

Our Boys and Girls BY AUNT BECKY

The Secret of the Silver Lake

By Henry Frith, Author of "Under Bayard's Banner," "For King and Queen," etc.

CHAPTER II.—Continued.

As the men advanced the old woman went to meet them. Some other women came out from their huts or shelter, and guarded Amy.

"We are in a terrible fix," said Ernie; "do you think we shall be killed, Amy?"

"Oh, Ernie, no: don't talk like that! The man—Scout, isn't he?—will help us. You are in more danger than I am—they will keep me here. So you must try and run away, bring help, and save me. Do you understand?"

"Yes; but—" "Hush! here they come. Make friends with Scout and he will get you away."

"I will give him my watch," said Stephen—"he is a good man, I think. Oh, here are the horrid creatures."

Stephen was not far wrong. The men were not nice; indeed none of the people were exactly the ladies and gentlemen whom one would invite to a Christmas-tree party or to tea in the nursery.

He was called Rangitiva, which means in his language Chief. The man was very brown, very tall and strong. His face was tattooed with curious marks, which Stephen afterwards heard had a meaning, and indicated rank or lineage.

Stephen's heart sank, a terrible thrill made his blood run cold. "Torture! oh, no! They would not! I do no harm! What will they do? Kill us!"

"Not at once. They will perhaps tie you down in the swamp yonder, and let the mosquitoes sting you to death—or—Hush!" he cried. "Wait; let me listen again!"

The chief was speaking in a loud voice. He said—addressing the old woman—"O Mother, thou art right! A beautiful girl of the strangers has come amongst us from the Great Atua to give us back our land and treasures. Treat her well. She is of Ruapehu. (Ruapehu is a volcano—the abode of deities). The Paheka men are dogs—let them die, or enjoy the torture. The Koriri (Council) shall decide. These are my words."

The Scout whispered to Amy that she was safe, but when Ernest asked him what the chief had said, he only shook his head and the lady lost heart.

"Where would you go if you got away?" he asked. "To our uncle Manton, on the Wanganui," replied Ernest, forgetting that he was talking to a man who was half native, half American; though, fortunately, the American half was the stronger.

movement was made at the sound of a kind of gong. It was really a wooden tambourine, not the Chinese kind of gong; and at the sound all the warriors collected in the wide open space.

But when the dance commenced it was so peculiar as to be impossible to describe. It was almost funny, but terrible, to see all the painted warriors, a great number, sit down in lines and suddenly jump up and then begin kicking up their legs and jumping like so many dozens of "Jim Crows."

Then Stephen and Ernest were seized and carried back into the camp, where "Scout," as they called the man, had remained. The chief was much excited, and when the lads were brought before him, he said something which the interpreter told the boys meant that they should be tied to stakes and tortured.

"Oh, Scout, help us!" cried Stephen. "What must we do?" "Have you your fire-eating trick ready?" asked the Scout.

"Yes. I can manage it presently. Tell them something; save us if you can, please, please do!"

Then the man said to the chief, "O Rangitiva, beware how you hurt these sons of the Pahekas! They can bring fire from their mouths and burn the Maori and his camp!"

"It is false," replied the chief. "If the Paheka can bring fire from his mouth, let him show it, or he shall suffer the torture by fire himself!"

The Scout told this to the boys, and then Stephen, who had been making ready some string, which he had prepared for his conjuring tricks, and some tow, pulled some of the tow and spread it out. The natives who had gathered round looked at this, and the American man, Scout, at Stephen's request, made them examine it.

Ernie did not hesitate a moment; but it was one thing to be told to come quickly, and another to go away quickly.

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