

the strange face, showed it moved with some unknown emotion, whether of hesitation, anger, or what else, who could say?

Nat remained against the tree cutting his pegs with the same monotonous clicking of the knife, and did not even look up in answer to the stern appeal, and so it was left for Cuthbert Hawk to decide whether this stranger should be taken at his word and dismissed, or be received with the welcome he demanded.

At that moment the strange feeling that had possessed him, when his hand was clasped by the one he was now gazing thoughtfully at, came over him again, and something seemed repeating to him that it would be better to send the man away.

Some dread doubt, some undefined fear, filled his soul, and he shuddered with a horror he could neither understand nor repress, as he jumped to his feet, trying by the very action to dispel the mysterious feeling, and said—

"We do not give half-welcomes, my friend. What I said this morning I stand to now. If you keep your side of the bond, we will keep ours. The past seems to trouble you: forget it, and be assured that neither Nat nor I will remind you of it. We have pasts of our own, and though yours has been a smirched one, we do not think any the worse of you for it. There is my hand on the bargain."

Listening with upturned face and half-covered eyes until Cuthbert Hawk had finished, Guy, for so they already called him, once more grasped the hand, fixing his black eyes on the face of the speaker with a curious expression, which, without understanding, Cuthbert Hawk shuddered at, and felt uncomfortable again, and uttering no word, dropped down before the fire.

Not a word was spoken for half an hour, the three men smoking in silence; then Nat looked up quietly, and opening his mouth with a yawn that threatened to swallow the other two, guessed it was time to turn in.

"Right!" said Cuthbert. "I am ready, and you must be too, I should think," he added to Guy.

"I shall sleep," he replied with a grim smile.

"Which'll ye turn in with?" said Nat.

"I have the biggest tent, better share with me," said Cuthbert.

"Thanks," said Guy, knocking his pipe out. "I'd as leave sleep here by the fire; but I'll come."

So they parted for the night; and Nat, as he walked towards his tent, turned to look after them, with a puzzled and rather troubled look upon his raven-hewn face, starting slightly, as he muttered—

"Darn me if they ain't both the same height, both the same color, and both the same. Curse me, what a fool I am! It air all straight enough, it air; and if it ain't, I guess that young un's sharp enough to take care of himself."

And then, waiting in silence until the two forms had passed into

the tent, he likewise lifted the canvas and entered.

Cuthbert fastened up the tent and looked to his wearisome usual declining his new companion's offer of help, and then rolled himself up in his blanket with a "Good night," but his salutation was not answered, and seeing the dark eyes closed and the strong arms folded across under the folds of the blanket, he muttered—

"Asleep already! He must have an easy conscience, any way."

He closed his own eyes; but not to sleep.

Wearied as he was, he could not rest still a moment. He slept for five minutes to dream that a dark face was leering menacingly into his, and that a woman's shriek—a shriek that he fancied came from the scornful lips he loved—rang in his ears, and woke in a cold sweat to find the form of the stranger lying rolled up, still, motionless, and asleep.

After a little while he sat up and wiped the perspiration off his white face.

"What is it that troubles me to-night?" he murmured, with his short laugh. "I'm like a child who has seen a ghost. I feel—" he continued, muttering hoarsely—trying with every word to shake the horrible depression and fear off—"as if some one were walking over my grave, or some danger hung over her head!"

"Oh God!" he cried, starting to his feet with a suddenness that shook the tent pole, but did not waken his companion, "can something be happening to her at this moment and I being warned of it? They tell strange tales—strange, supernatural tales of this—this sort of thing. Can—oh, Ida! Ida!" and he leant against the thick pole and clasped his hands.

For a moment he was silent, then he shuddered and drew himself upright with a gesture of determination.

"I must be ill—this will never do. I will play the man and shake it off." Then he walked to the opening and stepped quietly out into the still, cold air, smiling a little as he did so, for he thought, "If I make a noise Nat will shoot at me, and hit me, without doubt."

Then he walked down to the stream and dipped his head into the cold, refreshing water.

As he raised his head and shook the water from his hair, he fancied he saw the dark shadow of a form along the rock; he stood still for a moment; but seeing nothing move, although he waited with straining eyes for several minutes, he shook his head, muttering—"I'm going stark, raving mad!" and made his way back to the tent.

He seemed choking with the strange, indescribable sensation of coming ill, and he got back to the tent with one wet hand grasping his throat, and the other thrust through his coat.

Guy was still curled up in the rug, apparently fast asleep.

Cuthbert Hawk looked at him for a moment with folded arms and troubled brow, then took to padding up and down the tent.

He really thought himself upon the brink of some illness. All the past came up, unravelling away before his eyes. He saw his old friends, the old places, his old love, as distinctly as if he were there and with them at that moment.

He could hear the soft, sub-pointed words the beautiful girl breathed upon his breast: he could hear her scornful voice bidding him leave her for ever, he—he could bear it no longer. He must cry out, speak, or write. Ah, write! why should he not write!

Snatching at the lantern, he trimmed it with trembling fingers, hung it up again, tore out a small leathern writing-desk from his trunk, and sitting down, commenced writing an epistle as quivering with mad, tortured love and agonized despair, as was ever penned by mortal man.

The sweat rolled off his white face in large drops, and every now and then as he wrote her name, he moaned like a man in physical pain.

He had written on for nearly an hour when a sudden slight noise startled him, and looking round hastily, he saw a hand softly pushing aside the curtain of the tent.

A thrill of horror ran through him, and he cast a glance at the corner where the strange man called Guy lay.

To his astonishment he found him leaning upon his elbow, with his dark eyes fixed with a strange, snake-like expression upon him.

A shudder ran through his frame as much at the face and eyes in the corner as at the hand upon the tent, and he lifted his own and pointed tremblingly.

Guy raised himself with a sudden spring, and grasped his revolver.

Cuthbert, brought to himself by the sudden movement, threw down the letter and caught at his, and the two stood side by side, waiting for the next move.

It came. The hand was withdrawn, and a head appeared, pushing through at the bottom of the tent.

Cuthbert's heart beat fast, and he pointed his revolver at the horrible head, but before he could fire, the head was followed by a pair of huge ragged shoulders, and a face, grimed and lined with poverty, and lit up by two blood-shot savage-looking eyes, lifted itself to them.

Guy fired, and the head dropped with a wild groan.

The next instant a dozen yells broke out upon the night, and a band of bushmen burst into the tent, brandishing knives and revolvers.

Their yell was answered by a deep savage roar from the throat of Guy, who, gathering himself together for a spring, shouted—

"Follow me, beat through for your life," and slashing out with his long knife, actually, by sheer force, beat through the throng, and reached the open air.

Cuthbert raised his knife and tried to do the same, but a brawny ruffian with a ferocious face flung his arm around him and nearly

hurled him to the ground, while the others thronged round.

"Stand off!" cried Cuthbert, hoarsely, his late mood changed to a delirium of wrath, and feeling possessed of the strength of ten men. "Stand off, or I fire!" and with difficulty, he raised the revolver to the head of his captor.

A yell was the only reply, and a couple of men sprang at him to knock the revolver down, but he was too quick, and pulling the trigger, sent the deadly bullet through the man's face, who fell back with a shriek, and let him fire on the others. They levelled their revolvers at him, but he sprang at them and was grazed on the shoulder only.

Raising his knife, he slashed right and left with it, and caused them to fall back a little, but still could not get away. In another moment he would have been shot, but the crack of a rifle sounded at his ear, and one of the ruffians fell on his face, dead. The rest, surprised at the sudden reinforcement, started in amazement, and in that moment Cuthbert gained the opening and the air.

But he had only escaped one danger to fall into another, for a couple of dark forms who had been left as scouts sprang at him.

He uttered a despairing cry, and dodged the levelled blow of one of them, and then turned with his knife uplifted in one hand, and his revolver pointed in the other.

Covering the man, he fired, and saw him stagger and fall, the other with an oath darted under and received the long knife in his side instead of the heart, and Cuthbert dashed away at the moment the remainder of the gang poured out in a roaring, struggling, fighting mass, in vain trying to bring Nat and Guy to the ground.

Cuthbert stopped short in his flight, and filled with a blood-thirsty rage, turned to swell the minority to three. Three against nine!

It was long odds! Nat heard him shout as he came up, and cried out—

"Get away, Hawk; we'll manage these, get away."

Cuthbert laughed a short laugh, and snatching up the long gun, which the trapper had dropped, swung it round his head with the fury of a maniac.

He felt the hard, heavy butt end crash against a human head, and laughed aloud.

His blood was on fire.

The shouts and yells, the curses and the shrieks of the ruffians as he dealt them blows and they staggered under the bullets and the knives of the other two men, filled him with a fierce pleasure and he dashed more closely in, and paid for his recklessness by a deep slash in the arm from a bowie knife.

The pain made him madder than ever, and turning to a huge ruffian, who was rapidly beating Nat down, he raised his gun, and aiming with all his force, levelled the robber, to the ground.

"Thank ye! thank ye," answered Nat hoarsely, staggering back a little and poisoning his knife for the next—but the next did