

Rusty dropped prone on the
ground



*Rusty Sabin, who had grown up with the Cheyenne
Indians, knew fierce loyalties that his more civilized
white brothers could not understand*

The Sacred Valley

By MAX BRAND

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

BORN of white parents, Rusty Sabin was known among the Cheyenne Indians as "Red Hawk." One day while the resourceful Rusty is buying supplies in the town of Witherell with gold which he had mined from the Sacred Valley of the Cheyennes, he calls at the house of Richard Lester. Charlie Galway, who happens to be passing by, notices the nuggets of gold and, during his attempt to steal them, murders Lester, escaping apparently unseen. Lester's daughter,

Maisry, who is in love with Rusty, is prostrated by grief.

The inhabitants of Witherell, aroused by the murder, accuse Standing Bull of the crime. Standing Bull is a Cheyenne, who was with Rusty at the scene of the killing. Rusty pleads for a fair trial, and when he sees that the whites are not treating his friend squarely, he and Standing Bull manage to ride off on Rusty's white stallion. But Standing Bull is severely wounded in the escape.

Not long after Rusty's return to the Cheyenne encampment, Running Elk, tribal Medicine Man, declares that the Sky People have ordered a sacrifice for Standing Bull's recovery. Rusty is taken to the Valley of Death to die, but Sweet Medicine, in the guise of a huge owl, leads him to a cave through which he escapes to the Sacred Valley.

The Cheyennes, now suffering from drought, decide that a further offering should be made to Sweet Medicine. So the young, beautiful Blue Bird, who is enamoured with Red Hawk, is led to the Valley of Death. Red Hawk chances to meet Blue Bird. Overjoyed at seeing each other,

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they ask Sweet Medicine for an omen giving approval of their desired marriage, but none is given. Blue Bird then leaves to go to her people, and Rusty rolls away the stones of the dam which he has built. Blue Bird returns to the Cheyennes and rain descends.

Meanwhile, Charlie Galway rides to the Sacred Valley and discovers gold. He approaches a lonely shack in the Valley where he encounters Rusty, who declares that Galway must die because he has entered the Sacred Valley. But a vague sign from Sweet Medicine saves Galway, and he is permitted to leave the Valley.

Galway plans to reënter the Valley with a band of his friends; and, inasmuch as Running Elk wants to meet the whites in battle, the clouds of war appear to be gathering.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BLUE BIRD RIDES AWAY.

IN the camp of the Cheyennes, there remained a reaction after the departure of the war-party like the bubbling, swirling wake which passed over water behind a speeding boat. So in the village of the Cheyennes the enthusiasm of the people did not subside at once but, instead, expended itself in various small ways.

At night, the young men with musical instruments that made howling noises went to serenade their ladies. The dogs poured back and forth through the camp chasing imaginary wolves with a terrible clamor from dark to dawn. The old man sat down cross-legged to tell stories in the prowess of their youth, and the young men were overcome by the war spirit and yearning because they had been left behind so that at any moment of the day or the night they were impelled to leap up with a war cry and do a war dance in which with a war club or an axe they brained airy enemies by the score and took hundreds of invisible scalps.

That evening, half a dozen of the braves were seized by enthusiasm at the same moment and began to yelp and whoop with such energy that the dogs of the Cheyennes caught the enthusiasm of the idea and started to chase the imaginary wolves and fight over the imaginary bones again.

Standing Bull heaved himself up on his

elbows and remained in this posture, half risen from his willow bed. Now that he made the effort it was possible to see how nearly he had recovered from his illness. The big shoulder muscles were filling out. Across his breast the traces of strength were reappearing. His skinny shanks were swelling day by day with the commencement of the huge power of his ordinary health.

The Blue Bird said: "He is only half-way back to earth from the Happy Hunting Ground, but already he wants to be taking scalps and counting the coup."

The two squaws of the brave smiled and nodded. They would not have dared to make such a remark about their famous husband, but they were brave enough to agree with that newly privileged person in the camp, one who herself had passed through an unearthly adventure.

Standing Bull looked up to the girl with a smile and watched the owl-feather that trembled continually in her hair.

"What is happening now, Blue Bird?" he asked. "Have they sighted an enemy? Are they surrounding him?"

"They have come to the end of the day," said the girl, still smiling. "They are tired. Their horses are white with dried sweat. Their stomachs are empty. There is only a little stale water left in the water bags. They sit about and chew some parched corn. They looked about them towards the ends of the earth. The world is a big place and honor is hard to find in it. Clouds are in the sky. It will rain on them before the morning."

"No," said Standing Bull. "They are pressing on through the hills. They see before them the town of the white men. They creep forward. As the night begins, they rush suddenly forward. The white men sit inside their wooden lodges and eat, and blind themselves with the light of their lamps. The Indians rush like a storm on them. The white men run out with guns. They are shot down, the tomahawk is in their brains, their red scalps are torn from their heads!

"Ah, my people! You forget what Red

Hawk so often told you—that Witherell is not the chief city of the whites, that they are more numberless than the buffalo in the prairies! For this first blow you strike, you will be smitten a hundred times. All the Cheyennes will feel the strength of the white warriors. They will come by thousands, and every man will carry a rifle that shoots straight. My tribe will be lost."

"Will they go so far?" asked the girl, staring. "Will they go even to the town of Witherell, Standing Bull?"

"They will go wherever the evil brain of Running Elk can lead them," said the war chief. "He knows that before long I shall be able to ride a horse, and when that happens he will be no longer the head chief of the Cheyennes unless he does some great thing. That is the reason he takes three hundred warriors well-armed and rides away. He dreams of a great battle. The heart of the bad man never is small!"

"The wooden lodges of the white men are very strong," said the girl. "Sometimes they are made of heavy walls, and there are loopholes through which the guns can be fired. Every house is like a fort!"

"Suppose that the grass is lighted, and the flames sweep down over the town? The white men run out like frightened rabbits. The Cheyennes are before them in the streets, killing them by scores. But for every white man who dies, ten Indians shall be shot down later on. That is the word of Red Hawk. *Ah hai*, Blue Bird! If he were alive—as he is dead—he would be able to stop the madness of my people. No other man could do it!"

AN immensity of sorrow, a sense of doom covered the mind of the girl.

All that she had seen inside the Sacred Valley must remain nameless. She could not even say to Standing Bull that his friend was not dead, but living. Or was it life indeed that Red Hawk had inside the Sacred Valley? If he were brought into the light and the air of common places, might he not be utterly dead and a ghost?

She began to tremble. She began to taste again the life in the Sacred Valley.

Afterwards, she made medicine.

She did it very simply, as one who could be sure that the Sky People would hear her voice and give her wisdom. In her father's lodge, she picked up a handful of dust and blew on it.

He sneezed and looked up from the book which he was reading by the light of a lantern with glass sides—a miracle to the Cheyennes.

"What's the matter, Blue Bird?" he asked her.

She raised her free hand to let him see that she was conversing with the gods. Then, with lowered eyes, she counted the small pebbles which remained in her palm, some of them almost too small to glisten.

The number was odd. It meant that the gods wanted her to complete a task. What could the task be? Why, the very one which Standing Bull had named to her!

Her father was saying: "You and I are going on a journey, Blue Bird. You're getting a little out of hand, what with all this medicine making, and dust blowing, and stewing of herbs.

"There's always a bad smell in the lodge and besides, I'm disturbed by all the women who come with their sick children to you and ask you for cures. Do you think that the Sky People really are telling you how to help the sick?"

She looked down again at the pebbles in her hand and then closed the fingers over the little stones.

She knew, now, what course she would have to take.

She got up suddenly, and left the lodge with bowed head. As she stood under the stars again, it was revealed to her what she must do.

From among the horses tethered near the tepee, she took the big colt with one blue and one black eye, the fiercest, the strongest, the wildest of the horses belonging to rich Lazy Wolf. When she returned inside the lodge, she took her saddle from the post from which it hung.

"Where are you away now, Blue Bird?" asked Lazy Wolf.

Instead of answering, she picked up a small leather bag filled with parched corn, and a light rifle which her father had bought specially for her. When she reached the entrance to the tepee, Lazy Wolf called after her: "Confound it, Blue Bird, tell me what's up now! I'm getting a little tired of all this conversation with Sky People. Try talking for a while with your father and you may find one or two good ideas tucked away inside his old brain."

Her heart was pinched. She wanted to answer. It was her sacred duty as a daughter to answer the questions of her father, but a vow that held her was more binding still—she must not utter a syllable until she stood again at the awful entrance to the Sacred Valley.

She heard him muttering as she saddled the young stallion.

Her heart went out to him, but the vow laid a cold finger on her lips and kept her silent.

Now the horses were equipped. She mounted and rode slowly through the village. As she came out from among the tepees, from all the night noises of the town, she saw hanging in the east the thin, curved knife of the new moon.

She went on. The glimmering lights of the village grew pale behind her. And then a sudden rush of hoofbeats came roaring toward her and the shouting voices of young men of the night-guard who rode around and around the town. Not another woman among the Cheyennes would have abided that charge.

Only Blue Bird rode straight on at the usual dog-trot of an Indian pony.

They swept away. The dust from the hoofs of their horses stung her nostrils. Then she was alone in the night.

CHAPTER XIX.

A VISIT TO MISRY.

AT the gates of the Sacred Valley, for a long hour the Blue Bird cried on the god, and the only answer she heard was the whisper of the water run-

ning down the bed of the ravine, and the far off chanting of the waterfall at the other end of the valley.

Wiser people than she, perhaps, could have construed that echo into words with a meaning, but the Blue Bird merely withdrew to one side and lay face down on the ground, pressing the palms of her hands against it, praying to the Under Ground People. And as she lay there the dawn began, slowly, a light streaming gradually up around the edges of the great bowl of the sky.

She heard, at last, a light footfall on the rocks and turning her head was aware of a great elk, a king of his kind, standing at the entrance of the Sacred Valley. His head was lifted so that the great tree of horns sloped well back over his body. In spite of size and sleek weight, he had the look of a creature with winged heels.

The girl sat up, trembling with awe. This was the manner in which the souls of the dead heroes approached the Sacred Valley. Here was some famous warrior, clad in a new form, standing on the verge of Paradise. The elk turned his head, saw her, and bounded straightforward through the gates of the Valley.

The Blue Bird arose, her eyes shining.

In some far place on the prairies a whole tribe, perhaps, was lamenting for the death of a war chief; the voices of the women were screeching to the sky, their faces were marred by their own nails, their hair was cut short and clotted with dust as they howled. How could they know that in a form so new and splendid the brave man's soul was entering the earthly heaven of the Sacred Valley?

She went again to the mouth of the Valley and called out her prayer; and again there was no answer.

Always her prayer was the same: To send Red Hawk out from the Sacred Valley so that the war between the whites and the Cheyennes might be averted. The empty silence of the ravine at last weighed down her mind. She turned away full of uncertainty.

Red Hawk seemed to her half man and

half god, who had passed through death into a higher life though he still moved and breathed upon the earth. He it was who should, as Standing Bull declared, hold back the Indians and perhaps check the white men.

How could he be drawn forth from the Sacred Valley on that errand of peace?

Then, suddenly, bitterly, she remembered the white girl, the blue eyes, the beauty, the smiling. Even the very presence of the god hardly could withhold Red Hawk, if he heard the voice of Maisry Lester calling.

Well, she was no longer Blue Bird, a mere name, a girl of no importance whatever; she was now a famous medicine woman and for the welfare of her people she must give up her last hope of gaining that happiness of which most women can be sure. She felt such pain that she put both hands over her heart for a moment and closed her eyes. Then she laid her course straight across the plains towards the distant town of Witherell.

It was the twilight of a day when she came to the edge of the hills and looked down into the shallow, dimly lighted bowl of the town. The English which her father had taught her was not very good, not very extensive, but it was enough to enable her to ask her way to the house of Maisry Lester. She remembered that other time and that other town which she had visited in order to see the white girl. She remembered sadly, and shook her head. Then she rode her tired horse down the slope.

She had been remembering all through her journey the details of wisdom which the Cheyennes had taught her about the whites. These were some of the items.

1. The God of the white man lives too high in the sky to be of any use. He is worshipped by clasping the hands together and rolling up the eyes. He never receives sacrifices that are worth anything, but he is pleased by the moan and howl of a pumping organ. Big wooden tipis are built in his honor, each tepee crowned with a long wooden finger that points towards the sky.

2. White men are half warriors and half squaws; therefore they are contemptible. They have dim eyes, ears that cannot hear, and no sense of smell. They fight to kill, not to be glorious. They are afraid of the beautiful prairies and lose their way more than children. The sun is not their father and the moon is not their sister. They deform their feet with hard leather and therefore they neither can run nor walk. Because they are afraid of the sun they wear heavy things on their heads. They work all day long like squaws, because they are shameless. A white man loves to lie. Wonderful to state, they even lie to one another.

3. White women keep off their feet as much as possible. They sit a great deal. All the rest of the time they lie down. They keep something in their hands, sewing with a good deal of skill but making silly things of no importance. They are foolish; they love to gather together and giggle. They are cowards; they scream when they see even a mouse. They are cruel; they have been seen to strike little children many blows only because the children make a noise. They are selfish and will not let their men have two women.

UNDER such main headings, Blue Bird gathered her knowledge of the whites. Among all these people there were two exceptions: Red Hawk and the woman he loved.

Fear began to grow up in the breast of the Indian girl as she entered the first street of the little town. Far away, a whistle blew, with a terrible power, ripping the sky apart, cutting into her brain. She heard men laughing inside a house—bawling, horrible, meaningless laughter. She heard a baby crying, not the sweet, sad sound of a Cheyenne baby which makes the noise "Ai! Ai! Ai!" but a disgusting, booing complaint.

Into the sobbing of the baby rattled the harsh voice of a white woman. Blue Bird heard a sound of blows. The baby began to scream. The Indian girl gasped and put her hands over her ears.

She hurried her horse on. Out of the wooden lodges streamed brilliant lights. Unpleasant smells of strange cookery reached her nostrils; she heard metal clatterings. The memory of the Cheyenne town rolled back upon her mind and made her heart ache.

How could Red Hawk have chosen one of these people to be his squaw?

A group of small boys came swirling out into the street, knocking up a cloud of dust, yelling at one another. The Blue Bird sighed with relief.

She called out to them: "Will you tell me the place where Maisry Lester lives?"

"Hey! Lookat! It's an Indian gal!" they cried at her.

A shaft of dim lamplight swept over her. She smiled and made a friendly gesture as she asked the question again.

"That way," said one of the lads. "Down there—the house with the two trees in front. Hey, who are you? Where did you come from? Are you a Pawnee? Who brought you here?"

Questions are dangerous. She fled from them, galloping her horse, and they pursued her only a little distance before they fell into another dusty swirl of wild play.

So she reached the house and tethered the Indian pony to one of the trees in the front yard. A single light burned at the rear of the place. She looked through the window, touching with her hand curiously the dry ice through which the light shone.

Inside, she saw Maisry Lester, alone, sitting at a kitchen table with her face in her hands. The jealous heart of the Cheyennee was touched.

The brightness of the hair, the slenderness of the hands held her eyes. She wore a dress that seemed to Blue Bird of great worth, for it was a printed calico. The design, the pattern, the color amazed the Blue Bird.

She went with soft steps up the back porch and tapped at the door.

"Who is there?" asked a small, weary voice.

Critically the Blue Bird examined that voice. She had remembered it too dimly.

It was not like the voice of any other white, for it contained a real music.

"It is I!" she called in answer. "It is the Blue Bird."

A footfall came suddenly. The door was snatched open. She saw Maisry Lester's face full of startled joy, and then the white girl caught her in her arms. She used that strange white custom of kissing. But it was not very offensive. There was a clean, sweet smell about Maisry that was not unpleasant. It was not as good as the real smoky Indian smell, but it was not horrible, like the odor of most whites.

"Blue Bird, what have you come to tell me?" cried Maisry Lester. "What has brought you so far?"

Now that she had the full picture before her, the Indian girl stared, fascinated, into the blue eyes of Maisry. Blue eyes, she felt, were not as beautiful by half as black or dark brown; and yet there was a sort of shining color in them. The color of the eyes went with the color of the hair, like something painted very skillfully. Her skin was very pale, very pale. She was paler than Red Hawk ever became, even when he had been ill and remained out of the sun for a long time.

"Tell me—are you the squaw of some warrior now?" asked the Cheyenne.

"No," said Maisry.

"Do you wait for Red Hawk?" asked the Blue Bird.

She saw the white girl blench and the sight wrung her heart, but also gave her a cruel pleasure.

"Yes," said Maisry.

"Would you wait all your life for a dead man?" asked Blue Bird, more cruelly than ever.

"Yes," said Maisry.

THE Blue Bird sighed. There was a greatness of spirit in this pale-faced girl. There was something shining about her. She was not tall; she was not strong; but her heart was great.

If ever her voice sounded within the hearing of Red Hawk—no, not even the god could restrain him!

There was a vast urge in the Blue Bird to flee away from the house, and never to set eyes on Maisry again. And yet an iron sense of duty held her.

She looked up, and it seemed to her that the beauty of the Sacred Valley unrolled again before her eyes. The god had sent her out from the place. His purpose, perhaps, was to drive her on to the whites, on to Maisry Lester, so that through Maisry the threatened war could be halted. Now the words poured suddenly from her throat: "I can take you to him. He is not dead. He is living, Maisry!"

CHAPTER XX.

A SIGN FROM RUSTY.

THE trail lay wide and clearly beaten before the eyes of Rusty Sabin. So many scores of warriors with their war ponies and the herd of extra horses driven on by a select number of youth who for the first time were on the warpath, could not pass over the green of the prairies without leaving unmistakable signs of their passing.

Now and then parties diverged from the main road, the whole body splitting up into small sections which traveled towards varying points of the compass. Then the trailing task became difficult, for each of the smaller bodies attempted to lay a good trail puzzle behind them as soon as they reached a dry ravine, or a stream which enabled them to make a problem for a pursuer.

If Rusty lost the trail of the group which he had selected, he would lose the trend of the whole march. Three times he was stopped for a considerable interval by these cunningly constructed puzzles, but on each occasion he was able to work out the solution and ride on.

He was strangely happy. The Sacred Valley, in all its beauty, remained somewhere in his mind as a lonely duty, not as a joyful place. He was away from the god's place, and yet the god had not deserted him. As the dawn was born out

of the pale moonlight of that first night, he shot a scurrying rabbit, and as he dismounted to pick up the body, he felt before he saw the sweep of the broad, familiar wings above him; looking up, he recognized the huge night-owl of the Sacred Valley.

Had he come to accept the sacrifice, even if it were not actually living game? Holding up the limp body, he whistled; and instantly the owl swooped. The talons, like a powerful skeleton hand, grasped the rabbit; the softly rushing wings bore the owl away on high.

Rusty Sabin, looking after the soaring bird, saw it outlined jet black against the moon and the dawn for a moment; then it slid down into the darkness of the prairie. And Sabin laughed happily. This, certainly, was a veritable sign from heaven.

Late that evening he saw the war party of the Cheyennes. They were making a forced march by moonlight, and the long column went over a slight rise of ground, printing themselves as a small black picture against the sky.

Sabin took the White Horse at a brisk gallop through an arc that cut across the course of the column. He waited in a hollow until he heard the tramping of the hoofs. He waited with the stallion flat on the ground, almost covered by the tall grass. And at his word, the White Horse rose into view with Sabin in the saddle.

The half dozen scouts who preceded the rest were not a hundred steps away when they saw that vision appear from nothingness. A dead ghost of a dead horse—a vision from another world! Their sudden yell of dismay was music to the ears of Sabin.

They had halted. Two of them suddenly turned their ponies about and fled. The rest flung themselves on the ground and began to shout out prayers to the Sky People, prayers to Sweet Medicine.

Sabin rode straight on, at a walk, without turning his head towards the voices of his red people. But his heart was stirred.

Would the war-party dare to continue after such a vision had crossed its way? In the distance he made the stallion sink

into the depth of the grass. There he left the White Horse and returned stealthily until he was close to the camp. The grass was a sufficient shelter.

Peering through the high heads of the grass, he could see the rising of a column of smoke. Out of the distance he could hear the thrumming of a drum. And he understood.

The Cheyennes had halted to make enough of a fire to raise a smoke of sweet grass in which they could purify themselves after the terrible vision of the White Horse and the ghost of Red Hawk. After that, perhaps they would attempt to continue the war-trail. If so, he would cross their way again.

THERE was a small wind stirring the grass, and it kept a whispering sound about the ears of Sabin. He never would have heard the other noise that flowed through the sound of the wind; it was the sudden shudder that passed through the body of the stallion that warned him, and the lift and sudden sidewise twist of the head of the White Horse.

A snake, perhaps, slipping through the grass?

Well, a snake would turn away from creatures so great. Still, the head of Sabin was turned and his nerves were strung to alertness when he saw, over his shoulder, a shadowy form rising, and the gleam of steel by the pale moonlight. The blow was not a downward cleaving stroke, but a sidelong sweep which was surer to bite home in some part of the body of the enemy. Rusty dropped loose and prone on the ground. The long-bladed knife came into his hand as he heard the tomahawk whish over his head. The body of the other lurched toward him, following the stroke, and Rusty turned as a cat turns when it offer its claws to a foe. He stabbed upwards and felt the knife blade glide through flesh and grit on bone, and drive deeper.

A great hand gripped Rusty by the hair of the head. He stabbed again upwards. The hand lost its power. The tomahawk fell idly in the grass. A loose weight

dropped upon Sabin and rolled away from him.

He got to his knees. The White Horse was drawing great breaths of horror as it smelled the blood. And stretched before Sabin, vainly struggling to rise again, was a crop-headed Pawnee wolf. The moonlight slipped like water over the huge flow of muscles that covered his body. Among a nation of big men, he was a giant. He could not handle his own weight, but he intended to strike a last blow. The steel of his knife glistened as he dragged it out of the sheath of fringed leather.

Rusty caught the mighty arm at the wrist. There was no more resistance in that arm than in the muscles of a child.

"Die in peace," said Rusty, "because I take no scalps. I count the coup on you, Pawnee; and that is all."

"Ah," muttered the brave, "what bad fortune brought me to you? You are the friend of Sweet Medicine. You are Red Hawk the great medicine man!"

He sat up, clasping his body with one hand. The blood still poured from the terrible wounds he had received.

He began to sing the death-song, the words coming hoarse from his throat and with a horrible bubbling in them.

"Sky People, look down carefully. There is not much light; I cannot call loudly, but I am Long Arrow the Pawnee. I am the man who killed the white buffalo and sacrificed the skin to you. In the battle, I rode through the line of the Blackfeet and counted coup on a living warrior with a short stick. I stole the thirty horses from the Sioux. And I am the man who stole up in the night on the camp of the Cheyennes and killed the two braves with one knife.

"And I took their scalps and hung them over my fire. Cheyenne hair hangs from the reins of my bridle. The hair of Blackfeet fringes my leggings. You see that I have lived a good life and that I have hope of the Happy Hunting Grounds. And then you led me against Red Hawk.

"I struck with the hatchet and the hand of the god was put in front of it. I struck,

and the body of a man turned into air and the stroke was lost. Sweet Medicine turned the tomahawk aside. He guided the knife into my body. The life runs out of me like water downhill. The pool is emptying. Receive me, my fathers!"

The big body pitched to the side. Sabin, steadying it with a strong hand, laid back the limp weight Long Arrow in the grass.

IT was a huge-featured face into which he looked, the nose high-arched and the mouth vast and thin-lipped. He never had seen a face more cruel, he thought. But any man who had killed a white buffalo and sacrificed it to the Sky People was, of course, a very good Indian.

It seemed to Sabin that there had been some truth in the death chant of the dying man. Perhaps the invisible hand of Sweet Medicine, so swift that it can reach between a man and his thoughts, had intervened between the tomahawk and its target. Perhaps it was Sweet Medicine who had driven the knife home to the life.

In that case, the body belonged to the god and not to the Cheyennes. For that purpose, and lest any man should claim that warrior or despoil him of his scalp, Rusty took from a little pouch at his belt a single soft owl feather, such as he found in the cave of Sweet Medicine, and tied it with a wisp of Long Arrow's own hair.

The drum beat in the distance had ended. He heard a rhythmic beating of hoofs and then a confusion of impacts such as are made by the feet of many walking horses. And he saw that the Cheyennes were streaming forward. They had not turned back. They were coming straight along, their original course.

The teeth of Sabin gritted together. This was the work of Running Elk, of course. The old medicine man with mischief in his heart had persuaded the braves that the appearance of the ghost was perhaps a good sign instead of a bad omen. And as the whole procession dipped out of sight in a slight hollow, Rusty again rose from the grass on the back of the White Horse.

The train was proceeding straight to-

wards the place where the dead Pawnee scout was lying; and as it pushed forward over the rise of ground, clear in the moonlight the braves could see the White Horse stepping, and a shout of horror arose from many throats.

The forward movement ended. Half of the braves scattered towards the rear and, as before, a number flung themselves from the saddles to the ground. But Running Elk alone remained steadfast. He kicked his pony forward a short distance and then reached up both skinny arms as he shouted: "Red Hawk, if you come back from the dead to the living, tell us what the Sky People wish to say to us."

Sabin, for an answer, lifted his right hand and waved it in the signal which warns a man to go back. Then he turned his head and rode on at a walk. For he felt that the walking horse would be a more apt picture to present the idea of a return from the dead, a mounted ghost.

Behind him, he heard a sudden clamor. When he looked back he saw that the shouting of Running Elk had put heart in some of the warriors so that they had remounted and pushed forward a little distance to stare along the trail of the ghost.

So they had come on the spot where the dead Pawnee lay. And their yell of triumph turned suddenly into a familiar old chant in praise of Sweet Medicine.

The war party began to pull saddles from their horses. Whatever happened, they would go no farther forward on this night.

CHAPTER XXI.

A NOBLE MISSION.

THE Blue Bird sat cross-legged and looked for a long time at Maisry.

Maisry had started to sit in a chair, but she changed her mind and sat down on the floor also, not cross-legged, but with her feet on one side and with her right arm supporting her weight.

"You stay in the chair," said the Blue Bird.

"No," answered Maisry. "I'll sit the way you do. I'm not above you, Blue Bird."

The Indian smiled.

"It is so hard to hate you," she said, "when I want to love you."

"Do you hate me?" asked the white girl.

"There is Red Hawk," said the Cheyenne.

"Yes. There is he," said Maisry.

"You are very calm," said the Blue Bird. "You should not be so quiet. Look at me!"

"I *am* looking," said Maisry.

"I am not ugly," said the Blue Bird. "Look at me again. Do you see how I am not ugly?"

"I see very well."

"You must remember that Red Hawk is after all like a white man more than an Indian. A good Cheyenne brave thinks, when he takes a wife, how many horses she will cost, how many guns and buffalo robes. But a white man never thinks of how much work his wife will be able to do for him. He thinks more about how lovely she is. Do you understand me when I talk Cheyenne like this?"

"Yes, I understand you very well."

"*Ah hai*, Maisry, if your skin had been as dark as mine, we could have loved each other, unless we fell in love with the same man. But you never could be one who might be bought for a price in horses and other things."

"I don't know. I think I could have been bought," said Maisry.

"Maisry, when you say that, you are beautiful."

"When I say it, I feel very sad."

"Perhaps all women must be a little sad if they are to be beautiful."

"Do you think so?"

"Maisry . . . you see that my Cheyenne tongue can say white words?"

"You are half white, you know."

"My blood is all red."

"I know that."

"Do you hear that bird singing?"

"I hear the black bird."

"He is free," said the Blue Bird.

"Yes, perfectly free."

"*You* are not free," said the Cheyenne.

"No?"

"You are not free as Red Hawk is. He is strong and brave and he is as free as the black bird—if you would let him be."

"You think that I tie him?" asked Maisry.

"Ah, my sister," said the Indian, "don't you see that you do? Your God is not his god. Your skin is his color but your heart is not his color. You put birds in cages, but the meadow lark is not in a cage. He is unhappy; lines come between his eyes when he is with you. But with me there are no lines between his eyes when he is with me."

"Is he very happy with you?"

"For me he went into the Valley of Death."

"What is that?"

"The Valley of Death. He went into it. The god led him. He carried me from the Valley of Death."

"He carried you in his arms?"

"Yes. In his arms. And through the cave, through the house of the god. I was dead."

"What are you saying, Blue Bird?"

"Through the House of the God."

Her face flamed, suddenly. Through the golden obscurity of her skin the color rushed. And Maisry watched, carefully.

THE Indian girl went on: "Into my dead body he called back the life.

The first that I knew was his voice above me. I was in the blue of the Happy Hunting Grounds and he called me back to the earth. His voice called me, praying to Sweet Medicine. Do you know who Sweet Medicine is?"

"Yes. Did Rusty pray for you?"

"That hurts you, doesn't it?"

Maisry drew a quick, deep breath. "You see, Blue Bird, we both love him. We should be honest and tell one another what we think."

"Well," said Blue Bird, "does it hurt you—the thing I have just said?"

"Yes," said Maisry, and flushed.

They both were warm of face, staring at each other.

"Do you hate me?" asked Blue Bird.

"Yes," said Maisry. "No," she added.

"*Ai, ai!*" said Blue Bird. "Why should we both like him so much? There are many men in the world. There are more men than there are buffaloes, Red Hawk says, and yet we find only one."

"Yes," said Maisry, "that is true."

They stared at one another again.

The Blue Bird said: "I am going to cry. Cheyennes should not cry. But I cannot help it."

Maisry watched her with a cold face. The Blue Bird folded her arms across her face. She made no sound. Her body gently rocked to and fro, and the agony was a silent thing.

Maisry got up and went to her. She sat beside the Indian and put on arm around her. Suddenly the weight of the Blue Bird slumped against her.

The Blue Bird sobbed, openly: "I have seen a great many taller and stronger warriors."

"Yes," said Maisry.

"I have seen great chiefs with many scalps."

"Yes," said Maisry.

"I have seen warriors with the riches of a thousand horses," said Blue Bird.

"Of course you have," answered Maisry. "And men like that have wanted to marry you."

"Yes, they have," said Blue Bird.

"And still you think of him?"

"Yes, I think of him. The god compels me."

They were silent for a moment.

Maisry said: "Are you happier now?"

The Blue Bird was drying her eyes.

"I have been very weak," she answered. "Now I am better."

"Tell me, Blue Bird, about that Valley of Death—do you mean that you were very ill—or was it actually the Valley where the Cheyennes make their sacrifices?"

"It was that Valley," said the Indian.

Maisry reached out a hand towards her and left the gesture suspended in air for a moment.

"He carried you out of that? But how could he?" she asked.

"The god is his companion. He can do everything that the god wishes him to do. I can't talk any more about it or Sweet Medicine will freeze up my blood and turn me to dead stone. Maisry, there is another valley near the Valley of Death. It is the Sacred Valley where Sweet Medicine lives.

"I went to the entrance to that valley, just a little while ago, and called to the god and called to Red Hawk and begged them to stop the Cheyennes on the war-path and keep them from fighting with the white people. The god would not hear me; Red Hawk would not hear me . . ."

"Is that where he lives?"

"I can't tell you that," said the Indian.

"I can't tell you anything I know about that. I can only say that if you went to the Sacred Valley and called, surely Red Hawk would come out in answer to your voice. I am only a dark-faced Indian. It is you that he loves. He would come and he could turn back the Cheyennes from the war-path. Will you go with me?"

Maisry, listening with eyes of desperate interest, exclaimed: "But the two of us—to ride alone through an Indian country . . ."

"There are not many Pawnees. Most of them are Cheyennes, and I could make you safe from all the Cheyenne warriors . . . Look! You have a very good horse."

She pointed out the window towards the pasture in which stood a blood-red mare, one of those rare bays whose skin seems actually to be dyed by the life-stream.

"I have a good pony also," said the Blue Bird. "Who could catch us, if we traveled mostly at night? Will you come, Maisry?"

The thought of the prairie seemed to Maisry like the thought of a wild sea, filled with danger. But every day of her life in Witherell had been a barren wilderness since the death of her father. And

suddenly lifting her head she said: "Yes, I'll go."

"Good!" cried the Blue Bird. "Now? Will you come now?"

"Now—this moment," said Maisry.

CHAPTER XXII.

Galway's Expedition.

A N ounce of gold could buy a great many things in the town of Witherell, but on the equipment of his expedition Charlie Galway expended the last speck of gold dust from the sack which he had stolen. He spent so much organizing the outfit that people no longer referred to him as Charlie. He now was "Captain" Galway, a title which he could keep the rest of his life if he used a little discretion.

He spent his money freely, not that he was the sort of a man who used possessions with a free hand, but because he was sure that for every ounce he spent now he would have a hundred weight of gold in the future. He had drawn together exactly a hundred men for the expedition. His advertising had been unlike that which ever preceded another journey into the prairies.

He had asked, simply, for men who were young and strong, good shots and riders, and experienced in the ways of Indians and animals on the plains. He wanted these men for one month and offered them not a penny of pay, only a vague promise that they would come to wealth if they followed his guidance.

He stipulated with each adventurer who came to him that a tenth part of any loot or possessions which were derived from the journey should become his property. As for the goal of the journey, he had not a word to say.

These words of Galway attracted the curious; and Witherell always was filled with crowds of adventurous young fellows who were ready for any sort of excitement. At first, a mere handful would enlist, taking Galway's solemn oath in the

presence of others—an oath never to leave the expedition and to stand by the companions of the journey to the death. But when the town saw that Galway was buying ten new, strong covered wagons for the inland voyage, together with horses and mules enough to pull the loads, the village grew more interested.

For those ten wagons were loaded with all sorts of necessities, and particularly with lead and gunpowder for the five score excellent new rifles that Galway had bought. It was clear that in this expedition fighting might be expected—fighting and digging, since there were plenty of shovels and picks. But the rest remained a mystery and for the very sake of the mystery the best men came forward to join the little army.

Exactly ninety-nine men were chosen by Galway from the scores of volunteers. He made the hundredth. It would be easier, in this manner, to divide the shares of the spoils.

Only one purchase was made in total secrecy, and that was wood to make a number of gold pans. The rest of the buying was public knowledge; and the entire town of Witherell turned out to watch the expedition start. From the side of the river, where the two stacks of the river boat rose high into the air, the column of wagons and riders started through an outburst of cheers.

They made a very fine picture in white deerskins with decorated saddles and ribbons tied into the manes and tails of their horses. Every man had a long rifle balanced across the pommel of his saddle, and nearly all of them carried revolvers, too, and long knives in whose use they were expert either to take the hide off a buffalo or to slash the throat of a man. They were a wild lot. The oldest of them was under thirty, though a good many wore beards that made them seem experienced men of middle age. The youngest were still in their teens, but strong as maturity and eager to make up for youth by a more savage daring.

On the whole the men of Galway were

perfectly fitted for fighting Indians because not one of the tribes could have picked out a hundred men more desperate, more fierce, more totally wild. Many of them already had been outlawed in cities farther east; the rest had drifted West in the knowledge that the open frontier was the place for them to use their wits and their hands.

Charlie Galway, as the long train wound up through the hills away from the town, looked over his outfit with a sort of grim pride. He felt that it was a perfect tool, and that his was the perfect hand to wield it. He felt, also, that sudden elevation of mind which comes to a man who is about to make history. He had not a single regret or shame.

His word given to Sabin did not weigh on him in the least. Sabin was too much like an Indian to count. The Redmen had to go down. The wave of "civilization" had to wash deeper into the land, deeper and all the way across it, to the western ocean.

So the train dipped down from the hills into the green plain and moved steadily across it like a great, unjointed, but living snake.

ALL was done in good order. Ahead of the main body three of the best shots on the best horses felt the way. Three more on either side guarded the flanks in the distance and a third trio hung in the rear. It would have been hard to surprise an organism whose nervous system extended so far on all sides. But in case of a sudden attack, at least once a day Galway had his men practice the classic defense maneuver of the plains. At a blast of a horn, the head of the procession turned to the left. The rear of the train pulled out in the same direction, and the ten huge wagons rapidly formed in a circle, like a caterpillar coiling head to tail. Inside that strong wall men and horses gathered as inside a fort. A thousand Indians hardly would dare to attempt the storming of such a place of strength.

They were two days out before the first sign of danger appeared. Then, on the edge of the sky, appeared a little column of half a dozen riders. The bend of their backs proved that they were Indians, riding with shorter stirrups than white men ever used. One glimpse of them was enough to send a thrill through the nerves of the hundred men from Witherell. And after that, all of the wagon train kept a sharp lookout.

Scouts began to come in at least once an hour to report that Indians were visible to right, to left, before, behind.

Well, before the wagons pulled through the narrow mouth of the Sacred Valley, there would be fighting, of course. Galway knew that, since the Cheyennes never would give up their holy land without a struggle. But he felt equally certain that the Indians never would be able to guess the destination of the train until it was almost at the mouth of the valley.

If they attacked as the whites entered the ravine, they could be beaten off, no doubt; and once inside, half a dozen rifles could securely plug the mouth of the gully and keep a whole world of Indians outside. In the meantime, there would be plenty of food and water within the Sacred Valley, and there would be plenty of occupation in washing the gold from the soil.

The patience of the Indians would finally end. And at last the laden wagons—wagons more preciously burdened than any that ever had rolled across the green of the plains—would come streaming out and pass back to Witherell and a high carouse.

The more Galway contemplated his plan, the more perfect it appeared to him. He could see no possible means of failure, unless the Cheyennes actually managed to make a surprise attack. That he did not expect. As a rule the Cheyennes kept on good terms with the whites, and though they were keeping the wagon train under close observation, it was unlikely that they would fight unless they were grossly offended.

For that reason, Galway gave the strictest orders that no attempts should be made

against any of the Indians who skirted the course which the train was pursuing. That was why a wild rage rushed up into his brain when he heard a chorus of exclamations from the men who rode beside the wagons.

He was inside the powder wagon at the moment, broaching a keg of the stuff in order to replenish some half-empty horns, but when he heard the men crying out that Jerry Pike was bringing in a captive Indian, he was out of the wagon in a storming temper, at once.

And there, sure enough, he saw Jerry Pike coming with a captive led on an Indian pony beside him. It was only a girl. When Galway made sure of that, half of his anger left him at once. He even smiled a little.

Jerry Pike waved his hat and shouted from the distance.

HE came up, yelling: "I got a Cheyenne girl for you, boys, and a right pretty one, at that. Take a look at what I found running around loose on the prairie, Galway!"

The captain took that look and then shouted in his turn.

"Jerry," he said, "d'you know what you've done?"

"Sure I do," said Jerry. "I've caught a beauty and I'm gunna keep her. I'm gunna make a squaw out of her. I've hunted far enough to find my woman. This is her!"

Galway shook his head.

"She goes along with us, but she doesn't go as a squaw. Pike, this is the Blue Bird, and she's about the biggest medicine that the Cheyennes have. They'll never dare to lay a finger on us while we have the Blue Bird. . . . How did you find her?"

"Why, I seen an antelope up the wind and I figgered that a snack of antelope meat would be right good, so I slicked off my hoss and got into the tall grass to stalk. And on the way I come onto a little hollow where a pair of girls was hiding out—a white girl and this one.

"The white girl got to her mare in time to run. But I snagged this one and brought her back with me. She looks better than venison to me. *Hai*—Cheyenne . . . Blue Bird . . . whatever your name is . . . How about you being squaw and Jerry Pike'll be heap big warrior, eh? . . . Her brain's gone to sleep, captain. You see the wood in her face and no sense at all."

"Leave her alone," said Galway. "We're going to wrap her up in cotton and treat her fine. I tell you, she means the kind of luck we've all been looking for. Understand? . . . Blue Bird, you're as safe as you can be. Don't worry a mite about anything. Who was the white girl along with you?"

The Blue Bird turned an expressionless face toward him, her eye remained perfectly dead. He was no more to her than the distant edge of the horizon.

A crowd had gathered around them, riders and men on foot, prying at the beauty of the girl with keen, animal eyes.

Galway made a brief speech, but one that was to the point. He said: "Boys, we're in Cheyenne-land, now. And you know what that means. The Cheyennes are gunna be pretty sour when they find out we've taken the Blue Bird, and they're gunna come swooping down in a flock around us.

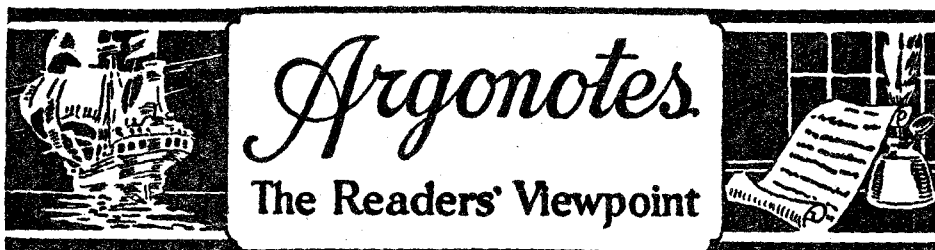
"But they won't dare to touch us for fear we'll take it out of the Blue Bird. You know what she is? She's the only living Cheyenne that ever was in the Sacred Valley. She's as holy as church on Sundays, to the whole tribe. She's the one that brought them the water in the big drought. If a man touches the hem of her skirt, he has luck for a year. Mind you, now—no foolish business."

"I go and find her and then you take her away from me," said Jerry Pike, scowling. "What do I get out of this, anyway?"

"I've got a brand new six shooting Colt for you, Jerry," said Galway.

"Have you?" shouted Pike. "Gimme it, then. I'd rather have one of them new guns than a whole tribe of squaws."

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.



THE WINNAHS!

A NOBLE job! Readers came through in fine style with letters in response to ARGOSY's request for information about the most popular story published in the magazine since January 1, 1935. Came through so well, in fact, that editors harvested a crop of headaches trying to narrow down the field and find the twelve best communications.

But here they are—the ARGOSY fans whose names have been placed on the subscription lists and who will receive the magazine regularly each week:

Vick Wilson, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.
Edward A. Sands, New York City.
V. J. Wheaton, Moncton, B. C., Canada.
(Mrs.) John S. Abbott, Chapel Hill, N. C.
Theo. Hewes, Indianapolis, Ind.
Jan H. Luwema, The Hague, Netherlands.
William Crescenta, Jr., Philadelphia, Pa.
Albert M. C. Wallach, New York City.
Murray Foults, Detroit, Mich.
Jay Arcy, Duryea, Pa.
(Miss) Marquita McKinney, Compton, Cal.
James P. Healy, New York City.

Here, too, are the names of the eight stories which received the greatest number of votes; the high spots in ARGOSY between January first and

August first, 1935, selected by readers and listed in the order of importance.

"The Monster of the Lagoon" (Worts)—which received a rating just about three times greater than the next highest title, which was:
"War Declared!" (Roscoe)
"Lysander of Chios" (Mason)
"With the Help of Henry" (Tuttle)
"High Treason" (Wilstach)
"Soldiers of Misfortune" (Newsom)
"The Enemy's Goal" (Mason)
"Murder—in Some Degree" (Worts)

And now that's all over—you still have a chance to write and tell us what you think of the stories we're publishing. See the announcement entitled "Of Interest to You!" which appears at the bottom of this page.

A NYTHING to get more stories like "Port of Missing Heads," says

MARY BELLE WALLEY

Theodore Roscoe knows his onions. "Port of Missing Heads," recently printed in ARGOSY of June the 29th, is a corking good story. But if, as he says, he has written one hundred and sixty stories, he ought to be puncture-proof by this time.

Please, Mr. Editor, if Mr. Roscoe has not run out of ideas give us more of him! If his muse has balked, reprint some of the one hundred and sixty old ones—anything to get more stories of the same caliber as "Port of Missing Heads."

Butler, N. J.

Of Interest to You!

WHAT do you consider the best story (of any length) published in ARGOSY since June 1, 1935? For the twelve post cards or letters from readers which name the best reasons why this or that story stands out above all others the magazine will give twelve full, yearly subscriptions. Literary style or skill will not count, for what the editors want to know is exactly what stories readers like best, and *why*.

Letters selected will be published from week to week, but *not all letters published will be rewarded with subscriptions.*

Your letter must reach us not later than January 1, 1936. Address it to The Editor, ARGOSY Magazine, 280 Broadway, New York City.