

seemed impossible. Nothing could save the Kenyons except the rains which would not come.

It was sunset when the news reached "Cheriholme," and before an hour had passed, Maurice was riding in the direction of the conflagration on the fleet young thoroughbred that had been his Christmas present from his father.

On and on he rode, through the warm, still blackness of the summer night—on and on, past bush and paddocks, confident that love could find a way where sympathy had failed.

At last he reached the smoke—heavy, brown, and so thick that he could scarcely breathe. Here, too, a new difficulty arose. His horse, hitherto so willing, refused to face the fire.

Precious time was spent in coaxing, but at last the frightened animal gave in to his rider's indomitable will, and, gathering his limbs well under him, rushed wildly into the fire. It was a never-to-be-forgotten ride. The terrified horse plunged and tore madly at his bit. On all sides trees were falling, their trunks a mass of glowing red. The wind swept the heavy smoke aloft, and it hung in dense clouds above the glare that could be seen for miles.

A few moments of scorching, intolerable heat, and the horse and rider, singed and burnt, and almost maddened by the stinging sparks, emerged into the little fire-lit hollow where lay the homestead Maurice sought—so far unharmed.

Mr Kenyon, unaccustomed to face danger, had regarded escape through the raging fire impossible, until Maurice's opportune appearance proved that it was not so.

There was time for little questioning, and but a hurried planning. In a very few minutes Mr and Mrs Kenyon were mounted on the only two available horses—Mr Kenyon with Bran, wrapped in a wet blanket, in front of him, Maurice with another bundle that meant Cherry. Dossie had insisted on be-

ing the one to wait till Maurice could return.

They had great difficulty in getting the frightened horses to face the rush and roar of the flames, but Maurice led the way, and after a few awful minutes, which seemed an eternity, they were able to breathe once more the cool, calm night air.

Mr Kenyon dismounted, and set Bran on the ground, and Maurice prepared to hand Cherry to her mother, but, overcome by the heat, the smoke, the scorching flames, and anxiety for her eldest daughter, Mrs Kenyon swayed and fell fainting into her husband's arms.

Bran screamed, and Cherry began to sob in a broken-hearted way, but Maurice did not hear them.

"I must go back for Dossie," he said. "If I don't—if we don't—they are expecting you at home, and you'll give them my love, and tell them that I did my level best, and that Royal is a Briton!"

He stroked his horse's smoke-blackened neck, and swung round to face the smoke for the third time.

There was not a second to be lost, for little dark-eyed Dossie was alone. She had been left in that horror-haunted valley to face, unaided the almost inevitable death that was sweeping down upon her. Maurice set his teeth as he thought of her little slender figure in the grip of the cruel flames.

Royal faced the fire nobly. Now that he understood what was required of him, he would go till he dropped. "Till he dropped!" What a volume of meaning lay in those three small words. He had come many miles, and Maurice had not spared him. Twice he had passed without much injury through the raging fire. Still he bore himself bravely, but he staggered, and Maurice, recognizing the mighty spirit that refused to give in, prayed that it might not fail until his work was done. And so, slower this time, the circle of flames, ever growing wider, was passed once more.