

Out on the Pampas

By G. A. HENRY

CHAPTER XI.—(Continued.)

Maud had thrown the gate open, and stood by the post with the barrel of her rifle resting on one of the wires. "Steady, Ethel, steady," she said in a hard, strange voice, as her sister joined her; "Hubert's life depends upon your aim. Wait till I fire, and take the man on the right. Aim at his chest."

The sound of Maud's steady voice acted like magic upon her sister; the mist which had swum before her eyes cleared off; her limbs ceased to tremble, and her hand grew steady. Hubert was now within a hundred yards, but the leading Indian was scarce a horse's length behind. He had his tomahawk already in his hand, in readiness for the fatal blow. Another twenty yards and he whirled it round his head with a yell of exultation.

"Stoop, Hubert, stoop!" Maud cried in a loud, clear voice; and mechanically, with the wild war whoop behind ringing in his ears, Hubert bent forward on to the horse's mane. He could feel the breath of the Indian's horse against his legs, and his heart seemed to stand still.

Maud and her rifle might have been taken for a statue, so immovable and rigid did she stand; and then, as the Indian's arm went back for the blow, crack, and without a word or a cry the Indian fell back, struck with the deadly little bullet in the center of the forehead.

Not so silently did Ethel's bullet do its work. A wild cry followed the report; for an instant the Indian reeled in his saddle, and then, steadying himself, turned his horse sharp round, and with his companion galloped off.

Hubert, as his horse passed through the gate and drew up, almost fell from his seat; and it was with the greatest difficulty that he staggered toward Maud, who had gone off in a dead faint as she saw him ride on alone.

Ethel had sat down on the ground, and was crying passionately, and Terence came running down from the house with a gun in his hand, pouring out Irish threats and ejaculations after the Indians. These were changed into a shout of triumph as Charley stepped from behind the hen house, as they passed at a short distance, and at the charge of his double barrels the unwounded Indian fell heavily from his horse.

Anxious as he was to assist his young mistress, for Hubert was far too shaken to attempt to lift Maud from the ground, Terence stood riveted to the spot, watching the remaining Indian. Twice he reeled in the saddle, and twice recovered himself, but the third time, when he was distant nearly half a mile, he suddenly fell off to the ground.

"I thought the murdering thief had got it," muttered Terence to himself, as he ran down to raise Maud, and with the assistance of Sarah to carry her up to the house, against the doorway of which Mrs. Hardy was still leaning, too agitated to trust herself to walk.

Hubert, now somewhat recovered, endeavored to parry Ethel, and the two walked slowly up toward the house. In a minute or two Charley came running up, and the peons were seen hurrying toward them. After a silent shake of the hand to his brother, and a short "Thank God!" Charley, with his accustomed energy, took the command.

"Hubert, do you and Terence get all the arms loaded at once! Lopez, tell the peons to hurry up the plow oxen, shut them in the inclosure and padlock all the gates. I will warn you if there's any danger. Then bring all the men and women up here. I am going to run up the danger flag. Papa is out somewhere on the plains." So saying, and taking his Colt's carbine, he ran up the stairs.

In a moment afterward his voice was heard again. "Hubert, Terence, bring all the guns that are loaded up here at once—quick, quick!" and then he shouted loudly in Spanish, "Come in all; come in for your lives!" In another minute they joined him on the tower with Mr. Hardy's long rifle, Hubert's carbine, and their double-barreled shotguns, into each of which Terence dropped a bullet upon the top of the shot. Hubert could scarcely help giving a cry. At a distance of a quarter of a mile Mr. Hardy and Fitzgerald were coming along, pursued by at least a dozen Indians, who were thirty or forty yards in their rear. They were approaching from behind the house, and would have to make a sweep to get round to the entrance, which was on the right, on the side facing the dam. This would evidently give their pursuers a slight advantage.

"They hold their own," Charley said after a minute's silence; "there is no fear. Lopez!" he shouted, "run and see that the outside as well as the inside gates are open."

"I think you might use the long rifle now," Hubert said; "it might stop them if they feel that they are in reach of our guns."

"No, no," Charley said, "I don't want to stop them; don't show the end of a gun above the wall." Then he was silent until his father was within three hundred yards. He then shouted at the top of his voice, "Mind the outside fence; mind the outside fence!"

Mr. Hardy raised a hand to show that he heard, and as he approached Charley shouted again, "Sweep well round the fence, well round it, for them to try and cut you off."

Charley could see that Mr. Hardy heard, for he turned his horse's head so as to go rather wide of the corner of the fence. "Now, Hubert and Terence, get ready; we shall have them directly."

Mr. Hardy and his companion galloped past, with the Indians still fifty yards be-

hind them. Keeping twenty yards from the corner of the fence, the fugitives wheeled round to the right, and the Indians, with a cry of exultation, turned to the right also to cut them off. The low, treacherous wire was unnoticed, and in another moment men and horses were rolling in a confused mass upon the ground.

"Now," Charley said, "every barrel we have!" and from the top of the tower a rain of lead poured down upon the bewildered Indians. The horses, frightened and wounded, kicked and struggled dreadfully, and did almost as much harm to their masters as the deadly bullets of the whites; and when the fire ceased not more than half of them regained their seats and galloped off, leaving the rest, men and horses, in a ghastly heap. Seeing them in full retreat, the occupants of the tower descended to receive Mr. Hardy and Fitzgerald, Terence much delighted at having at last had his share in a skirmish.

"Well done, boys! Very well planned, Charley!" Mr. Hardy said, as he reined in his horse. "That was a near escape."

After tea Lopez came up for orders. "You will place," Mr. Hardy said, "two peons at each corner of the outside fence. One of us will come round every half-hour to see that all is right. Their instructions are that in case they hear any movement one is to come up to us immediately with the news, and the other is to go round to tell the other sentries to do the same. All this is to be done in perfect silence. I do not want them to know that we are ready for their reception. Bring some fresh straw up and lay it down here on the floor; the women can sleep here."

"What shall I do about your own horses, signor?" Lopez asked.

Mr. Hardy thought a moment. "I think you had better send them down to the inclosure with the others; they might be driven off if they are left up here, and I do not see that we can require them."

"But what about the cattle, papa?" Charley asked. "It would be a serious loss if they were driven off, especially the milch cows. If you like, I will go down with Terence, and we can take up our station among them. It would be a strong post, for the Indians could not attack us on horseback; and with my carbine and Terence's gun, and a brace of revolvers, I think we could beat them off easily enough, especially as you would cover us with your guns."

"I had thought of that plan, Charley; but it would be dangerous, and would cause us up here great anxiety. I imagine, too, that as no doubt their great object is vengeance, they will attack us first here, or they may make an effort upon the cattle at the same time that they attack here. They will not begin with the animals. They will find it a very difficult business to break down the fence, which they must do to drive them out; and while they are about it we shall not be idle, depend upon it."

The preparations were soon made. At about 10 o'clock there was a sharp bark from one of the dogs fastened up by the fold, followed up by a general barking of all the dogs on the establishment.

"There they are," Mr. Hardy said. "Charley, bring the mastiffs inside and order them and the retrievers, too, to be quiet. We do not want any noise up here, to tell the Indians that we are on the watch. Now, Fitzgerald, you go to the sentries behind the house, and I will go to those in front, to tell them to fall back at once."

This mission was, however, unnecessary, for the eight peons all arrived in a minute or two, having fled from their posts at the first barking of the dogs, and without obeying their orders to send around to each other to give notice of their retreat.

Mr. Hardy was very angry with them, but they were in such abject fear of the Indians that they paid little heed to their master's words, but went and huddled themselves together upon the straw in the sitting room, remaining there without movement until it was all over. Terence was now reeled from the gate, which had been his post.

"Did you hear anything, Terence?" "Yes, sir—a dull sound like a lot of horses galloping in the distance. I should say that there were a great many of them. It seemed to get a little louder, and then it stopped."

"That was before the dogs began to bark, Terence?"

"About five minutes before, your honor."

"Yes. I have no doubt that they all dismounted to make the attack on foot. How quiet everything is."

Mr. Hardy and the boys took their place on the tower, from which they commanded the whole garden. They had the long rifle, the carbines and four revolvers. Mrs. Hardy and the girls took their place in the upper room of the tower, where there was a light. Their rifles were ready in case of necessity, but their principal duty was to load the spare chambers of the carbines and pistols as fast as they were emptied, the agreement being that the girls should go up by turns to take the loaded ones and bring down the empties. Sarah's place was her kitchen, where she could hear all that was going on below, and she was to call up the ladder in case aid was required. And so, all being in readiness, they calmly awaited the attack.

CHAPTER XII.

For nearly half an hour the occupants of the tower remained without hearing

the smallest sound. Then there was a slight, jarring noise.

"They are getting over the fence," Mr. Hardy whispered. "Go down now every one to his station. Keep the dogs quiet, and mind, let no one fire until I give the signal."

Over and over again the clinking noise was repeated. Cautious as the Indians were, it was impossible even for them to get over that strange and difficult obstacle without touching the wires with their arms. Occasionally Mr. Hardy and the boys fancied that they could see dark objects stealing toward the house through the gloom; otherwise all was still.

"Boys," Mr. Hardy said, "I have changed my mind. There will be numbers at the doors and windows, whom we cannot get at from here. Steal quietly downstairs, and take your position each at a window. Then, when the signal is given, fire both your revolvers. Don't throw away a shot. Darken all the rooms except the kitchen. You will see better to take aim through the loopholes; it will be quite light outside. When you have emptied your revolvers, come straight up here, leaving them for the girls to load as you pass."

Without a word the boys slipped away. Mr. Hardy then placed on a round shelf nailed to the flagstaff, at about eight feet from the ground, a blue light, fitted into a socket on the shelf. The shelf was made just so large that it threw a shadow over the top of the tower, so that those standing there were in comparative darkness, while everything around was in bright light. There, with a match in his hand to light the blue light, he awaited the signal.

It was a long time coming—so long that the pause grew painful, and everyone in the house longed for the bursting of the coming storm. At last it came. A wild, loud, savage yell from hundreds of throats rose on the still night air, and confident as they were in their position, there was not one of the garrison but felt his blood grow cold at the appalling ferocity of the cry. Simultaneously there was a tremendous rush at the doors and windows, which tried the strength of frame and bar. Then, as they stood firm, came a rain of blows with hatchet and tomahawk.

Then came a momentary pause of astonishment. The weapons, instead of splintering the wood, merely made deep dents, or glided off harmlessly. Then the blows redoubled, and then a bright light suddenly lit up the whole scene. As it did so, from every loophole a stream of fire poured out, repeated again and again. The guns, heavily loaded with buckshot, told with terrible effect upon the crowded mass of Indians around the windows, and the discharge of the four barrels from each of the three windows of the room at the back of the house, by Fitzgerald, Lopez and Terence, for awhile cleared the assailants from that quarter.

After the first yell of astonishment and rage, a perfect quiet succeeded to the din which had raged there, broken only by the ring of the ramrods, as the three men and their assistants hastily reloaded their guns, and then hurried to the front of the house, where their presence was urgently required.

There was a lull so profound after the discharge of the last barrels of the boys' revolvers as to be almost startling. Running upstairs, they fitted fresh chambers to their weapons, left the empty ones with their sisters, and joined their father. "That's right, boys; the attack is beaten off for the present. Now take your carbines. There is a band of Indians down by the animals. I heard their war whoops when the others began, but the light hardly reaches so far. Now look out, I am going to send up a rocket over them. The cows are the most important; so, Charley, you direct all your shots at any party there. Hubert, divide yours among the rest."

In another moment the rocket flew up into the air, and as the bright light burst out a group of Indians could be seen at the gateway of each of the enclosures. As the brilliant light broke over them they scattered with a cry of astonishment. Before the light faded the twelve barrels had been fired among them.

As the rocket burst Mr. Hardy had gazed eagerly over the country, and fancied that he could see a dark mass at a distance of half a mile. This he guessed to be the Indians' horses.

By this time the blue light was burning low, and Mr. Hardy, stretching his hand up, lit up another at its base, and planted the fresh one down upon it. As he did so a whizzing of numerous arrows showed that they were watched. One went through his coat, fortunately without touching him; another went right through his arm, and a third laid Charley's cheek open from the lip to the ear.

"Keep your heads below the wall, boys," their father shouted. "Are you hurt, Charley?"

"Not seriously, papa, but it hurts awfully," and Charley stamped with rage and pain.

"What has become of the Indians around the house?" Hubert asked. "They are making no fresh attack."

"No," Mr. Hardy said; "they have had enough of it. They are only wondering how they are to get away. You see the fence is exposed all round to our fire, for the trees don't go within twenty yards of it. They are neither in front nor behind the house, for it is pretty open in both directions, and we should see them. They are not at this side of the house, so they must be standing close to the wall between the windows, and must be crowded among the trees and shrubs at the other end. There is no window there, so they are safe as long as they stay quiet."

(To be continued.)

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