

"I'm afeard he can't manage him," said an elderly man, uneasily watching the antics of the brute, that from his mad viciousness had gained the title "Thunder and Lightning."

Some of the men laughed, others looked a little grave as again and again the creature braced himself and then let his heels fly high in the air, determined to dislodge his rider; but Wylie stuck tenaciously, and presently they were across the prairie like the wind.

"He ain't no tenderfoot where a boss is concerned," said one.

"No; but he ain't no ways cut out fer a cowboy," said another.

"Seems ter me he's mightily cut up ter-day fer some reason er ruther," put in a third, and then they resumed their cards and smoking. This was life for them.

On and on the broncho raced until more miles lay between him and the "settlement" than the young overseer imagined.

At last the exciting part for "Thunder and Lightning" was over, and he began to slow down a little, though it is probable had Wylie been situated to look in his eye his knowledge of horse nature, especially broncho nature, would have forbidden his slackening the bridle rein and relapsing into a reverie.

"Getting a bit winded, aren't you, old boy?" he muttered sarcastically, and then began thinking the very thoughts that he had taken this mad ride to escape.

It was all so sudden that he scarcely realized the situation, and a moment later he knew nothing as he lay, his body crushed into a sage bush, his head turned a little aside from violent concussion with a bit of bowlder. When consciousness did return a swarthy face was bending over him and some one was shaking him gently.

"Heap hurt—no get up?" questioned the Indian, shaking him a little more.

"Help me up," said Wylie in a dazed manner.

The Indian obeyed, but the young man fell back a dead weight in his arms. Some time passed before he again opened his eyes, and then he found himself lying in a clean, white bed, and a couple of men standing beside him.

"Where am I and what has happened?" he asked.

"You are here at the fort. Your horse threw you, the Indian thought," said an individual whom Dart recognized at once as the commander of the fort.

"Our doctor is away, but here is a gentleman, who chances to be stopping here, who will examine your wounds and see if anything serious is the matter," the man went on.

The gentleman referred to now advanced and began a slight examination, saying, apologetically—

"I am no physician, but still have a smattering of medicine and surgery that is sometimes handy in a pinch."

He was adjusting a bit of plaster on the forehead, and saying: "A narrow escape, sir; had that cut been an inch lower you would have been elected," when for the first time Dart raised his eyes to his face.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated under his breath, then pushed the hands away.

"What is it; did I hurt you?" asked the stranger.

For a moment the youth did not answer, then setting his teeth hard together he shook his head. Evidently the man did not recognize him, and in that moment Wylie had determined to keep still and take what help the other could give. He felt extremely weak, but by morning he would be able to return to the ranch. In that one brief glance he had recognized the face that had come between him and happiness—the face that had haunted him these two years past. And then he wondered if he could not hear some news of Dora (now, doubtless, this man's wife) if he could remain unrecognized. He was hungry to hear of her, no matter whose wife she was.

"How silly and childish I am!" he thought, stealing another glance at the hated face, dark and sinister as ever; and yet, now that he could see the color of the half-veiled eyes, they were soft and kindly. Something of this sort was passing through his mind when a drowsy stupor overcame him, and that was the last he knew for hours it seemed to him—weeks it was in reality.

It was a sunny, balmy morning toward the last of April that, unutterably weak and languid, Dart Wylie awakened to a consciousness of his surroundings, and, even then, where he was and why he was there were a mystery to him, and he was too weak to even wonder over it.

The dark man was still by his side and just back of him a pompous-looking gentleman stood, intently regarding his watch. The dark man said something in a low tone, there was a sound like a sob from back of a curtain at the foot of the bed, and a warning "hist" from the pompous gentleman. Dart was perfectly conscious of it all, but could only turn his eyes wonderingly from the face of one to the other.

Presently the pompous gentleman turned to a stand and poured something into a glass, and then came close to the bedside. The dark man raised Dart's head a little, and the glass was held to his lips; he drank as well as he was able and gained strength thereby. Vaguely he kept wondering if that had been a sob he had heard, and if so from whom could it have come. But this state was short in duration, and he soon slept soundly, but naturally.