. As soon as the male members of the family and I had gone off this evening, Aunt Kate and the two daughters-in-law, I should say, took a canoe and made for the north side of the hills or cliffs. The foreman of Lonewater ranch told you that he saw *three* White Hoods riding round the north side of the range towards the Seymours' place. They were Aunt Kate and the two daughters-in-law, without a doubt. The three had a hiding-place on the lakeside where they assumed their ghost-like disguise, and, of course, the two Seymours made up the five who held us up, round the other side of the range."

"And by riding this way, up the gully and across the valley here, they might very easily get to the waterside before you. You naturally moved slowly and warily, to guard against falling into an ambush or warning any of the gang on watch."

"That is so, sir. And the squatter and his four sons would just bring up the number of the bandits to what it was when they were going to hang me."

CHAPTER XXVIII
THE RETURN TO "WATER CASTLE"

The "lean-to" consisted of two compartments, and the walls of both were furnished with hooks, for slinging hammocks apparently, though there were no hammocks now in the place.

In fact, save for an old stove, which was evidently a home-made contrivance, there was nothing to be found in either compartment, until Sergeant Dick said he would take a final look-round.

He peeped upon some shelves in the inner room and spied a fragment of writing-paper, plainly overlooked.

Opening it out and shining a light upon it, the inspector and Sergeant Dick saw that it was apparently a scrap of a letter.

This is what they read:

> "... be foolish to touch their stock, Bud, old chap. Anyway, we will turn out in full force to-nite, the eight on us, and you and your wife. Muriel and Jenny be going to Paquita Springs this afternoon, so the coast will be quite clear. We will not need to trick them as usual.
>
> "Till I see you, to-nite, at the hut.
>
> "Your true pal,
> "ALF ARNOLD."

"That clinches it, sergeant," said the inspector with grim satisfaction, carefully folding the scrap of paper and putting it away in his notebook. "This bit of paper would hang the Squatter of the Lake, I should say, or at any rate get him a good stretch in jail, even if you were unable to swear to the lamp, or we couldn't trace those who sold it."

"And—and it would seem to show that Muriel and Jenny—the niece and daughter, I mean—are not concerned in the outrages of the gang, are wholly innocent of all complicity in the lawlessness.

'We will not need to trick them as usual,' the letter says, 'and as they are going to Paquita Springs the coast will be quite clear.'"

"Yes, yes, it is evident those two girls are innocent and know nothing whatever of the villainy of their relations and the Seymours. Come now, we will hurry back the way we came, proceed at once to 'Water Castle' and try to effect the arrest of Old Alf and his lot."

"One moment, inspector! I have an idea by which we may capture them without bloodshed—a thing that I have grave doubt we will achieve unless we resort to some ruse. You know the strength of 'Water Castle,' and the character of the squatter and his sons, to say nothing of his wife?"

"What is your plan?"

"First that we do not disappoint them, in the hope of presently hearing a big 'boom' from this quarter. Let us leave a time-fuse to blow the hut up when we are back across the valley."

"A good idea. We will do it. If the Arnolds believe they have blown us all to pieces, we ought to be able to capture them easily. They will take no precautions against our coming."

"Exactly! I will tell you the rest of my plan for taking them, as we go."

While Sergeant Dick and the inspector laid the fuse, the troopers were all told to drive the cattle, horses, and sheep to the farther side of the valley, well away from the force of the explosion.

Sergeant Dick and Medhurst then quitted the hut, laying their powder trail right across the valley. At the top of the gully the troopers rejoined them. Then Sergeant Dick applied a lighted match to the long, thin trail of powder.

With a hissing splutter the tiny red flash ran down the slope of the hillside and went zigzag-ging away across the valley until it looked no more than a fast-traveling, tiny red star in the darkness.

It neared the farther side, and all prepared for the detonation.

Sure enough it came.

A great, lurid sheet of flame lit the night under the opposite cliffs, there was a thunderous roar, echoed and reechoed by the hills around, and the solid rock under them shook and trembled.

Then the police turned their backs on the cup-shaped valley, from which it was not possible without human aid that any of the stolen animals could escape; for the top of the gully, we have forgotten to mention, was closed by a high gate, secured by a padlock.

Descending past where they had first entered the gully, the party came almost immediately—on just turning an angle in the cliff—to a solid wall of rock through which the gully was continued in the shape of a wide natural tunnel or cave.

They passed inside this, and saw an opening before them not more than four or five feet wide and six feet high. It was covered over outside with a mass of an evergreen creeper, which effectually masked it in like manner to the cave in which the Seymours had been captured.

Thrusting the creeper aside, Sergeant Dick and Inspector Medhurst emerged on the prairie within not more than two or three hundred yards of the Seymours' hut.

"Oh! ow! ow! Ye are ghosts come back from the grave to haunt us!" was the yelled greeting they got, as they pushed open the door of the hut, from the two Seymours, who squirmed and writhed in the chairs they were tied to.

"You see, inspector? They naturally concluded we had fallen victims to their horrible trap and been blown to atoms, all of us," said Sergeant Dick, grimly.

"Ah, they had laid a trap for you, then, sir. I suspected as much from the way they were chortling to themselves after we heard that explosion," said one of the two troopers who had been left guarding the prisoners.

"They'll chortle in a different way after their trial," grimly responded Medhurst. "Of course, had your murder-trap succeeded, you vile wretches, there would have been nothing to prove that it wasn't an accident, precipitated by ourselves in searching the hut. As it is, that little scheme will prove a very damning factor against you all."

A start was soon made now for the lake, all quitting the hut and mounting. The two prisoners were set upon their own horses, which had been left in the stable all night.

With their reins tied together and linked up on either side to a trooper's saddle-bow, the pair were placed in the middle of the troopers. Then, at an easy trot, with the horses' hoofs muffled, the party rode round the hilly spurs on the northern side of the range, and threaded their way through the woods down to the lake edge.

Sergeant Dick explained his plan for the capture of the Arnolds, as he and Inspector Medhurst rode at the head of the cavalcade. In accordance with it, they were no sooner at the waterside and in view of the lights of the "castle" and the ruddy reflection in the placid surface of the lake, than he fired three shots into the air.

As the reader may need reminding, three shots meant "Want to come off shore," and was the signal used by the Arnolds and all their visitors.

They had a full code of such signals, which all their friends knew and employed as occasion demanded. Four shots—two rapidly, and then, after a moment, two more in quick succession—for instance, indicated that danger was to be apprehended from some direction.

On his giving the signal, Sergeant Dick and his comrades of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police dismounted, and hid themselves behind trees and bushes. They had come to the identically same landing-place where the Ogalcrees had ambushed him, on landing for the first time on that shore from the ark.

The two Seymours had been gagged to prevent them giving any alarm, and moreover, tied to trees.

Hardly had these measures been taken when, through his binoculars, Inspector Medhurst saw the dark shadow of the ark slowly moving away from the verandah of the "castle" and making its way out of the palisaded "dock."

"There are sure to be some of the menfolk, if not all five, on the craft, men," whispered Medhurst, explaining his subordinate's plan now to the troopers. "The sergeant is a fine mimic, as I can bear witness, and he is going to imitate 'Bud' Seymour's melodious voice, and thus lure whoever's aboard right up to the landing-place. As soon as the scow bumps, every man of you must rush forward, without firing a shot, and get aboard. We don't want the rest of the family alarmed by a shot. You know the strength of the 'castle,' or,

rather you don't know it as Sergeant Dick does, and he says it would be almost impossible to storm it in the face of anything like a fierce fire from within. The Indians found that out to their cost. The sergeant says the floor of the front room drops like a trap on the pulling of a lever, and any one bursting in recklessly may therefore expect to be given a distinct cooler."

As already mentioned more than once, the scow, for all its awkward build, sailed swiftly. It was soon within hailing distance of the shore, and a man's voice, the voice of Amos, bawled across the water:

"Who is it?"

"Bud—Bud Seymour," Sergeant Dick at once answered, mimicking that old scoundrel's mode of speech exactly.

On that, the ark came on, and the peering eyes in the bushes made out four human forms in the forepart of the craft—two men and two women.

Sergeant Dick's heart beat faster.

What if one of the women were she whom he loved—whom he loved still in spite of his late ghastly fear that she might be implicated in the awful outrages of the gang and even in their attempt to put him out of the way by hanging!

When close inshore, the quartet on the ark dropped an anchor astern, and then, paying out the rope, proceeded to propel the craft, with the two long sweeps, towards the shore.

By this maneuver, as previously explained, in case of treachery they could haul off-shore again quickly, by dragging on the anchor rope.

Nearer and yet nearer glided the unwieldy craft, and Sergeant Dick's sharp eyes, trained by long practice to seeing well in the dark, made out Muriel and her cousin Jenny standing just within the cabin door. They were holding the anchor-rope, brought through the other doors, ready to haul on it. The family's isolation taught them to expect treachery and alarms from the most unexpected quarters.

Amos and his brother Abner were at the sweeps, of course.

Sergeant Dick had assumed Bill Seymour's hat and coat, and kept behind a small bush so as to hide his lower man. He concealed his face by turning the coat-collar up about his chin and drawing the hat well down over his brows.

Nearer, nearer! Not a yard separated the boat from the landing-place now.

Bump!

Immediately, Sergeant Dick rushed forward, pointing a pair of pistols at Amos and Abner.

"Hands up, both of you!" he bawled. "You are our prisoners!"

The pair stood as if petrified, and the two girls likewise; for all four recognized him in spite of his disguise.

He leaped into the scow, and, with a rush, his fellow police-troopers swarmed after him, all with pointed revolvers.

CHAPTER XXIX
THE FAILURE TO SURPRISE "WATER CASTLE"

Amos and Abner were each in the hands of half a dozen troopers in less time than it takes to relate. Then, as terrified screams burst from Muriel and Jenny, Abner gave vent to a howl that seemed hardly human and gasped affrightedly:

"They are ghosts, ghosts, ghosts! We are lost, Amos!"

"We are indeed, you fool!" spluttered his brother, struggling frenziedly now to free himself from the dozen muscular hands clutching him, "for you 'ave betrayed us."

Then a gag was forced into the mouth of each of the two young desperadoes, and their hands were dragged behind their backs and handcuffed so.

"Stop your screaming, girls! Hold your tongues or we shall be forced to gag you also," cried Inspector Medhurst.

At this threat Jenny was silent, save for a loud, terrified panting. Muriel had only uttered one involuntary scream upon the rush of the police.

"What is the meaning of this, policemen?" she now demanded, hoarsely. "Sergeant Dick, have you all gone crazy that—that you attack us—make prisoners of my cousins in this way and that you—you have disguised yourself in that way—are personating old Mr. Seymour?"

"Miss Arnold, an explanation is certainly due to you and your cousin Jenny," replied Dick, sorrowfully, as he put his pistols back in his belt. "You have both been cruelly deceived by your relatives. It grieves me very much to have to tell you, Miss Muriel, that your two cousins there, as well as their brothers and father, are members of the dreaded White Hood Gang."

"Impossible!" gasped Muriel, while Jenny stood as if transfixed. "Oh, that is too absurd!"

"It is true, Miss Arnold," put in Inspector Medhurst. "Your cousin yonder took us for ghosts, and his brother cried out that he had betrayed them. So he had, for it was fairly good proof—his taking us for ghosts—that he believed we had all been killed by a horrible trap set for us by him and his brothers and the two Seymours up among the hills."

"Oh, it is impossible—impossible! I cannot believe it of them," panted Muriel, sinking helplessly upon the seat under the bulwark of the scow.

"You will oblige us, ladies, by going inside the cabin and keeping silent," continued Inspector Medhurst. "If your uncle and cousins *are* innocent, Muriel Arnold, they will be afforded every chance of clearing themselves by the law of the land, provided they submit quietly. Haverty and Leclere, bring the Seymours aboard. Then we will draw out and make for the 'castle.' Sergeant, will you take the tiller, and steer?"

Gasping hard and staring wildly at each other, the two girls passed inside the after-cabin, then stood embracing for mutual support, while the police-troopers brought the Seymours aboard and hauled on the anchor-rope, pulling the ark off-shore.

Amos and Abner had been thrown helplessly handcuffed and gagged into two of the bunks in the fore-cabin. Bud Seymour was put in another bunk and his wife was bound to the mast inside the cabin.

As the ark drew near "Water Castle," Sergeant Dick and his fellow-policemen saw that the gate in the "dockyard" palisading stood wide, just as they expected it would be. The way in up to the verandah or landing-stage was clear.

But standing half within, half without the door of the "castle," peering out anxiously, was old Alf, rifle in hand, while faces were visible at two of the windows facing them. There were no lights showing in the place; all had been extinguished, and most of the windows in sight appeared to be shuttered.

"They heard the girls' screams, and are on their guard, sergeant," Inspector Medhurst called in a low voice from the after-door of the ark.

"I'm afraid so, sir. Sound travels far over water, and this lake is famous for its remarkable echoes," Sergeant Dick answered as cautiously, turning the ark's nose a degree so as to skirt the palisading to the open gate.

"Ark, ahoy! Anything wrong? That you, Amos—Abner?" Old Man Alf bawled to them.

Sergeant Dick was still wearing "Bud" Seymour's hat and coat, and again mimicking that old reprobate's voice, shouted back:

"Of course, it's Amos and Abner, and 'Bud' Seymour, too, a-comin' to see you, ole hoss! What do you think's wrong?"

Old Alf evidently consulted with others of the garrison, but he still seemed suspicious as he called out again:

"Amos, Abner, are you there? What did them there screams mean? We heerd them right enough. Muriel—Jenny, is it all right wi' you?"

"No, father, it isn't," shrilled Jenny on the instant, rushing to the edge of the squared bow. "The police are here, and they are after you and the boys. They've got Amos and Abner, and the two Seymours, prisoners in the cabin. Those you see are police wearing their hats."

She shouted the words rapidly—all in one breath.

Muriel gasped in dismay and ran and clapped a hand over her mouth, too late. She fought to free her mouth and shout something more, as Inspector Medhurst and three of the troopers rushed forth from the cabin and seized and dragged her and Muriel within it again.

"Oh, Jenny! Why were you so foolish? They will fight to the bitter end now. I know they will—your father and brothers. You have sealed their doom."

"She has that, for, as I said, if they resist, we will show no mercy—we cannot show any," exclaimed Inspector Medhurst. Then he stepped to the door again, and called out:

"Surrender, Arnold! Submit quietly, and you will all have the benefit of a fair trial. Refuse, and resist us at your peril! You know the penalty of defying us—the police."

Old Alf had vanished within the door, which was now closed, and the other faces were no longer visible at the windows. All the windows in sight presented only their armored, loopholed screens.

Suddenly one of the screens was thrown open, and Aunt Kate's voice boomed forth, even as the bow of the ark scraped one of the gate posts in the palisading, and the clumsy vessel swung slowly round to enter the gate.

"Let my two sons and daughter whom you have prisoners come on to the verandah and talk to us, and we'll think about surrenderin'."

Inspector Medhurst did not reply, but stepped back inside the fore-cabin. He called through the after one for the two troopers with Sergeant Dick to keep close behind the tiller-shield, with him.

"Stand on up to the house and lay us alongside the verandah, sergeant," he added.

"Do you hear me, you policemen?" roared the lion-like old woman again. "Give my sons and daughter their liberty, let 'em join us, and we'll then talk about surrenderin'."

"Your two sons aboard with us are prisoners, and as such they will remain," Medhurst answered, after another moment or two's pause during which Sergeant Dick ran the scow swiftly and deftly alongside the verandah. "I will hold no further parley with you than to ask you once more, 'Do you surrender or do you not?'"

"Curse you, we will fight to the death!" roared out the voice of Aaron.

An automatic pistol cracked rapidly from the open window, and bullet after bullet from the weapon clanged against and ricocheted off the steel tiller-shield, behind which Sergeant Dick and Troopers Bell and Watts were standing huddled, showing not as much as an elbow, fortunately for them.

"Hold your fire, troopers! Hold your fire!" bawled Inspector Medhurst. "Within the 'castle,' there! Alf Arnold, listen to me. I have no wish to fire on the house, as you have women with you. Let them come out—your wife and two daughters-in-law—then, if you men will not surrender, so much the worse for you. Send the women out, anyhow, first of all."

Abel, the other son in the house, had been quick to join in the firing at the ark. But both desperadoes now ceased shooting, and a silence intervened, broken at length by Aunt Kate's voice, calling out:

"No, no! Let Deb and Bella go, but my place is here. I will not leave you, Alf, nor my brave lads."

"They only want you to open the door so's they can make a rush in. Don't be gulled, men," shrilled the voice of Bella, Abel's wife.

"We will take no such advantage of you," the inspector bawled back, "but, if you doubt my word, lower the women through your trapdoor into a canoe."

Another longish pause, broken only by murmuring voices within the "castle"; and then old Alf Arnold called out:

"Very well, we will send the women out through the trapdoor."

Aunt Kate and her daughters-in-law could be heard still fiercely protesting against quitting their husband's sides. But the men's arguments evidently prevailed, for presently the occupants of the ark could hear noises under the "castle," which told them the women were being put into one of the canoes.

Sergeant Dick and Troopers Bell and Watts, by stooping and peeping round the side of the tiller-screen, could see, through the piles and cross-timbering under the verandah, the three women being lowered in turn through the trap in the central passage of the "castle" into a canoe drawn up under it. There were two other canoes moored close by.

CHAPTER XXX
THE END OF THE WHITE HOODS, AND OF THE STORY

"Thank heaven for that mercy, Jenny. Your mother and sisters-in-law will be out of the fighting," panted Muriel.

As the words left her lips there came a loud "view-hallo!" from the direction of the southern end of the lake, and, glancing thitherwards, Sergeant Dick and Inspector Medhurst saw a dozen or more canoes and rafts making for them.

For a moment the inmates of the ark believed that they were taken in the rear by Indians, broken out on the warpath again. But the next moment torches burst into flame in the leading canoes and revealed that the new comers were cowboys and settlers from the surrounding district. The red coat and Stetson hat of a police-trooper showed up conspicuously in the foremost canoe under the bright torchlight.

Medhurst and Sergeant Dick recognized the man as the trooper who had been dispatched for reënforcements immediately after Dick's rescue from the White Hoods.

Hails were exchanged between the troopers in the ark and the would-be avengers in the canoes; explanations were called for, and given freely.

"It means that we've rounded up and cornered the last of the White Hoods, men," Inspector Medhurst shouted to those in the canoes. "Old Man Arnold and his sons, his wife and two daughters-in-law with the two Seymours, 'Bud' and his wife, formed the entire gang, as we discovered. They tried to blow us up in the hills, where they've got a secret duffing-yard stocked full of cattle, sheep, and horses, all awaiting identification now. But we escaped the diabolical plot, thanks be, and here we are with Amos and Abner Arnold and the two Seymours prisoners, and just waiting for Mrs.

Arnold and the other women to come out before falling on and capturing or wiping out the last three male members of the band—Old Alf and his two eldest sons."

A yell of vengeful rage and fierce execration went up from the canoes on the words; and the cowboys and settlers in the canoes were all for attacking the "castle" from the other three sides in conjunction with the police in the ark.

But Inspector Medhurst again called out:

"No, no, men, you must keep at a distance. This is our affair—for us police to settle. And you wouldn't rob us of any of the glory of the capture of the place? We are strongly entrenched inside this vessel, while you'd have no more chance in your canoes and on those rafts than the redskins had in their late siege of the place. I cannot allow you to throw away your lives in any such foolish attack. You would all be wiped out and not be able to accomplish anything."

The canoe containing Aunt Kate and her two daughters-in-law, Bella and Deborah, now came up to the little gate in the timbering under the "castle." Unlocking the padlock upon it, the women opened it and paddled out.

"You had better come aboard the ark, Mrs. Arnold," called the Inspector.

The women were nothing loath to do so, dreading with reason the reception they would get from their infuriated neighbors in the canoes and on the rafts. Every man's hand was against the White Hoods, and all belonging to them; their atrocities had enraged every one, English, French, and Indian.

As the three women stepped aboard and passed by Sergeant Dick behind the tiller-screen, they each gave him a look of awful hate and vengeful longing.

Barely had the cabin door closed upon them than from three of the front windows of the "castle" three rifles rang out and as many bullets clanged again against the tiller-screen covering Sergeant Dick and Troopers Bell and Watts.

The police still held their fire, but Sergeant Dick saw the after-door of the ark open cautiously a few inches again, and Inspector Medhurst peep round it and beckon to him—indicate by jerking a

finger that he and the two troopers were to move the tiller-screen close up against the door.

This the trio promptly proceeded to do. They contrived to do so without exposing themselves in any way, but caused two of the outlaws in the "castle" again to blaze away furiously at their shield.

When it was alongside the after-door, Medhurst put into Dick's hands a small barrel or keg, with a candle thrust into the open bunghole.

"Sergeant," he whispered, "here is a keg of gunpowder. Slip under the verandah in the canoe and put it just beneath the door, then light the candle and get back as smartly as you can. We shall have to push off promptly to escape the force of the explosion. Will you do it?"

"Certainly, inspector. Where did you find the keg?"

"Inside one of the store-cupboards. The sight of it suggested the idea."

"One moment, sir! Would it not be better to blow in the western or eastern wall? You remember what I told you about the drop-floor in the front room? The gap would want some getting over, if they let it down, even if we got in the front as the Ogalcrees did, in the face of their fire from the inner rooms."

"Just as you like, sergeant. Very well, let it be the western wall."

Sergeant Dick, hugging the keg of gunpowder under his left arm, dropped on his knees and crawled round the farther end of the tiller-screen. His head was below the level of the verandah, and so he was hidden from the fierce, watching eyes at the "castle" loopholes.

Wriggling noiselessly and cautiously over the scow's bulwark, he stepped on to the cross-timbering between the piles supporting the verandah, and the next moment he had dodged through the open gate, by which the three Mrs. Arnolds had come out in the canoe, and was under the verandah.

The canoe was alongside the gate, but tied to the stern of the scow. He stepped into it and cast off the painter; then, leaving the paddles lying where they were in the canoe at his feet, he

soundlessly began to work the canoe along the inside of the piles by shifting his hands along the timbering.

In this way he worked himself under the house itself and over to the west side. He set the little keg against one of the piles supporting the western wall, immediately between the two bedrooms on that side—Aaron's and Abel's, as it happened. The keg fitted neatly in the crook formed by the pile and a cross-brace.

Then he struck a match softly and lighted the candle in the bunghole, immediately hurrying back diagonally in the canoe the way he had come, for the gate.

He gained the opening and wriggled noiselessly back over the bulwark of the scow. That the candle-fuse was still burning all right he could see through the piles.

The next moment he was behind the tiller-screen and safe inside the after-cabin, where, on hearing his report that the mine was set, Inspector Medhurst at once gave orders for the ark to be thrust off from the verandah. She had been hooked on to the piles with boathooks, that was all, and the current, flowing southward, at once began to drift her away from "Water Castle" back towards the gate of the outer palisading or "dockyard."

Sergeant Dick saw that none of the prisoners were in the after-cabin, and concluded that they had all been kept from the windows and in ignorance of what had been done.

Then it came—a great blinding, lurid flash, round and under the house, a deafening bang! Bits of the roof and fragments of the shattered wall and floor of the "castle" hurtled into the air and fell splashing into the water around.

"Round to the side blown in, quick, men!" yelled Inspector Medhurst, while all the women in the fore-cabin screamed in terror, to know what had happened.

The troopers at the windows told them, and the three Mrs. Arnolds indulged in the vilest abuse of Inspector Medhurst, Sergeant Dick, and all the Royal Mounted Police in Canada.

Paying no heed to the vituperation, the police-troopers under their two officers sailed the ark hurriedly past the verandah to the west side, where they beheld a great gaping hole blown in the wall of

the “castle.” The hole showed the partition between the two bedrooms and their communicating door, and was high enough and wide enough on either side of it to allow of two horsemen riding through abreast.

A dense cloud of smoke was still pouring from the two rooms exposed, and part of the flooring was gone, along with the piles and cross-bracing that had supported it; so that, though the holes into the bedrooms were so large, the aforesaid two horsemen would have found it difficult to find any footing, to get inside.

But the police-troopers made nothing of such a difficulty. As Sergeant Dick ran the ark close up against the shattered wall, they all swarmed out of the after-cabin door beside him, revolvers in hand. Then, led by him and Inspector Medhurst, they crowded to the bulwark immediately opposite the gap, like bluejackets boarding an enemy ship. Sergeant Dick headed the intrusion into Aaron’s bedroom, the inspector that into Abel’s.

All the women, of course, had been shut up, without arms, in the fore-cabin of the ark—locked inside it so that they could not get out and interfere in any way.

As Sergeant Dick sprang through the hole in the wall the door in front of him, leading into the central passage, was thrown open, and the three Arnolds appeared, reeling like drunken men under the unexpected shock of the shattering of their stronghold, and mad with fury and despair.

Each of them gripped an automatic in either hand and looked more like a demon than a human being, in the semi-gloom and dusty fog of the place.

Sergeant Dick promptly flung himself on his knees. Simultaneously all six weapons in front of him spoke rapidly, and the bullets went whizzing over his head.

As by a miracle, none of the troopers behind him was struck down. None, as it happened, was just in the line of fire, and, hurriedly ducking and dodging to one side, they pelted back a quick return fire, while Dick slipped swiftly to one side, dived out of the way like a cat or some wild thing.

There were two ringing screams, and Aaron and Abel fell heavily against their father, throwing the old man down. Then with a rush, the police under Dick disarmed and seized the trio. Sergeant Dick had not fired a shot—had had no need to—and he was glad in his heart that he had not been obliged to do so, on Muriel's account.

He did not wish to have the blood of any of her relatives on his hands, even though shed in fair fight and in defense of law and order.

Inspector Medhurst and those following came flocking through the intervening door. But their aid was unnecessary. Aaron and Abel had both been shot dead, and Old Man Arnold was dying.

"Inspector Medhurst, I would tell you something before I go," Old Alf exclaimed, with difficulty. "The girl Muriel is—is not my niece at all, but—but your daughter. She is no relation of mine. You believed your wife and child were killed by redskins. They were not. It was I who stopped them, I and—and—Bud—I mean several others. Your wife resisted us, and—and I shot her; and then we threw her body over the cataract, and some of the others wanted to throw the child after the mother. But my wife wouldn't hear of that. Yes, she was there—I've let it out now—but her saving the life of your child should speak for her. She said she would adopt the child—pretend it was my sister's child, and we threw the little thing's hat and shawl after its mother, to make you believe it was in the river too."

"Great heavens! Is this true? Your supposed niece, my daughter—my little Agnes?" cried Medhurst, staggered by the revelation, as well he might be.

"It's the gospel's own truth, as I am a dying man, Medhurst," groaned the old bandit chief.

The next moment he had breathed his last.

His wife readily admitted that Muriel was Medhurst's daughter, on learning of her husband's disclosure, and that he was dead and her two eldest sons the same. The meeting between father and daughter we shall not attempt to describe, beyond saying that both were too stunned and affected by the dreadful happenings of the last hour, their grim surroundings, to be very demonstrative. Indeed, Muriel seemed too stunned by the news to quite grasp its import.

So the dreaded White Hood Gang was no more—broken and rounded up to its very last member. The difficulty of bringing home any actual murder or atrocity to the prisoners, as none of them turned King's evidence, resulted in their all escaping the death penalty and receiving various terms of imprisonment instead.

Amos and Abner, however, within three months of their sentence, attempted to break jail and were both mortally wounded by their armed guards. As for "Bud," or Bill, Seymour and Aunt Kate, they both died in prison.

Eighteen months after Muriel or Agnes Medhurst had been restored to her father, she was led to the altar-rails in the little backwoods church of Paquita Springs by Inspector John Dick, for he was sergeant no longer, having been promoted to control of a far-stretching territory adjoining Lonewater for the prominent part he had taken in the detection and rounding-up of the dreaded White Hoods.

As for Jenny Arnold—the poor, innocent half-witted daughter and sister of that evil family—Muriel or Agnes Medhurst had taken her under her wing from the hour which witnessed the capture and ruin of the stronghold on the lake, their joint home up to that hour. And the two girls were not parted by Agnes's marriage; Jenny went to live with the married pair, and was as a sister to them both, under their roof.

THE END

Colophon

Sergeant Dick of the Royal Mounted Police
John G. Rowe

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