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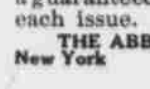
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ear is bleeding. That was rather a neat shot, don't you think?"

"It was," admitted Dean, without enthusiasm.

"When you shot my shoulder, you had a bigger mark."

"My ears are noted for their size," growled Dean.

"Better tie it up in this," commented Stranleigh, rolling up into a ball, and flinging towards Jim a handkerchief. The wounded man tied it around his bleeding ear.

"Now," said Stranleigh, coolly, "get your parley over as soon as possible, then go to Miss Armstrong, who will attend to your wound. But in order to win the privilege of surgical treatment, you must recognize that you are a prisoner."

"A prisoner!" echoed Dean.

"YES; a prisoner," repeated Stranleigh. "You must give me your word that you will say nothing to Miss Armstrong to show that I had a hand in this. Make what excuse you like for the disaster, and then get back to the bunk house, and tell your men the conditions of the game so far as we have gone. I will allow you five minutes after your return to show those chaps the letter 'S' I have perforated in the door. They are an unbelieving lot, and I wish to gain their respect. Without hurting anybody, I mean to prove I am a dead shot. I'm well provisioned here, and prepared to stand a siege. Until Mr. Armstrong returns not one of you will be allowed outside the chalet. Don't be misled by the fact that you outnumber me six to one. I hold a magazine rifle, possess an ample supply of ammunition, and have just given evidence of the rapidity with which I can reload."

"Yes," said Dean, "your position would be bull-strong and hog-tight, if you had a chum with you who could shoot too. As it is, you've nobody to relieve you, and a man must sleep. It will only take one of us to defeat you. We've no magazine rifles, and don't need any. I'll undertake the job myself."

"How do you propose to do it?"

"That would be telling," said Jim, craftily.

"Why not?" answered Stranleigh. "I'm placing my cards on the table. There were two things I determined to accomplish when I broke jail. I hope that wounded ear hasn't impaired your hearing, so that you may listen with attention. It's always as well to know what your enemy desires."

"Well, I hear you," said Jim, sullenly.

"The first thing was to shoot you, choosing some spot that was not vital. This in return for your shooting me. That part of my programme I have accomplished."

"What's the other part?"

"The second is to keep you all prisoners as long as you kept me. Now tell me what you intend to do."

"I won't do that."

"You're over-cautious, Dean. I'm not so chary, and so will give you the information. There are only two portions of the night during which you can come out unnoticed: before the moon rises, and after it sets. You will take up a position where you can see the barricade when day begins to dawn. You'll be wise to choose a spot a long way off, because the explosion, when it comes, will wreck everything in the neighborhood."

"What explosion?"

"The dynamite explosion. This wall is built of rock, intersticed with dynamite cartridges. You will likely obliterate the ranch house."

"I'll obliterate you, anyway."

"Quite so, but at a tremendous cost, because whatever the fate of Mr. Armstrong's residence, the doom of the bunk house is certain. You may be outside that danger, but you won't be free of another. You suppose, doubtless, that I shall be asleep in the cavern. As a matter of fact, I shall be sleeping placidly under the stars, quite out of reach of the main dis-

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