

John Howe of Seven Truck.

When Hook-and-Ladder Truck No. 7, of the New York Fire Department, bent around the corner into Lexington Avenue, two men were at the open window of the second floor of No. 94, the burning house. They gesticulated wildly, their open mouths screaming unheard cries for help; then smoke from the first floor poured up, choking them and diving them back out of sight.

No one in the streets had noticed these men. It was in the dawning of a dark morning, about six o'clock of January 2nd, 1897, and the few people out before the burning house were neighbours, men and women, busily trying to rescue their children and furniture and clothing from No. 96 and contiguous houses in the three-storied row. On Hook-and-Ladder Truck No. 7 there were two notably 'ert firemen—John F. Howe, the driver, and James Pearl, the man on the tiller. Both saw the endangered men, although they were the busiest of the crew at that moment, for How had three horses to swing at full gallop around the corner, while Pearl had the hind wheels to steer, away out under the long, spindling ladders.

Perhaps the work of driving and steering on a hard run made them more wide-a-woke than their mates or so they modestly explained it. But some men are always seeing chances to do good things, while others as habitually miss them. Howe and Pearl are of "the sort who get medals," as the firemen say, and indeed Howe had received the New York medal for bravery in 1896. He wanted another, what good man would not be keenly glad to get medals denoting that he had saved human lives? Pearl had the same hunger for life-saving—and medals. They were rivals, brave men, and good friends.

As his team thundered up to this fire at No. 94 Lexington Avenue, Howe thought that Pearl probably saw as well as he the chance to save those men on the second floor. But as Pearl could not leave his post at the tiller till the truck stopped, the driver had some hope of beating him.

Howe understood the situation at a glance. The back of the house was ablaze to the roof; in front the flames were in control of the high basement and the first floor. Tongues of fire were occasionally shooting up along the walls outside to the second story. In its most northerly window the man had appeared. No ladder could stand there. The only approach was through the next house in the row, No. 96, the house south of No. 94, and divided from it by only a brick partition wall.

Howe jammed down his brake and pulled up when his seat was just opposite the door of No. 96; thus he was nearer than Pearl to the door, nearer by the length of the truck. As the horses strained back on their haunches Howe called to a man on the sidewalk to hold them, at the same moment he leaped from his seat and ran. He must run fast if he would be first in saving the men, for Pearl started at the same instant from the end of the truck for the door of No. 96.

On the steps of the house they came together with a bump, but Howe got his shoulder in ahead and away he went up the stairs. He met frightened men and women coming down in half-crazed confusion, laden with bundles of clothes and dragging trunks. Over these he leaped or climbed as fast as he could, and close behind him he could hear the jumping and the clatter of Pearl.

Howe rushed into the front room and straight for the south window. He battered out the sash and stood up with his body outside, grasping the lintel with his hand. At that instant he felt Pearl's grasp on his leg.

"Go on, you lucky dog! growled Pearl. I'll hold your confounded leg." So How reports his hearty comrade.

Pearl a bulky, powerful man over six feet tall, was able unaided to hold Howe, but for precaution's sake he yelled to the tenants who were saving trunks, and bullied some of them into standing by to lend a hand if needed.

As for Howe, he now saw that he could not save the man except by a most dangerous feat, one requiring amazing skill, strength courage—and good luck in the bargain.

Almost under him—away down at the lower part of the tall basement—an iron fence with sharp pickets rose between the two houses. It ran out to the street from their front wall; it was exactly half-way between the window in which he stood and that in which the men stood; if he should fall in reaching out for them he must fall to death on the spear-like pickets.

Howe did not hesitate an instant. The imperilled men were again screaming in the next window. The north end of its sill, projecting three inches, was five feet from the sill on which he stood. He tried to reach to it with his foot, holding meanwhile to the lintel with one of his hands. His back was to the street, and when he got rest for his foot on the other sill he was standing directly over the pickets, splayed out wide, one hand grasping the sash of the window of No. 96, and his weight partly supported by Pearl, who grasped Howe by the leg and by

the waistband of his trousers.

"Come on now, you fellows, he yelled, "and be quick about it! Hey there!" His free hand was clutching for them.

A head appeared—that of Max Henschel; it had been scorched; the hair and mustache were mostly gone. Henschel crouched on the sill, trembling at the breath of the flames, but he reached out to Howe who clutched him with one hand, and pressing him against the wall with his body, passed him on to the clutch of Pearl, who jerked him into the window, and dropped him on the floor. The crowd roared with joy to see one man saved.

"Now for the other, John," said Pearl

Howe paused for a moment. He was burned, and he had swallowed a mouthful of hot air from the flames. He felt sick and weak; but to Pearl, whose face had softened with an anxious expression, he said:

"I'm O. K. yet Jim!"

"Get a move on then!" said Pearl hardening again. "The other man'll be cooked if you—"

A shout from the street, where a crowd had gathered, startled the two firemen. "Don't jump!" "Look out!" the voices yelled.

Howe took a fresh grip on the window-frame above Pearl, and turned his head just in time to see a white man coming at him. Then a great weight fell upon his neck and shoulders. It was the other man, Ferdinand Schmidt, a fat German, who had grown desperate and sprung out upon the firemen, and now clung to him with arms and legs in a desperate embrace. The iron pickets were directly under the two.

Howe swayed under the load. He had thought it hard to keep his balance before. Now every muscle of his body strained to stand up, but he bent and sank with the new, struggling weight. In vain he shouted to Schmidt to be still and he would save him.

The street was watching the men in horror. It seemed both must be impaled on the iron fence-points. Now the crew of Seven Truck were running up a ladder; but flame and smoke for a moment enveloped Howe. He lurched and seemed falling. His hand lost its hold. He clutched the German and thought of the picket fence—which of them would be on top in the fall?

With a grunt that sounded almost like a roar, the crew of the truck rammed the ladder up. It touched Schmidt's foot. He felt it, stiffened his leg, seemed to come to his senses, straightened his full length, whirled round backward and fell with a crash of broken glass through the upper sash of the window on Pearl. The German shot half-way across the floor,

and Howe had just strength enough left to get back into Pearl's arms, who had kept his wits perfectly all the time, and retained his clutch of his comrade.

"Hurt?" asked Pearl.

"None. Sick with the smoke, that's all."

"Well, button up your clothes, then, for you forgot it driving over, and it's light in the street. I'll call the ambulance for you and this fat fellow—he seems kind of done up, too. Next time mobbe you won't be such a hog for all the chances that's going."

The ambulance was needed, for Howe was not only sick but bruised badly. Yet he was out of the hospital in time to save the next life credited to Truck No. 7, that of a man whom he found on the fifth floor of a burning store in Fifth Avenue one night and brought down unconscious on an extension ladder.


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