

While he desired to live at peace with them he determined not to fall as his father had fallen if he could help it. Like most people in that section, and at that time, he went armed when away from home; and besides being one of that class of persons scarcely susceptible of fear, he was one of the best shots with a rifle or a pistol in that community.

One evening in autumn, just at dusk, a few months after the marriage, he was riding home from the village on a spirited horse, when the Morgans suddenly came into his mind. He thought over the strange history of the two families, and began talking to himself as he rode leisurely along:

"How unfortunate—how foolish it is," he mused, "that this enmity should exist through whole generations, morely because remote ancestors quarreled over a line of fence, or the ownership of a truant pig! They hate me; I do not fear them, yet I'd like to be reconciled. I think I shall see them and talk it over. I believe I could reason them into fairness. How to approach them, though—"

He was then riding by a little grove of timber, from which three men sprang into the road. One grasped the bridle-rein, while two stood with rifles leveled upon him. It was not yet so dark but that he recognized his assailants. They were the Morgans. It was Ephraim who held his bridle-reign, while his father and James menaced him with their rifles.

"Oh, Hazen!" said the old man, with an air of triumph, "we've got you! You won't see the sun rise to-morrow, you independent young dog! You'll be with your father before that. What's more, you'll steal no more daughters of mine. Stop that. Don't offer to reach for that shooter!" he said, as Martin's hand moved towards his breast pocket. "At best you've but a minute to live while I tell you why I am going to shoot you, and how glad I am to wipe out the last Hazen; but none of your tricks, or you won't live a second!"

Martin Hazen, sitting in the saddle with the calmness of the tall trees by the road-side that looked in the gathering darkness like grim spectres frowning upon the terrible scene, felt that it was no time now to reason with his enemies, and he dismissed the thought. He waited, motionless, for Henry Morgan to speak again, for he knew that the revengeful man would love to gloat over him before destroying him, and that his sons would wait his command. Henry Morgan, with the rifle still leveled, went on:

"Yes, young Hazen, the last of your race—"

Quick as a flash, Martin snatched his revolver from his pocket, and dropping his face upon his horse's mane to confuse the aim of Henry and James Morgan, he fired at Ephraim, who fell to the earth; and the horse, startled by the crack of the revolver at his ear, dashed away at full speed.

Almost simultaneously, Henry Morgan fired at Martin's head, missing him; and a moment later, James, much confused by the sudden turn of affairs, fired almost at random, and the bullet pierced Martin's left thigh. He had not gone far before he discovered that the shot had broken the bone, and he began to suffer such excruciating pain that only the danger which he knew was still behind him and his realization of how important it was to reach home prevented him from reeling from the saddle in a swoon.

He succeeded in reaching home, to be met at

the gate by his mother, who told him that in his absence Esther had been forcibly carried away by her father and brothers. Martin fell rather than dismounted from his horse, dragged him into the lawn, and with the words: "The Morgans have shot me," fell fainting upon the grass.

Mrs. Hazen hurried to a neighbor's house for assistance. A surgeon was summoned. Martin was carried in and laid upon a bed. He revived and his wound was properly attended to, with appliances of splints and bandages; and the good doctor finally left him that night in great pain with the consoling remark that he would keep him bed for a good three months, at least.

For many days several armed friends of Martin Hazen remained constantly at the house, to defend him from a possible attack of the Morgans.

Martin began to recover from his wound, but his anxiety for Esther tormented him day and night. He feared they might murder her; but his friends assured him that they would not dare to do that, that she was probably merely kept at her old home under strict surveillance, and that in due time she would be rescued by some process or other.

It was ascertained, meantime, that Ephraim Morgan was not killed by the bullet from Martin's revolver on the night of the attempted assassination; that the missile had only ploughed its way through the scalp of his cranium, producing a shock that had merely stunned him for half an hour. Finally when Martin was able to get out of bed and sit in a chair for a few minutes at a time, the Morgans not having made an appearance, the friendly neighbors left, and Martin was alone with Mrs. Hazen.

It was the very next night after the vigil ceased that the door suddenly flew open and Esther burst into the room occupied by Martin. It was a room on the ground floor, properly a sitting-room, but the bed had been placed in it temporarily for the wounded young man.

"Esther," Martin exclaimed joyfully. She ran to his bed-side, kissed him, then said excitedly:

"Oh, Martin, they are preparing to come to-night to kill you! I overheard their plans, and escaped by jumping from the window of a room they had locked me in. They don't know it."

"Let us hasten for aid," said Mrs. Hazen, who came in from an adjoining room at that moment.

"It is too late. They may be here in a few minutes. We must carry Martin out of the house. Oh, Heavens!" she exclaimed, trembling from head to foot; "I hear their horses' hoofs now—they are not a hundred yards away."

"Be calm," said Martin. "I will tell you what to do, and do it quickly. Mother, you and Esther help me, and I will get out and lie under the bed. Then arrange the pillow under the covers so that I may think I am lying in the bed, then both of you go into the next room. They will probably run in and fire, and I will crawl out with my revolver. Here it is. Then they with their empty rifles, will be at my mercy. Now leave the candle burning on the mantel. When I rap three times on the wall come in."

These instructions were obeyed, and as the two women withdrew, Esther said:

"You won't kill them if you can help it?"

"No, I promise you that. Quick, now, I hear them!"

The women withdrew, and had just closed the door behind them, when the front door flew open and the Morgans rushed in.