

## FOR HER BABY'S LIFE.

A YOUNG mother crouching over her first born sat in her humble cabin on the border of the Great Tenass Swamp, that diurnal, mysterious, and all but impenetrable jungle which stretches for many miles into the lower border of Alabama from the head of Mobile Bay. She was awaiting the return of her sturdy husband, a hunter by vocation, who had gone into the swamp for game. It was the middle of August and the day was exceedingly hot. The tall sedges and other grasses that began where the jungle ceased and that filled all the broad flat pampas region lying between the swamp and the forest of pines was dry and offered a temptation to fire.

The woman belonged to the common people, but the infinitely gracious light of motherhood shone in her blue eyes and invested with rare comeliness a face that bore beneath its present radiance hard traces of an inherited necessity to earn a subsistence by the sweat of the brow. Strength of limb and health of body were becoming accompaniments of the rich colouring of her cheeks, for, having issued from generations become accustomed to the miasms of the swamp, she was on her proper health and her vigour reflected the bountiful luxuriance of the surrounding vegetation. Modified by the new happiness and light that filled her life the dullness of her comprehension was still dimly reflected in her face and in the heaviness of her movements.

But suddenly she paused in her crouching and play with her baby, raised her head and sat in rigid stillness, listening. Then her face blanched, and, snatching her baby to her breast she sprang to the door and eagerly scanned the vast stretch of dead grass palpitating in the sun.

"O God!" she exclaimed, "It is coming." As she spoke a blast of hot air struck her white cheek, coming suddenly to disturb the dead calm that hitherto had prevailed. To the windward, rolling in great writhing wreaths towards the sky, was a dense gray smoke, that, mounting rapidly, in a moment turned the brilliant sunshine to a dusky opal hue. The flames, urged by a high wind, whose forerunner had just as-

sailed her, ran toward her with incredible speed and fury—with the speed of the wind and the fury of destruction. She knew what it was bringing to her in her lonely and exposed position.

There was no time for regrets; a precious treasure was clasped to her bosom, and that was the one thing in all the world to be saved from the merciless monster coming to raze and devour all that lay in its path. With a silent prayer to Almighty God for the safe deliverance of her treasure at her hands and with a dumb, blind hope that somewhere in the profound and trackless jungle she might find the one other next and most precious to her soul, she fled bareheaded and panting to the protection of the swamp.

Of all the agonies which she thereupon encountered—fear of the roaring fire behind that sent broad sheets of flame athwart the sky and started small fires all about her; concealed vines that tripped her feet and rebellious shrubs that tore her garments; dread of black bears whose growls of alarm made her knees tremble; terror of frightened panthers whose screams rang through the dark forest—of none of these things need much be told.

The woman fought her way through the jungle, now beside herself and under the influence of a rash eagerness to save her baby's life from the innumerable menaces that dogged her feet. But she knew a little of these wilds, and with approximate accuracy could judge whether this tuft or that was treacherous or firm; whether this vine would poison her and therefore her baby as it tore her flesh; whether her leap was able to clear that black pool, and whether the dark knob of moss on the other side covered a slippery root or honest ground.

She held her baby clutched tightly to her breast, and its loud wailing brought forth from the darker clumps of dwarf palmetto certain hideous creatures that filled her with a terror far beyond that inspired by the growls of bears and the screams of panthers. These were the alligators, those ancient and formidable kings of the southern swamps. The simple folk of these lowlands knew with what jealousy they had to guard the safety of their babes when these monsters were hunting food.

Once in her flight she inadvertently stepped upon a young alligator, and its ensuing sharp squeal brought plunging

forth its enraged mother, which gave chase to the fleeing human mother so closely guarding her own young. The pursuit was soon abandoned, but it impaired the woman's remaining wit and she plunged, floundered, and staggered forward with but two purposes in her disordered mind—flight onward and onward and the preservation of her child from harm. Indeed, to stop or turn back was impossible; not but that she was now perfectly safe from the pursuit of fire, but there was nothing to return to but danger in the swamp and a possible heap of ashes where her home had been. She must go on and on, daring not to call her husband's name aloud for fear of the beasts, but plunging and floundering forward in the dumb and desperate hope that somewhere ahead she might find him, or somewhere beyond the jungle discover the safety of human companionship.

It was thus that after some hours she was dismayed to find her progress barred by the broad expanse of the Tenass River. Behind her lay the terrible forest, its upper parts lashed by the gale and its still depths echoing the moaning and swishing of the cypress tops and the swaying muscadine vines that clambered from the roots to the summits of the trees. Before her lay the broad stretch of tide-water, its surface deeply ruffled by the wind, and beyond its reach of two miles in width began interminable canabrakes. Beside a skurrying bird here and there not a living thing, not a sign of human habitation, greeted the wretched woman's eager scanning.

She did not know where she was nor how many miles she had come. She knew only that she was helpless and desolate, that her baby was crying with fright and hunger, that her own clothes were nearly stripped from her body and that she was dying of thirst.

There was a hazy interval, though partly through it rang faintly the peevish, whimpering cry of an infant followed by silence. When the mother staggered to her feet she found her baby sleeping in the hot sand beside her. She staggered to a little pool a few steps away, drank her fill of tepid, ill-smelling water and returned to her infant.

A new danger soon appeared—the twinkling eyes of moccasins, the most venomous

of all the snakes of the Southern jungles, peered at her and the child from small tufts of dwarf cane that fringed the river bank. She snatched up her baby and began cautiously to pick her way along the river, lest she set foot on one of these deadly reptiles. Soon she found a place of seeming safety, where she might enjoy a little rest and have time to bring her wits to order and devise means of escape. It was a great tree that had stood on the low bank and had fallen into the river at an acute angle to the shore line. It was still anchored to the bank by a few unsevered roots on the under side, and although its great trunk was half submerged, the exposed part was broad and secure. Had not her observation been blunted or possibly her experience lams she would have observed that the upper part, long denuded of its bark, bore certain signs that, had she known their meaning, would have made her avoid this refuge as the most deadly trap into which she could have fallen.

Seeing none of these she walked out upon the log as far as she could go to the remaining stumps of broken limbs, and there she sat down, making herself comfortable with her back resting against a branch stump, and appeased the hunger of her whimpering child. The infant then fell into slumber. The spot where the woman sat was in the shade of the trees on shore. A feeling of utter exhaustion and of refreshing coolness came over her, and before she could realize her peril and summon her energies for renewed efforts to escape she went to sleep.

Presently she was roused by a strange crackling and scrambling, and the log swayed so heavily that she clutched a broken branch barely in time to save herself from the water, which was dark and deep. It was a second or two after her heavy eyes had opened that she was able to perceive a huge alligator slowly creeping down the log toward her and thus completely shutting off all means of escape to the shore. To spring into the river was out of the question. A choking terror for a moment paralyzed all her faculties. She realized that her baby, which had awakened while she slept, was crying again, and that this sound had attracted the hungry saurian. With wisdom and calmness born of a great horror dimly realised the woman stilled the cries of her

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