

CHRISTMAS "FURTHER ON"

But the tune died on his lips as two figures arose suddenly in his path and he found his hands tied behind him. Then, quick as a flash, a dozen of his neighbors stood around him, and the first two were fighting fiercely. He loosed his hands, or someone cut the cord, he never knew; but there was a flash, one of the ruffians had fired, and he saw among his defenders a slight form fall to the ground. There was a minute's silence, then a dozen men fell on the two and tied them securely, and shook them, using fierce and bitter words. Hugh bent over the wounded lad. "Silas, and you are hurt defending me. I thought to-night you were angry with me about something." The lad's face grew deathly pale as they tore away his clothes. Would he die with his secret unspoken?

In a few rapid words the neighbors spoke to each other of the part he had taken in the rescue, of the bitter sacrifice, the sorrow of friends. For well they knew no doctor could heal the wound now, as his life blood ebbed away while they vainly tried to staunch it.

"Hold my hand fast, Hugh," he murmured like a drowsy child, "and tell Ruth I love her, but I give her to you."

His voice sank lower, there was a hush among that crowd of stalwart men who wept silently, and as the moon rose and shone on the scene, adding