

The interpreter went on his way after shaking hands warmly all round.

Seeing that I wouldn't be persuaded to stop, the woman of the house left the mother of the babies in charge of her homestead and tramped with me a long way. I discovered that she was not long from Home, and also that she hailed from our own county, and we had quite a friendly talk. Then we shook hands again, and she ran off home, and there was I, alone, on a lonely grey road, with monotonous-coloured scrub on one side, and on the other forest-clad mountains—I should say "brush-covered hills." Nothing here is called by a pretty name as an ugly one comes to hand. As soon as I was alone I grew afraid, and kept looking out for "swaggers" and other wild beasts, but I had to do my three or four miles before dark, so I put forth my strength and ran and walked as though I were in for a wager. Can't you see me in your mind's eye? The only other travellers I saw were two in a trap that passed me. Wherever I saw a house I ran in and asked how near I was to Tihitoto, and I would not have believed five paltry miles could have been so long. To shorten a long story, I could not shorten the walk. The sun set in rainy clouds, and still Tihitoto was a thing of the future.

At this time I spied a meagre, iron-roofed cottage with meagre woman at the door.

"Oh! bless you!" she said, in answer to my usual query, "you're a long way off the town. I'll show you the way I always go to the town. Better than the road, ain't above 'arf a mile neither."

"I'll be very much obliged to you if you will," I said, somewhat dolefully. And the good woman led me round her cottage, over a ferny knoll, and set me on a track that appeared to lead away back into the mountains.

"Now, there you are," she said, "on'y 'arf a mile, clear enough track. Goes through that gully there, and when you get up yonder, you can almost look down on Tihit. Good events!"

And I summoned up my pluck and struck away into the dark green mountains, whose tops were bright with the colours of sunset. As soon as the path took me fairly into the wood I grew very scared. I gathered up my dress and fairly flew along, and when I got down into the shadowy gully I would have retreated if I had dared. I gasped out a prayer and thought of Harold. I never believed that I was such a coward. I would have given anything to have found myself through that dreadful "arf mile."

I struggled across the gully, hurrying and panting hard, and tearing myself on the creepers, and when I got to the top of the ridge and started down the easy slope on the other side, the swaggar duly put in his appearance. Now hold your breath, Artie, and tremble in sympathy for me! His appearance was so horribly sudden that I well-nigh screamed, but remembered my heroic ancestors in time, and gasped instead. He was coming from the opposite direction, and it was no difficult to see that he was tipsy. Just my luck! He had a swag on his back—hence his name—and a tin mug at his belt. All this I observed in an instant without coming to a full stop. Also, he was ill dressed, and worse looking. It was a decided shock to meet such a person in such a place, and I will admit with my customary candour that I was considerably alarmed.

My heart beat fast, but I did not pause. Calmly and composedly I made to pass, when the drunken wretch said, "Hullo!" and lurched right across the way. It was only a single file path at best, and he made it impossible to pass. I can't tell you how frightened I was when he did that. In a dash I reviewed my situation—fear is a very painful sensation, as possibly you know—and I was so helpless—my watch, my purse—the hateful, cowardly wretch.

"I said in my most coldly civil voice: 'Will you kindly let me pass?'"

"Shay! where're y' goin' this hour?" he said, lurching a step forward with a kind of drunken, and to my eyes, menacing leer, and he added something that sounded like "pretty girls," but his enunciation was not clear, so say the least of it.

"Oh! if only Hal were here!" thought I, and aloud: "I wish to pass please. You are in my way," and in my flurry and fright I made an effort to brush past him. I was quick, but he was quicker, and he caught me by the arm and stopped me, saying with an absurd show of indignation (absurd to look back on). "Hera, Misaise, that's rude!" when a geul'nian's (hic) talking to a lady—she—the's not goin' to go, and go—and shove!"

"Let me go at once," I said in such a fury of anger, that I could scarcely get the words out. "How dare you touch me!"

He gave a drunken chuckle, and grabbed at my watch chain. "Shay! that's 'anoome!" he said thickly.

I made a wild effort to get free from the touch of the vile creature, but in vain, and then, and not till then, I lifted up my voice and shrieked aloud for help! help! help!

And, hey presto! the knight was on the

scene. God bless him! There was a rustle in the bushes, a footstep, and a sudden voice at my shoulder. It was a clear, boyish voice, and it said imperatively, "Here! you drop that!"

"Oh! such a wave of relief and thanksgiving swept over me. The order was so startling and unexpected that the tramp promptly dropped 'that' in the shape of my gold chain, but he still held my arm, and turned to stare at the newcomer, and launch an oath at his head.

It was only a boy of about fourteen, a knickerbocker boy not as tall as I, but I blessed him for my champion.

"You let go o' her—go on!" said the boy, boldly advancing, and the tramp obeyed. It is true that he only did it for the sake of more conveniently kicking the boy, but the instant I was released I fled like a deer, with the sound of his drunken swearing in

my ears. I barely left my little rescuer, and never passed till a turn in the path hid me from the pair. There I rallied, and bethinking me of the comparative sizes of my persecutor and my knight protector, I turned about as hastily as I fled, snatching up a short stick as I ran. (I wonder what I intended to do with it?)

But before ever I got in sight of them I heard a crashing blow, a cry, and a double fall—the last the heavens, and then the sound of flying feet. I knew by the sound that it was the boy running, and I sprang to meet him. In a moment he was round the corner, running—rather, staggering along; his head was bent forward and down; he had both hands to his face, and, oh, dear! the blood was running through his fingers, and drip-dripping on the path.

"Oh! he's hurt you!" I cried, catching

him by the shoulder to steady him, and passing my handkerchief to his poor face.

"Thank you!" he said, stammering and gulping, so that he could scarcely speak.

"It's nothing to-much. He fetched me a crack in the face—sent me flying—b-but I grabbed his legs and brought him down on his back—and ran. Come on, let's run; he might follow when he gets on his legs again, but he's so "tight" it'll take him a long time."

We ran. I held his hand, and he held a dreadful crimson handkerchief over his mouth and nose, and gasped with pain.

The tramp shouted after us once or twice, thereby causing us to quicken our steps, but as the boy said he was in no condition to give chase.

"I'm so much obliged to you," I said gratefully, as we hurried along. "How quick and brave you were! Thank you with all my heart. I am so sorry he struck you that dreadful blow."

"I didn't do anything," said the boy, bashfully. "I just happened to be there, and so I told him to stop it. Wasn't he an ugly looking beast though—and tight? My eye!"

"He was quite ugly enough for me," I answered. "I was silly to come this way alone. I was walking to Tihitoto by the road, but a woman at a cottage down there told me this way was much shorter through the wood."

"It's shorter, but it's not much of a track," answered the boy; and then irrelevantly, "how your hand shakes! Are you scared?"

"I was," I said, candidly.

When we came to a little stream I wanted to bathe his sanguinary countenance for him, but he scorned to let me do it, and kneeling down on a stone, he soused away till the bleeding ceased, and then gingerly dried his face with his cap and duly washed my handkerchief. His face was horribly bruised and swollen on one side. I wonder the blow that brute gave him not stun him. I asked him which way he was going, and he said his way lay back in the opposite direction to mine, and he reckoned he could dodge the tramp through the undergrowth. He strongly recommended me to go back to the road, but the thought of the swaggar in the path and the weary miles I had already tramped decided me to go on. He assured me that I was not likely to meet any more traps, and so we parted and I went on my way sad and fearfully.

Before long my path grew more overgrown and indistinct and then it branched out into two ways, and I stood perplexed and distressed, and wondered which way to take. And while wondering, I heard again the unmistakable sound of running feet behind me. Pit-pat, pit-pat, they came, striking terror into my heart. My first thought was sufficiently absurd, but under the circumstances it appeared quite possible—the swaggar had caught and murdered the boy, and was now pursuing me for the same fell purpose. Doesn't your heart bleed for me, Artie? However, it was only the boy returning in such haste that he nearly fell into my agitated arms.

"Beg your pardon!" he stammered breathlessly.

"Oh! is he coming?" I cried.

"No, no," he almost laughed. "Did I scare you?"

"But what has brought you back?" I asked.

"I thought I ought—I—better—I thought I might as well see you to Tihitoto, that's if you don't mind. It's getting so dark, you see."

"I should be very glad of your company," I said, not considering it necessary to say how particularly delighted I should be, but really there is no need. Won't it be taking you too much out of your way?"

"No," he said laconically.

"But you will have to come back in the dark."

"No, I won't come back this way tonight."

"Well," I said, "I should only be too glad to be guided to Tihitoto, but it seems scarcely fair to put a stranger to so much trouble. I don't think I should let you. I am already deeply indebted to you, and how am I going to repay you for all this kindness."

The boy blushed all over his face and looked quite pleased. "I'd like to show you," he stammered eagerly.

So what could I do but gratefully accept and follow my little guide down the better of the two paths that had puzzled me. I never want to have a more considerate escort than he was. He conducted me through the bush as though I had been a royal princess on tour. He parted the creepers to make a way for me, and held back the springy snipejacks while I passed. He really was a grand little chap, and when we had to cross little creeks or patches of mud, he offered me the assistance of a sturdy brown hand, with a funny mixture of shyness and self-reliance.

I had ample opportunity for studying him as we hurried along, and I soon came to the conclusion that he was no common boy. His hands—Harold laughs at the

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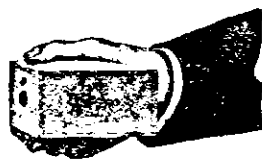
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