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as a man will in the perplexity of an undecided course. The Indian followed his every change of expression.

And just then, as though timed to the instant, as though but waiting the cue in this real stage, there stepped from among the shrubbery that flanked one side of the trail as it rounded the cottonwood, a slow munching cow followed by her calf.

Then the plan shaped itself quickly. Dick stepped his mount to a point from which he could further view the trail ahead of him, the trail lying toward the town. A rising cloud of pony-stirred dust told him to act quickly. The posse was already out, as he had expected, for he knew the heat to which they had been raised.

There was no time left him to dally, if he was to save Nellie back there the blow of having her father torn from before her eyes. There was no time to warn him to get out of the country. Besides, this plan that had flashed to him would not bring disgrace upon her; and, knowing the girl as he did, he realized that in that lay her greatest suffering.

With wide-eyed wonder Natacha watched his movements. He caught up the coils of his rope that dangled from his saddle horn, sent its hissing loop over the head of the calf.

With the calf bound and lying before him, Dick cast a hasty eye over his saddle-bag outfit in search of some suitable iron. A fence-repair kit he had kept since Texas days gave him what he needed; a short pry or rod.

He quickly kindled a fire which sent his iron to a red heat. He took it from the fire to approach the calf.

Up to that moment Natacha had watched him with wild noncomprehending eyes; but, tuned to the thumping of the oncoming cow ponies of the posse, came the full realization to her of what his purpose was. Then she sprang to Dick's side and began stamping frantically at the fire.

And this was the picture that Big Grat D'Alton, who headed the men, took in as they rounded a clump of shrubbery.

"My Gawd!" cried the burly leader in genuine amazement. And the others of the party were, if anything, more nonplussed.

Dick whirled around in a well-feigned surprise and made a move that would have been natural enough under the circumstances; he sprang for his horse. And the result of this move was as natural; for when he had turned to the sharp order to stop, he gazed into the blued eyes of a half dozen rifles.

"Well, fellas," said Dick, as though he realized that the jig was up, "I guess you got me at last."

And so it was that they captured him; but there was not a man among them but felt as if the thing was all some vague dream. But then, little by little, and to the voicing of Big Grat, they began to fit one thing to another. "So, Dick Crosby, that there plumb

so, blee Crossy, that there plumb child-like innercence o' your'n as to what the game o' rustlin' really was—was only play actin'! Well, we galoots might a known as much, and no wonder you didn't have to come out that first day to see the new fangled brand, seein' as you'd invented it yourself. How did you come to miscarry asendin' that there Injun girl to throw us into pore old Bartlett?"

Little by little the uncouth oratory of Grat was keying them to that pitch where the rope plays its role.

But an interruption offered itself abruptly.

"Stop her, Hank!" yelled Big Grat, but Hank was slow of comprehension and before he realized the import, Natacha had thrown her full weight upon his bridle which swerved him out of her way, and, clinging close to her horse's neck, she sped by him.

horse's neck, she sped by him.

"Aw, well, let 'er go," said the leader.

"Now, fellas," went on Grat ponderously, "course sech a thing seems plumb unnecessary in sech a case as this here, but I maintain we'd better hold a court right here."

This suggestion met with general approval and with a dry smile Dick awaited his "trial."

True to Dick's wish that she keep out in the open, Nellie was taking her interest.

evening canter, when a mile from home she met Natacha. The Indian girl checked her mad pace, but for a second. Sponged as from a slate, all trace of jealousy had left her. There remained but one thought now. She must save Dick.

"Man Crosby," she cried, "mile back. They got him. Rope. They hang him. Hurry."

Nellie read the terror in the girl's eyes and realized the truth of the peril that mirrored itself so strongly in the face of Natacha.

Old Bartlett tipped over his chair in his haste to reach the doorway, for such a pace spelt something.

Blocking his exit, the Indian girl demanded of him: "You come with me!"
Conscience had a subtle power. There was no need for him to be told that she knew his secret; he felt it in her there before him, and as he backed to a low shelf by the fire place, his hand closed over a knife that lay there, and a kindred gleam leaped from the girdle of the girl.

He was old, but a man; wiry, knotty, a little man of the open air. She had youth with her, the panther strength of her blood.

He fought for the love of life; she for the love of a man.

Close caught and writhing in deadly grip, they swayed about the humble room. Then the knives glinted a mirrored answer to each other. It was but one thrust that each had made, but it was enough. Together they went to the floor.

A crimson drip followed the Indian girl as she caught up the man bodily and staggered toward the horse. With desperate effort she swayed him to a place across the horn of the saddle. Then she sprang erect and mounted.

Even Dick Crosby looked up from the face of Nellie as she lay before him in a faint, when Hank checked the beast that carried the double inert burden, and man and girl slid to the ground.

Big Grat's flask helped the explanation; for the eyelids of Old Bartlett flickered to the licquor. "I didn't understand," he said. "The

"I didn't understand," he said. "The Injun didn't tell me as how Dick was to be strung up in place o' me. If she had, I'd a come along myself. Fer I was a livin' fer Nellie. Fact is, that's why I turned to the rustlin' game, goin' it partners with a feller from north o' here. That doctor I had from the East for Nellie, boys, you know, cost money, and I jest had ter have it fer her."

His face contracted in a spasm of pain, and Old Tom Bartlett had paid his penalty.

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