

WHO KNOWS?

BY GEORGE MILLARDE AMBRIDGE.

Who knows, who knows,
O, dainty rose,
What fairy wings
Have brushed thy cheek?
Whose message, when the south wind blows,
Is told thee?
Would that thou couldst speak!

What gentle whispers
From the birds,
Are scattered to thee
O'er the flowers.
O, lovely rose, oh! fresh pink rose.
What tale is told
When the wind blows,
When the breeze comes from foreign bowers.

Is it a tale of love, untold?
Is it the song of some happy maid?
Is it grave schemes and plots for gold?
Or is it the wall of a trust betrayed?
Tell me, sweet wild briar rose;
But echo answers me:
Who knows?

LIMESTONE GAP.

BY HENRY DALE.

"Hello, Old Cyclone, what's the matter now?"

"Matter? Ef yer want ter keep ther la' on yer heels y'd better stop that ere squallin' an' saddle up."

"Injuns?"

"Yer bet, thicker'n grasshoppers in Kansas, sand burrs in Texas, sage brush in Dakota, an' liars in Denver."

"Boys, Old Cy don't talk fur nuthin. Better be saddlin' up an' prepa'r ter run or fight, an' may be both."

"The jest's the size o' it," growled the rough-visaged frontiersman known as Old Cyclone, drawing in his panting steed, and casting furtive glances down the valley in the direction he had come.

The scenery about the little camp was wild and picturesque in the extreme. Rugged mountains, some barren and others dotted with verdure to their very summits, rose on every hand. Below them was a lovely valley with a stream like a thread of silver winding through it.

The camp itself was on a bit of table land, and there was from it an excellent view of the valley for several miles below.

Three hardy mustangs were grazing a short distance from the camp fire, and three men were seated about it, when the fourth, whom we have introduced by the appellation by which he was known all over the West—Old Cyclone—came up on his horse.

Two of the men seated at the camp fire were rough, bronze-cheeked frontiersmen, like Old Cyclone, but the third was little more than a boy. His fair cheek and tender-looking hands were evidence against his having been long on the frontier. The three were finishing their dinner, and Bill Murphy, one of the frontier scouts, had been entertaining his companions with a song, which drew forth from Cyclone the remark that he had better stop his squalling.

"How far ar' they, Cy?" asked old Zach, the third frontiersman.

"Bout two mids."

"Great grizzlies, boys, we'd like ter be tak right in by the ternal varmints!"

The three mustangs were saddled in as many seconds, and while this operation was going on Old Cyclone leaped from his saddle and began stamping the fire into the earth, thus putting it out.

"Wall, I s'w, Tenderfoot, yer gettin' purty handy wi' leather. Ther way ye sitchin' yer broncho 'ud do credit to a reglar broncho buster. Mount, boys; we've got ter hit the flat an' overtake that wagin' train afore it strikes the mountings, or we'll hev the pesky theevin' red-skins or skalpin' every man, woman, an' child ar'ng 'em."

The face of the youth, who was called Tenderfoot among his companions because he had been on the plains only a short time, turned deathly pale. His father, mother, younger brothers, and sisters were with that train, and in danger of being massacred by the Apaches.

The youth, whose name was Charley Myrtle, was a brave lad, and he gripped his rifle, while his teeth were set with an air of firmness and determination, though his cheek was considerably paler than usual.

"How far do you think the wagon train is from the mountains?" he asked of Old Cyclone.

"Dun know, Tenderfoot, but its more'n likely they're in 'em now. They've had time to come to 'em by this time, but ef they ain't crossed the river they kin git back to the flat (prairie) before the Apaches come up ter 'em."

"Can we defend ourselves better on the prairie than on the mountain?"

"Yer just bet we kin, Tenderfoot. Here, fellers, jump yer cayuse an' less be makin' tracks fur Limestone Gap."

The men were in their saddles and soon galloping at a break-neck speed along the plateau, and then entered a narrow, deep defile which brought them out into a sort of a wide canyon.

Charley Myrtle, who was unaccustomed to horseback riding, was stiff and sore, and scarcely able to ride, yet the recollection that his parents and brothers and sisters were in danger seemed to give him new life.

"Are the Apaches mounted or on foot?" Charley asked Old Cyclone, who rode at his side.

"Mounted? Why, Tenderfoot, they never ride, specially ef they're in a hurry. No, sir, they're on foot."

"Then we can outravel them?"

"Wall, now, I don't know so well about that, youngster," said the old scout. "Them air pesky red-skins when they git it inter their head to go kin' just git over ground about as fast as the next one. In these ere mountings they kin' outrun a hoss. Why, they run deers down sometimes."

"Then they may overtake us?"

"Yes, they will if they come onto our trail unless we mend our gait."

"Did they see you?"

"No."

"Then they may not find us."

"Yas, ef they turn off some other way, but they war com'ing right toward us."

"How many?"

"Dun know exactly, but that war at least a hundred o' 'em."

They now came to where the valley was wider, and the sides became bluffs a hundred feet in height.

Two ranges of mountains converged about a mile further up, in what was known as Limestone Gap. The valley or canyon from the point they had now reached, gradually grew narrower until they came to the gap, which was so narrow that two could scarce ride abreast through it.

At every few rods Old Cyclone dropped to the rear, and looked back down the valley a'd along the tops of the bluffs on either side.

"Thar aint a red nigger in sight, yit, boys," he at last said, galloping up to where the others were hurrying their mustangs

over the stony ground. "I think we'll git ter the gap all right."

The ponies thundered along over the stony earth, and the ring of hoofs echoed along the canyon until Charley began to fear they would reach the ears of the pursuing savages.

"Thar it is, thar it is," cried Old Cyclone, who had forced his horse ahead of the others, "thar's the gap; now, we'll soon be out beyond it."

They urged their horses forward at the top of their speed, and were soon through the pass.

"Hello, who's yer?" cried Old Cyclone, who was some distance ahead of the others.

In a moment every one drew rein. Coming toward them was a white man mounted on a horse considerably jaded. The horseman saw them and motioning his hand for them to halt, they drew rein, and he galloped up to them.

"It is Tom Long, one of the teamsters," said Charley.

"So it proved.

"Wall, Tom, what yer want?" asked Cyclone.

"The Apaches are down the valley."

"Thunderation—we know that. Whar's the train?"

"That's just what I come to tell ye about."

"Wall, go ahead an' tell it."

"Yes, yes," put in Charley Myrtle, his face growing still paler as his anxiety increased. "Where is the wagon train? Has it crossed the river?"

"Yes, an' is on the way across the mounting range above here."

"Great Scott!" gasped Old Cyclone, "the pesky varmints 'll overhaul 'em sure afore they kin git across."

"The Captain said they would, and sent me on ter tell ye to hold Limestone Gap again 'em fur three hours."

"Three hours! why we'll hev a hundred to fight."

"Can't help it," said the teamster, "it's got to be done."

For a moment the veteran frontiersman, the hero of a hundred battles, sat on his pony voraciously chewing the huge quid of tobacco in his mouth. At last he said:

"Wall, boys, ef it's got ter be done that ain't no use o' whinin'; now all I've got ter say is if the thing kin be done, we kin do it. But, say, Tenderfoot, ye'd better just keep right on ter the train."

"Why?"

"Thar's goin' to be a scrimmage."

"Well, what if there is?" said Charley, bravely. "My parents are with that train, and I'm going to help defend 'em."

"Pluck, boys, by jeminy," growled Old Cyclone.

"Isn't there some way that the Apaches could go around this pass, flank us, and get to the train?"

"No, not if they're across the river. They've got to git through Limestone Gap, or they can't tack the train."

"Some one must go back to the train," said Tom Long. "They want word sent 'em."

"Ye'd better go, Tenderfoot," said Cyclone.

"No, sir; all whom I have are with that train, and I shall stay here to defend them," said Charley, proudly and bravely.

"Wall, youngster, I admire ye," said Old Cyclone, "but you don't know what's comin' in!"

"There's goin' ter be blood shed. Ye've never smelt powder an' heard bullets screach; yer don't know what it is. The men who stay here three hours hej just about got a free pass inter eternaty."

"I will lose my life, if necessary, defendin' my parents, brothers, and sisters," said the brave boy.

"Then, Tom, ye'd better go back yerself," said the old scout.

Tom was rather inclined to stay at the Gap, but as Old Cyclone had some information to send to the captain of the train in regard to the number of the Apaches, and the place where they would be safe from them, he had to go.

"Hey ye plenty o' cartridges?" asked Tom.

"I dun know. Leave yer gun an' all ye got," said Cyclone. "We'll want 'em afore we're through wi' this."

Tom did so, and galloped away toward the train.

The four horsemen rode back to the pass not over a hundred yards away, and Old Cyclone examined it and the surrounding hills with an experienced eye. He saw at a glance the strong and weak points in the defense of the gap. The narrow pass lay between two tall bluffs, one of which was twenty feet higher than the other.

A short distance back these heights could be reached, as the ground was sloping enough to ride the horses up to them. Old Cyclone then wheeled about again, with his followers at his heels, and galloped to these points, and Old Zach and Charley went up one side, while he and Bill Murphy ascended to the other.

These elevations were so near that the scouts could converse with each other without speaking much above a conversational tone. In addition to his own Winchester, Old Cyclone had the gun of Tom Long.

"Dismount, boys, an' lay down on the edge of the cliff," said Old Cyclone, "then ye kin pick 'em off without bein' seen."

They sprang from their horses, and, leaving them a little way back, so as not to be in the range of bullets from below, crept to the edge of the bluffs which over-looking the pass.

At Old Cyclone's direction each man placed a large number of heavy stones on the edge of the bluff, which might be available to hurl down upon the heads of the enemy.

"Remember if they get through the pass," continued Old Cyclone, "it ain't fur they'll hev ter go till they kin git up here on the bluff an' lift our ha'r."

Every one understood the importance of allowing no one to go through the pass.

"Lay low, they ain't far away," said Old Cyclone.

Charley, with his rifle ready, crept to the edge of the bluff where he could sweep the pass and expose but very little of his person.

The others had secured favorable positions.

Only a few moments elapsed, when Charley saw a dark form flitting up toward the pass not more than four or five hundred yards away. Another, another, and another came around the bend until fully fifty were in sight, and then in a solid mass, silently but swiftly they advanced toward the pass.

Old Cyclone leveled his rifle, and when they had come to within two hundred paces of the gap, he bawled out to the foremost among the Apaches:

"Hold on thar, ye pesky red varmint; ye won't? then here goes." And Old Cyclone's rifle belched forth fire and smoke.

Charley, who watched with no little interest the effect of the shot, saw the Apache leap into the air and fall back upon the rocks.

A whoop which seemed to make the canyon tremble now rose from the Indians, and the air shook with the rapid discharge of Apache guns.

The bullets whistled like rain about the four men, but they were hard marks to hit in their position.

Charley found his nerves nigh steadier than he had expected after the first volley.

He took aim at the advancing band of savages, and pulled the trigger at the same moment. Old Zach's rifle cracked, while on the other side of the plateau, where Old Cyclone and Bill Murphy lay, a perfect fusillade was kept up all the time.

"They're fallin'," cried old Zach.

"Gin it to 'em," roared Cyclone, who, having emptied his own rifle, seized the gun of Tom Long.

Charley Myrtle's rifle was a repeating Winchester, and no sooner had he fired one shot than he threw another cartridge into the chamber and discharged that also.

"Don't shoot too fast, Tenderfoot," cautioned old Jack, who was kneeling behind a rock not far from Charley's side. "Take good aim, an' don't yer pull a trigger till yer sure o'er nigger."

"But the smoke is too thick; I can see no one."

"Then wait till yer kin."

The constant discharge of guns down the canyon concealed the savages from view, but at last the canopy lifted a little, and Charley discovered a tall, powerful Apache urging the warriors on.

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