

Fronting the cabin, beyond the maize field and the rich green grass and the placid stream, rose two hills, steep and thickly wooded, and between them ran a narrow, winding, and rocky pass. Down this gorge, to the listening pioneer, now came a confused and trampling sound.

"It is iron striking against the rocks!" he announced. "The hoofs of horses" —

"Iron!" cried his wife. "The horses in Virginia go unshod! And what should a troop of horse do here, beyond the frontier, where even the rangers never come?"

The man shook his head, a frown of perplexity upon his bronzed and bearded face. "It is the sound of the hoofs of horses," he said, "and they are coming through the pass. Hark!"

A trumpet blew, and there came a noise of laughter. The child pressed close to her brother's side. "Oh, Robin, maybe 't is the fairies!"

Out from the gloom of the pass into the sunshine of the valley, splashing through the stream, trampling the long grass, laughing, and calling one rider to the other, burst a company of fifty horsemen. The trumpet blew again, and the entire party, drawing rein, stared at the unexpected maize field, the cabin, and the people about the door.

Between the intruders and the lonely folk, whose nearest neighbors were twenty miles away, was only a strip of sunny grass, dotted over with the stumps of trees that had been felled lest they afford cover for attacking savages. A man, riding at the head of the invading party, beckoned, somewhat imperiously, to the pioneer; and the latter, still with his musket in the hollow of his arm, strode across the greensward,