

cannot fire with any degree of precision; and if we can keep them off for a little time longer, we will yet be saved."

The blackguards were evidently greatly taken aback by seeing their two companions tied fast and prisoners; but the two worthies soon explained the matter, with many hideous oaths and deep vows of vengeance against Arthur and me. As soon as they were let loose, the one who was called Jack said to his companions—

"New then mates, the sooner we finish this here job the better, for that there wench won't be long before she brings the whole 'camp' down on us, like a swarm of ants. Now I votes, mates, that we just get a hold of the two downy coves wots been and hidden away in that room, pointing to where we were.

Without more words they came on towards us, each with a pistol ready. I do not know what Arthur felt, but my pulses throbbed, and my ears seemed to be full and bursting; but my hand was as steady as ever, and my nerves like steel.

"Now then, I muttered in a hoarse low tone, remember—fire at the man on the left and aim low, and don't hurry."

Raising our pistols, we both fired together. The man that I fired at gave a sudden shudder and fell forward on his face, shot dead; and Arthur's man, shot through the breast, but not killed, staggered and nearly fell. The others drew back, taken by surprise; but only for a moment, for, firing their pistols towards us, they again rushed to storm our little stronghold.

"Fire again—quick, Arthur!" I cried, as I leveled my pistol, and pulled the trigger.

There was but one report, and another of the ruffians fell, either killed or badly hurt. This time the gang drew back, evidently thinking it was not safe to trifle with us.

Then I found Arthur was wounded in the arm, not dangerously, but sufficiently to prevent his being of much use should the fellows again make a charge on us. This, however, they seemed not inclined to do; and we could hear them discussing what was best to be done. One suggested firing at us volleys on the chance of maiming or killing us; but one, with greater ingenuity, proposed setting fire to the house, and either burning us alive, or, as he said, 'smoking the——things out, like a pair of 'Bandicots' in a hollow log.' This idea was received with general satisfaction, and preparations were at once commenced to carry it out. Logs and scrub were piled up against the walls of the wooden house and lighted in many places at once. The dry wood soon caught and in a few minutes was blazing bright and clear, but fortunately for us, with little or no smoke. Still, the heat was intense and suffocating, and in a very few moments more would have either become unbearable and driven us out to meet certain death at the hands of the cruel ruffians who stood around the house, laughing and jesting at our sufferings, or have consumed us where we were, with no chance of escaping from torture the most agonizing and horrible imaginable.

After a brief consultation, we agreed to rush out and face death at once, rather than bear the dreadful fate waiting for us. Hastily I tied Arthur's shattered arm to his side, and then, shaking one another by the hand, we were on the point of rushing through the flames, when we heard shots fired, and soon voices.

The police had come! How they captured the bushrangers I know not; except from heresay; for as we ran through the fire, blinded by