

***EDWARD
SYLVESTER
ELLIS***



***THROUGH
APACHE
LAND***

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Through Apache Land

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I.

MOONLIGHT ON THE RIO GILA.

CHAPTER II.

TOM HARDYNGE'S RUSE.

CHAPTER III.

PURSUED BY THE APACHES.

CHAPTER IV.

OUTWITTED.

CHAPTER V.

AN ALARMING MESSAGE.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TWO SCOUTS.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CAVALRY ESCORT.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN DEVIL'S PASS.

CHAPTER IX.

AMONG THE APACHES.

CHAPTER X.

LONE WOLF.

CHAPTER XI.

SURROUNDED BY DANGER.

CHAPTER XII.

"THE HOUR HAS COME."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FLIGHT.

CHAPTER XIV.

PURSUED.

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE SOLITUDE.

NED TRIED THE SCARE GAME AGAIN, FLINGING UP HIS
ARMS AND SHOUTING

CHAPTER XVI.

AMONG THE MOUNTAINS.

CHAPTER XVII.

A MYSTERIOUS CAMP FIRE.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE INDIAN FIGHT.

CHAPTER XIX.

A TERRIBLE MEETING.

"THIS 'ERE IS A LITTLE ROW YOU KIN SETTLE WITH ME,
INSTEAD OF THAT BOY THAR."

CHAPTER XX.

WHITE VS. RED.

CHAPTER XXI.

FRIENDS TOGETHER.

CHAPTER XXII.

ANXIOUS WAITING.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DEATH SHOT.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BUFFALOES.

CHAPTER XXV.

ALONE AGAIN.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CAPTURING A MUSTANG.

STILL NEARER, UNTIL IT APPEARED AS IF HE HAD TO MAKE
BUT A SINGLE LEAP FORWARD.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A RUN FOR LIFE.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A GREAT MISFORTUNE.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE LONE CAMP FIRE.

CHAPTER XXX.

FIGHTING A GRIZZLY.

CHAPTER XXXI.

SLEEP.

CHAPTER XXXII.

REUNITED.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CLOSING IN.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

HURRICANE HILL.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE SENTINEL.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A DESPERATE SCHEME.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE TWO DEFENDERS.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

HAND TO HAND.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

CONCLUSION.

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THE FOLLOWING ARE THE TITLES

CHAPTER I.

[Table of Contents](#)

MOONLIGHT ON THE RIO GILA.

[Table of Contents](#)

Along the eastern bank a small Indian canoe, containing a single individual, was stealing its way—"hugging" the shore so as to take advantage of the narrow band of shadow that followed the winding of the stream. There were no trees on either side of the river, but this portion was walled in by bluffs, rising from three or four to fully twenty feet in height. The current was sluggish and not a breath of air wrinkled the surface on this mild summer night.

It was in the wildest part of the Indian country, and Tom Hardyng, the hunter, runner and bearer of all dispatches between the frontier posts in the extreme southwest, knew very well that for three days past it had been his proverbial good fortune, or rather a special Providence, that had kept his scalp from ornamenting the lodge of some marauding Comanche or Apache. Tom was one of the bravest and most skillful of borderers in those days, and had been up in the Indian country to learn the truth of numerous rumors which had come to the stations, reports of a general uprising among the redskins, with whom the peace commissioners had succeeded in negotiating treaties after months of diplomacy. After spending more than a week in dodging back and forth, in the disguise of an Indian he had learned enough to feel that there was good foundation for these rumors, and that the exposed stations and settlements were

in imminent peril. As soon as he was assured of this fact he started on his return to Fort Havens, which still lay a good three days' travel to the southwest. It was Tom's purpose to continue his descent until the following night, when, if nothing unexpected should intervene, he hoped to reach the point where he had left his mustang, and thence it would be plain sailing for the rest of the way. He knew the country thoroughly, and was confident that it was safer to perform a part of the journey by water than by land, which explains how it was that he was still in the paint and garb of an Indian, and still stealing his way down toward the Gulf of California.

"Them Apaches are a cute set," he muttered, as he glided along through the bank of shadow; "I believe they've larned I've been up among them lookin' around. I can't tell 'zactly how they larned it. I've played Injun so often that I know I can do it purty well; but they know there's somethin' in the air, and them signs I spied yesterday showed plain 'nough that they was lookin' for me. They'd give a dozen of their best warriors, with a chief throwed in to make good weight, to keep me from reachin' Fort Havens with the news that the Apaches are makin' ready to raise Old Ned along the border. Fact is, I do carry big news, that's sartin. Hello!"

This exclamation was caused by the appearance of a bright point of light on the edge of the bluff, several hundred yards down the river, and upon the opposite side. At first glance it resembled some star of the first magnitude, which a sudden depression of the bluff had made visible. The scout ceased paddling, and, suffering the canoe to drift

slowly with the tide, fixed his keen gray eyes upon the fiery point.

"That ain't any more of a star than I am," he added, a second later. "There she goes again!"

The torch, for such it was, remained stationary for scarcely a minute, when it began revolving swiftly from right to left, the gyration being of such a nature as to prove that it was swung by the hand of some person. Three revolutions, and then it suddenly reversed and made three in the opposite direction, then two back, then two forward, then one back and forth, and then it vanished in the gloom of the night. Tom scarcely breathed while viewing this pantomime, and when it ended he still held the paddle motionless while he chuckled to himself, for he knew what it all meant. He had seen Indian telegraphy before, and had learned to comprehend a great deal of those mysterious signs and signals by which news is carried across mountain and prairie with incredible speed. He had ridden his fleet mustang to death to head off some of these telegrams, and yet in every case the Indians, by some trickery unexplained to him, had outsped him.

"Yes, I can read that," Tom growled, still drifting with the current. "That ere redskin is signalin' to some other scamp, and it's all about *me*. It says that I'm on the river somewhere, and a lookout must be kept for me."

Such was the fact. The Indian who swayed the torch meant thereby to appraise some confederate that the scout who had dared to penetrate such a distance into their country, and to unearth their most important secrets, was seeking to make his way down the Rio Gila and out of their

country again. This much said the torch in language that could not be mistaken. Although it added no more, yet the sequence was inevitable, and Tom needed no one to apprise him that the river both above and below him was closely watched, and that he was in the greatest peril of his life. Being entirely shrouded in shadow, he could not see the moon, which rode high in the sky, scarcely touched by a floating cloud.

"I wish the moon would go out of sight altogether," he said to himself, as he viewed the clear sky. "I'd like to see it as black as a wolf's mouth, and then I'd teach these scamps somethin'; but there's too much confounded moonlight layin' loose for a chap to show any scientific tricks."

The fact that a redskin had indulged in signaling suggested that there must be some one to whom he had signaled, and the hunter devoted himself to learning where the second Apache was located.

"As near as I kin calc'late, the chap must be on this side of the stream, and purty close to where I'm rockin' in the cradle of the deep this very minute."

He now moved his paddle slightly—just enough to hold the boat motionless while he looked and listened. The stillness was profound; not even the soft sighing of the wind reaching his ears. He had peered around in the gloom only a few minutes when he discerned the reply to the signal already described, and so close that he was startled. Scarcely fifty feet below him, and on the edge of the bluff, several yards in height, a light flashed into view. A second glance showed him that it was a flaming torch held in the hand of an Indian, who began whirling it around his head

with a swiftness that made it seem like a revolving wheel of fire. The rapid motion of the torch, as the reader may infer, caused an equally rapid increase of the flame upon it, so that it revealed the Indian himself; and the hunter, as he looked toward it, saw the figure of the warrior standing like some pyrotechnist in the center of his own display.

A better target could not have been asked, and Tom, quick as thought, raised his rifle and sighted it; but with his finger upon the trigger, he refrained, lowered the piece and shook his head, muttering as he did so:

"He deserves it, and I'd like to give it to him, but it won't do. They'd know what the rifle-crack meant, and I'd have a hornet's nest about my head quick as lightnin'."

Tom was not certain of the meaning of the exhibition he had just seen, but believed that it was intended as a mere reply to the other—the same as if the Apache had shouted "All right!" in response to the notification. The Indian must have circled the torch in this manner for more than a score of times, when he threw it from his hand into the river, where it fell with a hiss, and was instantly extinguished.

The scout was in a quandary. If he continued down stream he must pass directly beneath the spot where his foe was standing, and the shadow was by no means dense enough to make it possible for him to escape observation. He was confident, however, that if he could change places with the warrior, he could discern the canoe without any closer approach. He was at a disadvantage, for the bluff was perfectly perpendicular and so high that he could not reach the ground above without retreating up the river for at least a quarter of a mile, where the bluff was depressed enough

to permit him to draw himself upward upon it. Had the bank been low and wooded, it would have been the easiest matter in the world to have shoved the canoe into the shelter, or to have circumvented the Indian by lifting it bodily from the water and going around him, and striking the river again below. But Tom hesitated only a few minutes. He was anxious to get forward, for delay was dangerous and he felt annoyed at the manner in which he was dogged.

"Here goes," he exclaimed, starting the canoe forward again. "If that Apache is anxious for a scrimmage, he can have one."



CHAPTER II.

[Table of Contents](#)

TOM HARDYNGE'S RUSE.

[Table of Contents](#)

Hardynge was too skillful a hunter to place himself directly in the way of the Apache whom he knew to be the most treacherous kind of an enemy. His purpose was to indulge in a little strategy and to seek to outwit the redskin, as he had done on many an occasion before. It required but a second for him to slide his rifle over upon his back, the stock being hastily wrapped with a leathern sheath, which he always carried for such an emergency, when he gently let himself over the stern of the canoe, taking care to make no splash or noise in doing so. He then permitted his body with the exception of his head to sink entirely beneath the surface, while he floated with the boat, lying in such a position that he made it effectually screen him from the view of any one who might be upon the bank above. It was hardly to be expected, however, that if the Indian saw the boat, he would permit it to pass unquestioned. Tom did not anticipate it, and he was prepared for that which followed. For several minutes the most perfect silence prevailed. At the end of that time, the scout knew that he was exactly beneath the spot whereon he had seen the answering signal, and scarcely stirred a muscle, keeping his head as close as possible to the boat, and so nearly submerged, that he could scarcely breathe.

"Hooh! hooh!"

The Apache had noted the empty canoe drifting below him in the shadow, and surveyed it with something of the feeling of the detective who suddenly stumbles upon a clue, the precise meaning of which is at first a mystery to him.

It is hardly to be supposed that he intended this outcry as a hail to the boat, which he must have seen contained no one. Its appearance would naturally suggest to one in his situation that the occupant had been alarmed by the signs of danger and had taken to the land. This supposition was so natural that Hardyng would probably have got safely by the dangerous point but for a totally unlooked-for mishap. The water, which up to this time had been fully six feet in depth, suddenly shallowed to less than a quarter of that, so that he struck his knees against the bottom. The shock was very slight, and scarcely caused a ripple; but it takes only the slightest noise to alarm an Indian, especially when he is on the watch. That faint splash caused by the jar of the body caught the ear of the listening, peering redskin, who instantly slid his body over the bluff, and balancing himself for an instant, dropped with such precision that he struck the canoe in the very center, and preserved its gravity so well that it tipped neither to the right nor left.

At the very moment the Apache dropped, the hunter rose to his feet, knife in hand. The water rose scarcely to his knees, and the bottom was hard, so that it was almost the same as if he stood upon dry land. The warrior had not time to recover from the slight shock of his leap, when Tom grasped him by the throat and used his weapon with such effect that it was all over in a few seconds.

"There! I reckon you won't go into the telegraph business again very soon!" he growled, as the inanimate body disappeared down the stream, and he coolly re-entered the canoe, which had floated but a short distance away.

He had scarcely done this when a new idea struck him, and, hastening after the receding body, he carefully drew it into the boat again. Here it was the work of but a few minutes to place it in a sitting position in the stern in the most natural posture imaginable, so that any one looking upon the figure would not have suspected for an instant that it was anything but an animate being. Making sure that its pose could not be improved, the scout then turned the boat directly away from the bank, never changing its course until the very middle of the Gila was reached, when he began paddling in as leisurely a manner as if no danger threatened. It was a daring stratagem, but it is only by such means that men are enabled to escape from peril, and although fully aware of the danger he was incurring, he kept on his way with that coolness that years of experience had given him.

As he approached a point opposite that where he had seen the first signal he did not turn his head, but he looked sideways and scanned the bank with the most searching scrutiny. Sure enough, at this moment he plainly discerned the figures of fully a half-dozen Indians standing upon the bluff and apparently watching the canoe with a curiosity that was natural.

"All right," thought the hunter; "so long as you let me alone I won't hurt you."

Had there been but the single occupant of the canoe the Apaches would not have stood debating in this fashion as to what they should do, if, indeed, they should do anything at all. Unity in the question would have shown that it was the identical individual for whom they were searching, for they knew that he was alone; but the fact that there were two, and both in the guise of Indians, could be explained upon no other hypothesis than that they were really what they seemed to be.

"Hooh! Hooh!"

It was precisely the same exclamation which had been uttered by the warrior who sat so cold and inanimate in the stern of the canoe, and Tom, without the least hesitancy, ceased paddling for the instant, straightened up, and responded in the same guttural fashion, resuming the use of the oar at the same time, as if he meant that that should be the end of it. But the Apaches immediately followed up their ejaculations with some other sounds, which were doubtless intended as a summons for the craft to heave to and "show her papers." Tom did not understand the Apache tongue well enough to comprehend the precise meaning of these words, although he was pretty well convinced of what the others were driving at. He did not dare to attempt to reply, nor did he dare to move faster; so he did the only dignified thing possible under the circumstances. He continued that automatic paddling, and, assisted by the current, was rapidly leaving his enemies in the rear when they called to him again, moving at the same time down the bank in a fashion which showed that they meant business. The hunter, not yet ready to make the desperate dash which he

had reserved for the last final effort, if he should be driven to the wall, ceased work again and called out:

"Hooh!"

He said it as impatiently as he could in the hope of "cutting off further debate," and resumed paddling, knowing that a comparatively short distance down the river the banks were so depressed that he could readily make his way from the boat to the land, so that after getting fairly below the Apaches his chances of ultimate escape were greatly increased.

The Indians must have been exasperated at the refusal, for Tom had taken scarcely a dozen strokes when he saw the flash of several guns upon the bank, and the whizzing of the bullets around his head left no doubt of the target at which they aimed.

"I can do somethin' of that myself," growled the hunter, as he laid down his paddle and took up his gun.

Without the least hesitation, he fired directly into the group, and the wild cry that instantly followed told with what a fatal result also. All diplomacy was ended by this act, and without pausing to reload his piece, he dropped his gun and bent to the task. The long ashen paddle was dipped deep into the water, and the light vessel shot like an arrow down stream. It seemed, indeed, to be imbued with life, and fairly skimmed over the surface. The unexpected and defiant response to the summons of the Apaches threw them into temporary bewilderment, and the minutes thus lost to them were golden ones gained to the fugitive, who shot the canoe as close to the opposite shore as was prudent, and wielded the paddle with the skill of a veteran.

Having now no need of the dummy that had stood him so well for the time, Tom did not hesitate to throw him overboard as a useless incumbrance, and, thus relieved of the dead weight, he sped forward with wonderful speed. In a short time after that the redskins had vanished from view, and almost any one would have supposed that the danger was passed; but Tom was well aware that it was only a temporary lull in the storm. The Apaches were like bloodhounds, who, having once taken the trail of their prey, would relax no effort so long as there was a chance of capturing him, and so he abated not a jot of his tremendous exertions.



CHAPTER III.

[Table of Contents](#)

PURSUED BY THE APACHES.

[Table of Contents](#)

As stealthily as a phantom did the canoe bearing the scout skim along the shore of the Gila, hugging the banks as closely as possible, so as to take advantage of the ribbon of shadow which followed the winding of the stream. The moon was creeping higher up the sky, and this advantage would soon be denied the fugitive altogether, so every minute was improved to the utmost. Now and then Tom ceased paddling, and as the boat shot forward with undiminished speed, bent his head and listened. This was continued until he had passed fully a quarter of a mile, when he rested for a longer time than usual.

"I guess they'll have to give it up," he said to himself, with a peculiar chuckle. "They ketched me in a bad box, that's sartin, where I couldn't climb out on either side. But things are a little better here," he added, as he looked from side to side at the bluffs, which were so low that the tops could be easily reached from his boat. "I don't much want to tramp over-land, but if it is necessary I've got somethin' of a chance, which isn't what I had before."

He might well prefer the water to the land; for on the former, whether he went fast or slow, there was no trail left for the keenest bloodhound to follow; on the latter it was impossible to conceal his most cautious footsteps from the eyes of the redskins. The surface of this portion of Arizona

was of such a nature that everything was against the hunter. There was no wood nor tributary streams for miles. If he left the Gila, and struck across the country, it would be over an open plain, where he could be seen for miles. He would be on foot, while his enemies would all be mounted on their fleet mustangs. How, then, could he elude them by leaving his boat? His only hope was in traveling at night, but night must always be followed by day.

"I wonder what ideas will creep into their skulls," he muttered, reflecting upon the view the Apaches had gained of him a short time before from the bank. "A dead Injun is a good deal better than a live one, as that 'ere critter proved to me. If I hadn't fired back agin, they might have thought I was one of their own warriors—mebbe they'll think so now. Great Scott!"

The scout was paddling along in his leisurely manner, when his eyes, by the merest accident, happened to rest upon the other shore, at a point a short distance below him. While thus looking, he saw distinctly a point of light appear and vanish three times! It performed no such gyration as those which he had first seen, but simply came forward and receded until it was gone altogether, leaving the same misty darkness as before. More by instinct than from any other cause, Tom turned his eyes to the point opposite where he had seen this exhibition. He had scarcely done so when precisely the same thing was seen!

"Jest what I expected," he said as he checked the downward progress of his boat. "The varmints have 'spicioned that one of the chaps in that 'ere canoe which passed before 'em is myself, and they're goin' for me like

lightnin'. They've mounted their horses, and kept it up till they knowed they'd struck a pint below me, and there they've signaled to each other that I'm still above 'em on the river, and still to be ketched."

The scout was certain that his theory was correct, and that, distasteful and dangerous as it might be, the time had come for him to leave the river. To continue further would be to precipitate a collision in which there was no possibility of the good fortune that had followed him in the first place. Besides this the night was so far advanced and the moon so high up in the sky, that the shadow had narrowed to a band which was practically useless.

"No use makin' faces when you've got a dose of medicine to take," he added, as he ran the canoe close to the shore.

There he found that by standing upon his feet he could easily reach the edge of the bluff above and thus draw himself up when he chose. This he proceeded to do, but he was too skillful a hunter to leave behind him such tell-tale evidence as the canoe itself would have proven. Were he to leave that as it was, it would be sure to catch the eye of the Apaches within a quarter of an hour and tell them precisely what had been done. And so, as the hunter hung thus by his hands, with his long rifle secured at his back, he caught the toe of his moccasin in the craft in such a way that it dipped and took water. He held it thus until it could contain no more; but its composition was such that even then it would not sink. There were loose boulders in the bank, and the hunter proceeded to drop these carefully into the boat below. It required several for ballast, when it quietly went to

the bottom, where it was certain to stay. This done he addressed himself to the task before him.

As he straightened up and looked off in the moonlight, a very discouraging, although familiar sight, met his eye. The moonlight was quite strong, and he was enabled to see objects indistinctly for a considerable distance. It was everywhere the same. A level, treeless prairie, where for miles there was not a drop of water to be obtained, and over which, as has been already shown, in case he attempted to make his way, he would be placed at the greatest disadvantage possible, especially as his own mustang was still a good hundred miles to the southwest, if he had succeeded in avoiding capture up to that time. But the life of a frontiersman, besides being perilous at all times, is hardly ever anything but disagreeable, despite the curious fascination which it holds for those who follow it. Tom did not hesitate a moment longer than was necessary, now that a disagreeable expedient was forced upon him.

His first precaution was to make sure that none of the Apaches were in sight. The point at which he had seen the answering signal was so far below that he was certain it would be beyond his vision, and, this much determined, gave him just the "leverage" needed to work upon. It needed but a few seconds to assure himself upon this point, and then he struck off to the southwest. This course, while it took him away from the Gila, would eventually bring him back to it, the winding of the stream being such as to make this junction certain, if continued. The great thing now required was haste; for a great deal depended upon the ground that could be passed over during these favoring

hours of darkness. He had taken scarcely a dozen steps when he struck into a long, loping trot, not particularly rapid in itself, but of such a character that it could be kept for hours at a stretch. It was the genuine Indian dog trot, which is so effective in long distances. As the runner went along in this fashion, his thoughts were busy, and all his senses on the alert. He concluded that it was nearly midnight, and that he had, consequently, a number of hours at his command; so he aimed to get as far below the intercepting Apaches as possible, with the intention of returning to the river, before daylight, where he was hopeful of discovering some canoe, or at least of hitting upon some feasible method of hiding his trail from his lynx-eyed pursuers.

This loping trot was kept up for fully two hours, at the end of which time Tom was certain that he was approaching the river again. He still pressed forward for another hour, when he came to a halt. Although he had continued this great exertion for so long a time, yet so good was his wind that when he paused there was no perceptible quickening of the respiration. Years of training had made him capable of standing far more trying tests of his strength than this. The scout carefully turned his head from side to side, looking and listening. All was still, and his ear caught no ominous sound. Then he moistened his finger and held it over his head. Yes, there was the least possible breath of air stirring, as was told him by the fact that one side of the moistened finger was slightly chilled. Everywhere, right, left, in front or rear, so far as the bright moonlight permitted his vision to extend, was the same dead level of treeless plain. Kneeling down he applied his ear to the ground. Could it be? There

was a sound thus carried to his ears—the very sound which above all others he dreaded to hear. It was a faint, almost inaudible, tapping upon the earth. Far away it was, but drawing nearer every minute.

The scout knew what it meant. It was the sound of horse's hoofs!



CHAPTER IV.

[Table of Contents](#)

OUTWITTED.

[Table of Contents](#)

"I'll match them Apaches agin the world for shrewd deviltry," exclaimed Hardyng, unable to suppress his admiration even in the moment which told him of his own increased personal danger. "By some hook or crook, the Old Boy only knows what, they've found out my game, and are after me. Ah! if I only had my mustang, Thundergust, with me!"

Tom now changed his direction more to the north, his intention being to strike the river much sooner than was his original purpose. It was the only thing he could do to escape the redskins, who showed such a wonderful skill in following him up.

As near as he could judge, something like ten miles still intervened between him and the friendly stream—a distance which he was confident of passing before daylight, if he did not find his pursuers in his path. The greatest care was necessary to keep out of the way of these creatures, and the fugitive had run but a short distance when he paused and applied his ear to the ground again. Only for an instant, however, when he bounded up and was off like a shot. The alarming sounds came to his ear with such distinctness as to prove that the Apaches were close at hand. Guided by some strange fatality, they were bearing directly down upon him at full speed. More than all, those pattering footfalls

were such as to indicate that the swarthy horsemen were not approaching in a compact group. They had separated so as to cover a wide area of ground, and were advancing in such an array that the difficulty of escape was increased tenfold. Everything conspired against poor Tom. The bright moonlight, the broad level stretch of plain, the fact that he was on foot, and his pursuers, besides being well mounted, were among the most skillful riders of the Southwest, made his situation about as desperate as it is possible to imagine.

A few minutes later the fugitive paused again, but this time it was not necessary that he should apply his ear to the ground. The sounds of the mustangs' hoofs came to him very plainly through the midnight air, and as he looked around he half expected to see the shadowy figures of the horsemen plunging forward in the gloom toward him! Nothing was to be seen, however, of them, and, feeling that the situation was becoming desperate, he changed his course again, his purpose being simply to get by the approaching marauders without caring in what direction he went. Had he been five minutes earlier he might have succeeded, but he was just that much too late.

He was stealing forward in his cautious manner, with the sound of the horses' hoofs growing more distinct every second, when, sure enough, the figure of an Indian horseman suddenly came in sight, bearing down upon him as straight as an arrow. The very instant Tom saw it he sank down upon his face, scarcely daring to hope that his pursuer would pass him, and prepared for whatever he chose to do.

The scout turned his head so that he could watch every movement and guard against it, his hand being extended