

aphixing vapors, rushed to the chamber to close the door that had been left open, but sank blindfold and overpowered upon threshold. It was with dimently that he could retrace his steps. He was gasping for breath like a drowning man when he rejoiced the anxious group below.

"That does mast be shot," said Podijah, "or we shall be smoked to death, like rats in a hole! I'll shoot it, or suffocate tryin' Was my fix, if I don't?"

The tall form of Podijah disappeared in the mass of smoke that rolled from above like thunderheads. There was a moment of intense anxiety, then the door was heard to close. Almost simultaneously Podijah tumbled down the stairs, covered with cinders, his face and hands blistered; and some of his white locks whited to ashes.

"Bravely done!" cried Jessie. "If you have not said us, you have at least given us reprieve."

"Don't praise me," returned Podijah. "The prides of a gal intonates me like ardent spirit—the posture the gal, the drunker it makes me. I never shall get away from this place alive if there's anything desperate I can do."

"Desperate" off'desperate" said Hunter. "We might cut our way through and save ourselves, perhaps, if there was nothin' of a feminine nature to look after; but these girls can't stand naked balls, nor they can't stand fire."

"Heavens!" exclaimed Paul. "What shall we do?—not for ourselves, but for these poor girls."

"Escape as you can through the darkness; and as far as we girls, we will trust to the mercy of the enemy, and yield ourselves prisoners," answered Jessie, eagerly.

"Yes, we'll trust ourselves to the hands of the Tories," said Judith and Ruth hurriedly.

"You will but it's poor trust," returned Hunter, looking compassionately at the three girls. "It'll be miserably mercy you'll get from them. No, not we can't think of that!"

"Good bless you, Tom Hunter, no! We can't indeed, think of that. We will die, if it's the Heaven's will, for these dear and helpless ones but forsake them, never!"

A loud shout arose from without. The Tories were exulting in their success.

"What must be done?" asked Paul, in anxiety of mind.

"We can do naughts," replied Hunter. "Remain here and be burnt, or rush out and be shot."

"Well neither be burnt nor shot," returned Podijah stoutly. "I'm bound to live as long as uppers and unders. I hold together. I don't go to knock under in the mornin' of my days, by gawd! I know that as high is grass, but I don't want my grass cut while it's so green. I'll hold on to existence to the last gash, I swear! Tom Hunter, I'm goin' to eat just about my biggest and the biggest of every thang's through the tarsal Tories, a little quicker you see, and hold ahead a bay when there's a thunder-shower comin' up, I'll roar home!"

Laurie stood. House shook with the violence of the devouring flames which had eaten through the roof and now enveloped tile and rafters. While the group looked up in alarm, a red sword of fire was thrust down through the ceiling.

"It is the burning world! It warms us from our Paradise!" said Jessie.

"Nay," said Paul, impressively, "some of us may be going to an eternal Paradise."

The fire above growled angrily in answer, and the black smoke curled into the room like the rank and destructive breath of a demon.

"I'd such man as that his weapon is loaded. Take care, gal! Stand back as far as you can from the flame and smoke. There's a harbin' under on your dress, Miss Ruth—it isles!"

"It is out," said Podijah, emphatically, smothering the incipient glow with his great hands.

"We must rush out two abreast," said Hunter. "Podijah and I will go first. Harken, you, Joe and Blitche keep near the ladies. Blitche, be brave, and use those large arms of yours to some purpose—give 'em the contents of the blunderbuss in the face and eyes, then stab it and break their heads."

"Yes, morn Tom. This chil' know what he bout. Hunter feard dat hangin', jist. Thought I'd do for dat time. Oh, gally, didn't it last when they set me up to de limb! Poured to stop my breffles. You stand by me, morn Tom, and I'll help you. You Lord won't make die-blunderbuss speak to 'em, de minnie I hab a chance to wignitly cross de night."

The parties were now driven to the remotest corner of the room by their new and treacherous enemy, which was gathering strength and ferocity with frightful rapidity. Hunter unfastened the door, and the fresh access of the air gave additional force to the conflagration. He dashed a moment alone in the surging smoke, but a shot was fired from the concealed and watching foe.

"There is no help for it," added Tom. "We must try, now or never, Podijah!"

"At yourself!" responded the Yankee. "We must try it now or never, Podijah!"

"I am at 'tis," responded the Yankee, who had himself to danger as if he had been accustomed to it from childhood.

The walls shook with the vehemence of the fire, and there was a warning crack and groan among the grunting juntas and trembler rafter.

"The roof will fall in a moment!" cried Hanselburg. "We are ready. Quick, Hunter, quick!"

The heart of Tom Hunter quailed with courage and resolution; his form dilated; his nose was quivered by the contact.

"Do the right, friends—as the right!—Keep under the smoke as much as you can, and stop as you can."

They glided unhesitating to the end of the ceiling.

"Now for the slumbery in the direction of home," whispered Hunter.

A mere appearance. Dear young lad, so brave!—admitted Paul, whose steady bearing and fathoming eyes told that he was really in battle for the fair being under her protection.

"Now for a dash—dash, faster—stop—give as small a dash as the smoke can possibly give."

When two or three rods from the burning building, the flames shot up with increased brilliancy, blinding wavering glare upon the fugitives. A dozen men sprang from the grass and foliage to intercept their progress.

"Gasp!" shrieked a voice that was starkly familiar to Jessie Bertrand.

"Down!" thundered Hunter, springing toward him with a fierce look, and seizing a hand at his head with his rifle. Jessie was staggered and fell on one knee. The tall Yankee pressed by the side of Hunter, and the fiery blitche sat at his feet.

"Here at you, you foul scoundrel! Paul Molyneux didn't come out here for nuthin'. Come on—a dozen of ye at once!"

There's a score of airthquakes shut up in my bones!"

"Shoot down the rebels—shoot 'em down!" cried Vantastic, over whose prostate form four stout fellows were contending.

Blinko discharged his blunderbuss, and the scattering storm of buckshot wounded several.

"Seize the gal! seize the gal!" shouted Langford.

"I'm with you!" exclaimed Nat Herrick, and both approached the terror-stricken girls.

"Oh, Paul, save us from those wretches!" shrieked Judith.

"Here's for you, Master!" said Herrick, leveling a pistol at Paul. A bullet whistled close to the young man's face, who, putting himself between the young ladies and the villains, held them at bay. His person was the target for a dozen furious blows, which, with surprising adroitness, he turned aside and baffled.

The four men were now engaged in an unequal conflict.

"Fly to the swamp, girls, while we keep the miscreants in check!" announced Hunter.

The maidens ran like frightened deer, but their defenders had the mortification to see two Tories in pursuit of them, without being able to go to their assistance. Over-powered by numbers, they gave ground, but inch by inch. They were maimed and bleeding before they began to despair.

"Take 'em alive, boys! take 'em alive, that we may have the pleasure of hangin' 'em!" shouted Vantastic.

A single rifle shot rang sharp and deadly through the air. A Tory, who was pressing hard upon Hunter, threw up his arms and fell dead at the feet of his comrade.

"Hounds of hell!" cried a thunderous voice. "You love blood, and slaughter and carnage; you shall have it!"

An athletic man, with a black patch over his left eye, a rifle slung at his back, a pistol in each hand, and a large sabre swinging at his side, appeared in the ranks of the Tories as if he had suddenly fallen from the clouds. He fired his pistols and unsheathed his sabre.

"Tremble, miscreants, for One-eyed Saul is among you."

The sabre flashed like lightning around the stranger's head. The tones of his voice, the fierceness of his countenance, and the fatality of his arm, struck terror and consternation to the hearts of the Tory remnants. The survivors turned and fled for life.

"Cowards! wretches! come back, and I will meet you single-handed!"

The eyed Saul looked wildly around and laughed mockingly, then turning to Hunter, and his panting and bleeding companion, and pointing in the direction the girls had fled, exclaimed:

"Way do you stand here? After them—after them, for they need your help—There are shrieks yonder; away—away! It is Saul of Laurel Swamp, that commands you. I have work to do. I must go this way and that way, and there is no rest for my head this night!"

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