

couple of weeks, until the miserable blunder, that was the cause of his present confinement, suddenly put an end to everything pleasant.

While he stood thus engrossed in thought, still fingering his hair, and gazing out at the stars that were already shining, Merriman suddenly came to the conclusion that he must, if at all possible, get out of his predicament. And yet the question that perplexed him was *how* was it to be accomplished? He was possessed of a deepening conviction that the trouble of that morning had arisen through the fault of one of the other regiments, and yet the blame had fallen upon him, in some inconceivable manner. He didn't know just what they might do with him; possibly they might shoot him. At the thought he clenched his fist, and looked about to see if there was not something that would enable him to force his way out. He felt certain he could set matters right, if only he could get to headquarters. Still he knew the place he was in sufficiently well to feel assured that it would be idle for him to attempt an escape. The west side of the building, where he was, stood on the edge of a ravine filled with rocks. It was an old mansion or castle; he did not know just which, and just at present was being used to quarter some of the officers of the regiments, and also, as Merriman was too well aware, as a place of temporary confinement for himself.

While he was wondering what he could do, and debating in his mind whether, if he had a real opportunity to escape, he would do so or no, he heard the key turn in the lock, and saw someone enter the room. In the dim light he gradually made out that it was Tom Ossington. Ossington belonged to one of the other regiments, but professed a friendship for Merriman that the latter was a little dubious just how to accept; besides, Ossington's smile was like his eye—there was something about it that Merriman could not like; it made him uneasy, and yet, when he had been with Ossington for a time, he seemed to forget his prejudice, and tried to make himself believe that it was aroused by having seen him with Eva Stafford on one or two occasions. When he had made out who his visitor was, however, he said: "Well, Ossington, I'm mighty glad to see you," which was true, for the confinement was becoming tiresome. Ossington made no reply for a moment, but moved toward a little table that was standing near the window, and as the dim light shone upon his countenance, Merriman fancied he saw a half-cynical smile play on his visitor's lips. He was reassured by the frank voice, however, when Ossington said clearly and distinctly: "Merriman, I've come to help you out. The officers are having a merry time to-night, and unless you get out of this, things are likely to go rough with you to-morrow. Here's your chance, but don't attempt it for half an hour." With that he placed something on the table, turned and walked out, and then locked the door. Merriman heard his footsteps gradually die away, as he walked down the corridor.

For a moment he stood in wonder, then slowly turned to the little table. A rope ladder! The very fulfilment of his wish! With feverish haste he fumbled for the end of the ladder, but when he found it, he remembered that he had been told to wait half an hour. He turned and looked out of the window. There was a light in the room he believed was Eva Stafford's. Could he have seen her then and known her thoughts

he would have seen her sitting at her desk wondering what she could do to help George Merriman out of his trouble; she was sure he was not in fault. But poor Merriman knew nothing of it. He gazed a moment longer, then turning with a look of set determination on his face, he pulled off his coat and then his boots. "Hang the half-hour," he said, "I don't see that that can make any difference," and seizing the rope-ladder, he hurriedly passed it out of the window, as a man does a fishing-line, when he is trolling. Soon he came to the end, which he quickly but securely fastened to a heavy bar across the sill, and with one more glance to the lighted window, and a short prayer to Heaven, he sprang upon the broad sill and looked into the dark ravine below. He could not see the end of his ladder. Slowly he turned upon his side, and with trembling limbs sought the first rung. The slim ladder swayed and swung as his weight was thrown upon it, and his heart seemed to leap into his throat, as he felt something slip. He thought it was the bar. The moon was just peeping over a distant hill, and as the light increased, Merriman's form was distinctly outlined against the rough, grey wall, as he slowly and carefully made his way, step by step, down the slender ropes. Sometimes they seemed to slip, and he expected to be dashed on the rocks below, but it was only the knots tightening with his weight, and as he stopped to look, he saw that he was half way down. "Thank heaven," he said, "a few minutes more and I'll be safe." The rough stones cut his fingers, and they were bleeding; the thin rope felt like a sharp edge on his feet, but with the hope of freedom sustaining him, he struggled on. And now he was at least two-thirds of the way down; the moon shone full upon the wall, and he thought he might hasten. He put his foot upon the next rung; he was just about to loosen his grasp above, when something slipped! Merciful heaven! For a moment he knew not whether he had fallen or no; he felt his heart pounding at his side like a sledge-hammer, and then he heaved a deep sigh; he was still on the ladder, but a glance showed him that it was the last rung that had slipped and fallen; the ladder was too short by many feet! Then it all came to him like a flash; he saw through it all; Ossington had played him false; his first impressions were true. After a moment's rest, Merriman, with characteristic determination, set his teeth and started the perilous ascent. How he accomplished it he never knew. He used to say afterwards that it was all like a dream. But at last he reached the window-sill once more; he rested for a moment, then drew in the rope-ladder, and as he let himself down to the floor, he saw a form in the clear moonlight come from behind a line of rock by the road, and look toward the wall. "Yes," he said, "the half hour is up," and fell in a dead faint upon the floor.

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Little else remains to be told. The blame attached to the blunder of a few days previous was truly located on the morning on which George Merriman was to have been tried by court-martial, and so he was set free. They had found him next morning very weak, but conscious. Only Tom Ossington himself ever knew what was in his own heart, but it had a great effect on him, when Merriman frankly forgave him. He wept, and somehow the cynical smile and the bad eye seemed to soften into something more tender and sweet after that. Perhaps that wasn't the only reason, for,