

man, stand forth. I want to speak with thee."

There was no reply from the forest depths.

"Is Gray Rabbit there?" he called again.

A tall, half-naked dark form seemed to spring up from nowhere, not six paces away.

"Ha! Now Gray Rabbit, thou art the chief of this marauding band. I will make terms. What dost thou want?"

The Indian shook his head rapidly from side to side, emitting several short guttural sounds that Desborough seemed to understand.

"So thy people are hungry. Well, dost expect to eat us?"

The chief stood in stoical silence.

"I repeat man, dost propose to give us for meat? Art a cannibal? Harken! I will give thee a hundred bags of corn, Captain Blake will do the same, and each of the others will give something—venison, pork, or beef. We have barely sufficient for ourselves this winter, but we will part with half for the sake of peace. Draw off thy band and this shall be done."

The only reply to this offer was an arrow sent straight at Desborough's head. It glanced off leaving a nasty flesh wound on the brow, that rained blood at once. He lost no time in withdrawing and barring the door again. Then followed immediately such a hideous yelling, accompanied by such a hissing rain of arrows that it seemed as though the air were filled with the sound. The guns steadily belched forth their answer. Red forms fell here and there, but others quickly took their places. From the forest all about, they poured forth upon the clearing, in teeming numbers. The cabin was surrounded. The small glass panes of the six windows were broken in and dark faces appeared in the apertures. They were shot down quickly, but more sprang up. The powder was giving out. Half-an-hour of fierce fighting, of speeding arrows and rapid shooting, of wild screeching and soft praying sped away like five minutes.

"I fear our ammunition is getting low," whispered one of the gunners, to Desborough.

"Have at them while it lasts!" he growled.

Blake stumped about from window to loophole upon his wooden leg, filling the posts of three men who had been wounded. The women had now come to the aid of the remaining fighters. Mistress Ogilvie wielded a huge knife to some purpose, and the battle hung at uncertain balance, with the odds, if any there were, in favor of the palefaces. Then the Indians, finding it a losing game as the morning advanced toward dawn, with a hundred of their band lying dead in the snow, approached with lighted faggots which they applied to the jutting logs at the corners of the cabin. Smoke that was not the smoke of powder rose, and presently flames leaped into view. The faces of the men grew a shade paler, and a few of the women moaned and clasped their infants closer in their arms. The flames were darting merrily about the lower part of the cabin, and the interior was becoming insufferably warm; the red-skinned demons had commenced a hideous dance in the front upon the clearing when of a sudden was heard the welcome sound of galloping hoofs.

It put new heart into the besieged. A last volley from the loopholes poured forth, and concurrently came some encouraging shouts from the road. In three minutes a score of riders galloped into view, their figures clearly outlined against the brightening eastern sky. In the van rode a tall man wrapped in a belted great coat with a squirrel skin cap upon his head, and into the seething mass of darting, dancing savages was sent a cannonade from twenty fresh guns that took such toll of them the clearing was left free of few but prostrate forms. Calling for buckets the horsemen galloped to the creek. The thin ice was broken and the buckets filled and passed from one pair of willing hands to another. The settlers threw, also, armfuls of snow against the burning logs, and after much rapid labor,

with the hissing of the quenched element and the shouting of one man to another filling the morning air, the fire died down. Little actual damage had been done. The lower structure was charred and smoking, the windows all broken, but the building was otherwise intact.

"Blessings, blessings upon thee!" fervently spoke Captain Blake to the leader of the reinforcements.

"We galloped the full sixteen miles," said one, "this fellow would not show mercy to man or beast till we reached here."

"Come in and eat and drink," cried a woman, soon coming to the door. The men swarmed into the smoke-filled house, but their leader sprang into his saddle again.

"Whither away in such haste?" demanded John Desborough, catching the bridle of the tall, black horse.

The stranger bent downward a moment and whispered something.

"Zounds man, what care we?" cried Desborough. "There are none here but wish thee goodwill. Thou'rt the hero of the day, man! See, 'tis already coming dawn. Have breakfast and rest a bit, then—"

"Nay, nay," persisted the rider, gathering up the reins. At this moment Elizabeth appeared in the cabin doorway. "A cup of hot coffee, lass!" cried Desborough. "Here is one that cannot wait."

The girl disappeared, and in a moment re-appeared with the coffee and a gen-

erous loaf. Only when she had reached the bridle did she recognize her preserver of the night before.

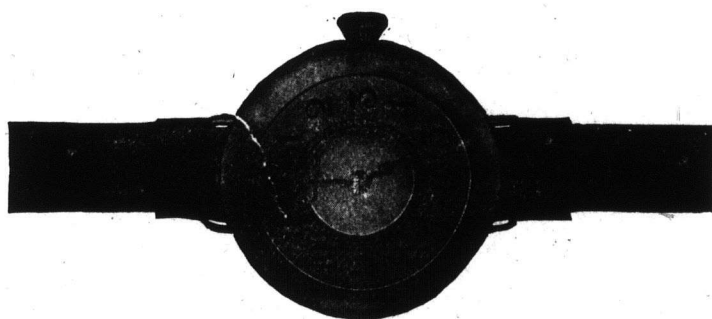
"Here stands the fairest lass in all the colony," said Desborough. "Wilt not remain and be served a proper breakfast from her hands?"

"That in faith would need no urging," replied the rider, "but that I may not permit myself the pleasure—alas! Thanks, fair lady, that draught has warmed me through. Farewell!"

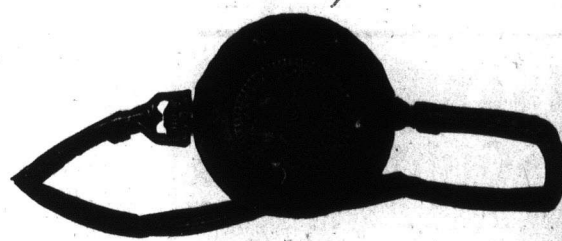
And with a low obeisance the tall stranger rode away towards the rising sun.

Dawn—the Christmas dawn—broke rosy and clear. York village lay in smouldering ruins, as did the homes of

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