

Hallo! Buttercup, what is it that tickles your fancy an' makes your mouth stretch out like that?"

Buttercup became preternaturally grave on the instant, but declined to tell what it was that tickled her fancy.

Shortly after the party rose and left the house, Hunky Ben remarking, with a quiet laugh, that deeds of darkness were best hatched at night.

What the conspirators hatched became pretty evident next day, for, during the breakfast hour, a band of forty horsemen rode slowly down the sloping road which led to the plains, and on the side of which Crux had built his saloon.

Crux and his men turned out in some surprise to watch the cavalcade as it passed. The band was led by Charlie Brooke, and the scout rode in advance on Black Polly as guide.

"Is it the Reds or the Buffalo you're after to-day, Hunky, with such a big crowd?" asked Crux.

"Halt!" cried Charlie, at that moment.

The forty men obeyed, and, turning suddenly to the left, faced the saloon.

"Hands up!" said Charlie, whose men at the same moment pointed their rifles at Crux and his men. These were all too familiar with the order to dare to disobey it.

Our hero then ordered a small detachment of his men to enter the saloon and fetch out all rifles and pistols, and those of Crux's people who chanced to have their weapons about them were disarmed.