

"There is a half-breed Indian, Zerata we call him, who used to be a servant of the doctor," Ned was advised. "He returned to the old place about a year ago after it burned down. He does odd jobs about the town now and sleeps in the stable on the old Wilman place. Maybe he can tell you if the doctor is dead or alive."

Ned went over to the stable indicated. Its door was open. Seated on a stool mending an old garment was a dusky-hued, solemn-faced half-breed. There was character in his statuesque face, and as he lifted his eyes they penetrated like electric sparks.

"I was looking for Doctor Wilman," said Ned. "I have a letter for him."

The half-breed drooped his head slightly. He pointed across the great frowning mountain range to the north.

"Dead," he said simply—"many moons since."

"I am sorry," observed Ned. "It was from an old friend of his that I came—Mr. Harold Wade."

He was fairly startled at the effect of these words upon Zerata. The latter gave a quick start. A singular gleam came into his eyes.

"I knew him," he spoke, and his coarse, guttural voice trembled. "He was my friend, you are of his family."

"I am his nephew," explained Ned. "I came out here with some small capital to seek a business investment. My uncle knew that Doctor Wilman would assist me."

"Zerata would help you, too," spoke the half-breed eagerly. "He will seek, he will find for you. He will tell you, then."

Ned comprehended that the speaker held some pleasant memory of his uncle and was anxious to be helpful to him. Cast on his own resources and researches, he devoted the ensuing week to seeking some mining investment. It began to strike him as strange, but at every turn he seemed to come across the Indian. Zerata was unobtrusive, but he had become

a positive shadow on all the movements of Ned.

One day Ned met in Hopeton a blustering, typical mining prospector named Burke. In some way the latter had learned of the fact that Ned had some capital to invest. He had a mine to sell and he invited Ned to visit it.

Ned did not like the appearance of Burke, but it was a country of rough men and the man talked in a very plausible way of his holdings. They set out upon their journey, about four days' travel from Hopeton.

It was the second night of their camping out when Ned awoke with a start at the sound of a pistol shot. He aroused to see Burke on his feet and a swift, savage form disappearing.

"Quick! Follow!" shouted Burke. "You have been robbed!"

Ned placed his hand at his bosom. The package of money was gone and Zerata had taken it, for Zerata, it was plain to discern, was the fleeing intruder.

The amazed Ned put after his companion. Occasionally he heard shots ahead. There was bright moonlight, and after losing track of fugitive and pursuer Ned finally came to the edge of a valley. Aloft a thrilling spectacle met his view.

Upon a projecting rock, hundreds of feet above him, two men were struggling, Burke and Zerata. Both had knives and were circling about seeking an advantage.

In some way, after a murderous lunge at his adversary, Burke stumbled, rolled to the edge of the rock and slid over. His frantic hands groped for a saving hold. Clutching at handfuls of long, stringy grass, he hung suspended.

Then began a strange, wierd threnody. It proceeded from the lips of Zerata. His arms folded across his chest, he chanted some wild strain of a death song, gazing mercilessly at his victim who slid, slipped inch by inch, and then—the final catastrophe,