

I vowed I would do nothing of the sort but they ordered me to shut up and Mark told Bill to keep me quiet while the others went outside for a chat. Presently they came back again.

"Look here," said Mark. "these fellows went in for cracking you on the head and stuffing you under the floor, but I am soft-hearted and won't have it so. No use risking hanging for killing a gol-darned lawyer, says I. So we have decided that Andy and Bill and me will take you out by a path on which you can't find your way back again, and leave Crutchy to mind the store. How will that do, Bill?"

"Fine. I know a dandy path for him. He wont find his way back again—not any!"

There was a meaning in his words which I thought best not to see, so expressed my willingness to proceed. It would be some advantage to get outside the walls and by evincing no suspicion I would be enabled to choose my own time for a bitter resistance of what I was sure was a plot to murder me. I offered to put away my pistol if Bill would do the same and to empty my gun if they would also. To this Mark agreed, and though the others dissented, it was done. I was forced to walk first, much against my will, then came Bill and Andy with Mark behind carrying my empty gun. In this order we walked about half a mile without incident, my mind in a state of intense excitement, watching for some opportunity to dart suddenly aside, and ready to turn at the least sound and give somebody a chunk of lead. By rubbing my arm across my chest I had managed to get my pistol forward until its handle protruded from my jacket ready to my right hand.

Smash, crash and curses! This means life or death. Quick as thought I sprang around, my pistol levelled, but I did not fire. Mark stood with my gun clubbed in his hands and

Andy and Bill lay on the ground. Andy gave a kick and emitted an oath and was served with another crack on the head. Then he quit.

"What's your game? If you try that on me I'll stop you before you go far," I yelled.

"I aint such a darn fool as to fight both sides," said Mark, throwing down the gun and examining the unconscious men. "They'll sleep about ten minutes. I gave them nice easy ones, just enough to let us get a mile away before they start on the rampage. If Bill could only wake up with one eye he would give me a dose. What did I do that for? Well it ain't like me to play sneak on partners, but you see Bill is a terror. You had to be put away according to his notion, and that lane devil, Crutchy, is worse than him. It was decided to bring you as far as that hollow tree and then crack you and stuff you down the hole or else shoot you and leave your gun as though it was an accident. We didn't want to do you up too near our house for when people found you they might prowl around and smell us. But I never laid anyone out yet and took a notion to you and made up my mind that between us we could handle them. I'll get away from here: anyhow, its getting too hot for us to make much of a haul any more."

While he was talking we had started off running, but by degrees fell into a walk as distance grew between us and the spot where the men lay. Mark left me when a mile from my hotel. I offered him money, which he refused; I told him I was a wealthy man and would give him \$500 and set him up in some small business if he would be honest. He refused, but as he turned away he laughingly said: "Never mind that money now but remember you owe it to me and see that you pay it when I ask for it."

Away he went. When along with a well-armed hunting party of six, I