

THE RANGERS;
OR,
THE TORY'S DAUGHTER.
BY JUDGE D. F. THOMPSON.
VOLUME II.
CHAPTER VII.

While casting about her in doubt respecting the next step to be taken, she discovered traces of what was evidently once an imperfect road, or path, which seemed to extend through a partial opening towards the mountain. Thinking it might possibly lead to some human habitation, or at least to some place preferable to the open forest and shelter till the return of daylight, she resolved to follow it. As she proceeded on, she began to detect marks of the woodsman's or hunter's axe in the trees here entirely cut down and there girdled or denuded of their bark as high as the hand could reach. These indications as to the former presence of men appeared to grow more frequent as she went on; and at length she came into a small opening in the forest, in the midst of which stood a roughly constructed log-house, or shanty, with a regularly framed back roof still standing. The remains of smaller and less durable structures were also visible in the vicinity of the former.

With a cautious and hesitating step, Miss Haviland drew near to this rude structure, and at once deceived by the appearance of the unguarded loop-hole window and the open entrance, before which the untrodden wild weeds were growing, that it was untenanted. Approaching still nearer, and peering into the window, she discovered in one corner of the deserted apartment, a comfortable looking bed, composed of branches of the hemlock, which she hastily concluded had been collected and used by hunters, who occasionally made the place their quarters for the night. Immediately concluding to avail herself of the advantages which this shelter and primitive couch seemed to promise for obtaining the rest her exhausted system so much needed, she entered and, throwing herself down on the soft and yielding boughs, she surrendered herself to the influence of the grateful repose, and fell asleep. She was soon, however, awakened by what, she knew not, unless by the feeling of uneasiness and apprehension, by which she now found herself unconsciously agitated. She had heard or read of those mysterious intuitions by which, it is said, we sometimes instinctively become apprised of impending danger, when there is no apparent cause for apprehension, and when reason utters no warning. If such instances ever in reality occurred, this might be one of them or the impression might have been unconsciously received from actual sounds, which came from foes now secretly lurking near and which, as it is known often to be the case, had fallen on her slumbering ear, and disturbed and troubled without fully awakening her. But whatever the cause of the strange fashions, the effect soon became too strong and exciting to permit her longer to remain passive. And she arose to examine the apartment, and see what precautions could be taken to render it more safe against the intrusion of enemies, whether they should come in the shape of men or wild beasts. On approaching the entrance, she discovered standing by the side of it against the wall, a sort of rough door made of long cuts of thick bark confined by withes to two cross pieces and intended evidently as there were no contrivances for hanging it, to be set up against the entrance on the inside as a barrier against the cold, or the unwelcome intrusion of anything from without. But it had become so water soaked and heavy, and the end on which it stood, so firmly set in the ground that she found, on making the attempt, her strength unequal to the task of removing it, and she turned away to look for other means of protecting herself from danger. Casting her eyes upward, she perceived lying loose on the beams, or rather poles, extending across the room above several pieces of bark, which had been left there, probably when the roof of the same material, was constructed. And it immediately occurred to her, that if she could mount this loft, she might so dispose of herself there as to escape the observation of any human intruder, and, at the same time be out of reach of any wild beasts that should enter the room below. Accordingly going to one corner she began to mount by stepping on the projecting sides of the logs in the two converging walls, and soon succeeded in reaching the loft and forming, from the bark a place of concealment sufficiently strong and broad to bear her weight and screen her person from observation. Upon this she extended herself, face downward, with her eyes placed to a small aperture to enable her to see what might happen in the room below, and, silently, but with highly excited expectation, awaited the event. But what event did she expect? She could not tell; and yet she was wholly unable to divest herself of the continually intruding idea that something fearful was about to occur; and impelled by the singular apprehension, she could not help listening for sounds which might herald the approaching evil. For some time however, no sounds reached her ears, except those low, mingled murmurs which are peculiar to the forest in the stillness of night. But at length her quickened organs were greeted by some noise which she knew was out of a familiar one; and the next moment the sounds of human footsteps became distinctly audible. Presently she heard voices at the door, and then saw two dark forms cautiously entering the room below. After walking around the apartments and thrusting the muzzles of their guns into corners, with the apparent purpose of ascertaining whether any one was concealed within, they approached the pile of boughs before described and gave vent to their satisfaction at finding so good a bed, in a short guttural ugh! which produced to the trembling listener above, a sense of relief, and of those doubts which had been sent out in pursuit of her. They then proceeded to draw up the old door and barricade the entrance after which they set their eyes against the wall, and camped down on the bed in the corner.

It would be difficult to describe the emotions with which the hapless girl listened what had occurred; and these with the fear of what might still be in store for her, nearly filled the measure of her distress and perplexity; for although she had thus far escaped observation, and although she soon had the satisfaction of knowing, by the heavy and measured breathing which

reached her ears, that her foes had sunk into a deep sleep, yet how was she even now to avoid falling into their merciless hands? Should she attempt to descend and detect her pursuers without being heard and detected? She feared not. And should she remain in her present situation till daylight, would her terrible visitors then awaken and depart without discovering her? This alternative appeared to her even less promising than the other. And yet one of the two courses must be adopted. Should it be? While anxiously reflecting on the subject, fresh noises in the woods arrested her footsteps; but evidently not those of any human prowler. With a light quick pat pat, the animal came to the door, paused, and sniffed the air through the crevices. He then moved along to the window, reared himself on his hind legs, thrust in his nose, and after giving two or three quick eager snuffs there also with drew, and trotted off to the forest, where he appeared to come to a sudden halt. The next moment, the long, unceremonious howl of a wolf rose shrill and tremulous from the spot, and died slowly away, in strange wild cadences, among the echoing mountains around. Sabrey instinctively shuddered at the fearful sound, but instantly turned her attention to the sleeping Indians, and she expected to hear rousing up and rushing out with their guns after the insidious prowler. But they, to her surprise, snored on unconscious of the danger. The howl was soon repeated, when short, faint responses, in the same shrill savage modulations became audible in every direction in the surrounding forest. These answering cries growing more distinct and loud every moment, in their evident approach to the spot where the first signal

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bones, and tore the flesh on which they were making their horrible feast. Then followed the fierce noisy encounters for the decreasing fragments till none were left worth contending for. At this juncture, two of the half-glutted but still ravenous gank relinquishing the well-picked bones on which they had been laboring rose, and advancing into the middle of the room stood a moment listlessly viewing the operations of the rest when they suddenly started, and, turning slowly around and round, began busily to sniff the air and throw their noses upward in search of some fresh game that appeared now to have struck their keen olfactory. The affrighted maiden, who had been witnessing this hideous scene from her hitherto unsuspected concealment above with blood-curdling in horror at the sights and sounds that reached her receding senses, now shuddered in fresh alarm; for she too well understood what this new and fearfully significant movement of the wolves portended. And, instinctively, withdrawing her face from her loop-hole of observation, she hastily drew herself up in the middle of her frail support, so as to be as far as possible out of the reach of her expected assailants. But they at once detected the slight sounds caused by her movement, and, now guided by two senses instead of one, instantly began to gnash their teeth, and with wild howls, to leap upward after their newly discovered prey. And although her position was more than seven feet from the ground—a height which it might be supposed, could not have been reached by this class of animals in a perpendicular leap—yet so desperate had the present gank become by the taste of human blood, that they soon in their determined and constantly repeated efforts, began to strike and seize the beams

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then drop back again to the ground for another trial. The terrified maiden now gave herself up as lost and tried to quell the tumult of her frenzied feelings, that she might meet her approaching fate, as dreadful as it was, with calmness and resignation. But the terrific noise of her maddened assailants, as they leaped up, snarling and howling in demoniac chorus, and made nearer and nearer approaches every moment to her person, once more aroused her natural instinct for self-preservation; and she arose, and, standing upon her feet, involuntarily bent over one end of her support to catch a view of what was passing below.

In withdrawing her shrinking gaze from the fiercely upheaving heads and fiery eyeballs which there greeted her, she espied the guns of the Indians still standing against the wall, almost directly beneath her, with the muzzles tending upward within reach of her arm. With the rapid process of thought which danger is known often to bestow, a new plan of deliverance suggested by the discovery just made, was instantly formed and digested in her mind. And in pursuance, she drew a white handkerchief from her pocket and, hastily folding it together threw it down to the farthest corner of the room below. As she had anticipated the whole gank rushed after it. And instantly seizing the opportunity thus afforded to execute her design she hastily balanced herself on the edge of the bark the most nearly over the guns, reached down her arm, grasped one of the muzzles and drew up the heavy weapon just in time to escape the baffled brutes as they came bounding back with redoubled howls of rage and disappointment, to the spot. Too much accustomed in the new settlement in which she had been mostly reared, to the sight and even handling of fire-arms not to know how to use them, she socked the piece, and, again advancing to the edge of the platform pointed down into the thickest of the infuriated pack and fired. One wild, piercing yelp followed the deafening explosion and, the next instant, all the survivors of the hushed and frightened gank were heard scrambling through the window, and scattering and fleeing off with desperate speed into the surrounding forest. With the last sounds of the retreating steps of the wolves and with the over-wrought feelings of the maiden all her strength gave way and, sinking down weak and helpless as an infant, she sobbed out in the broken murmurs of an overflowing heart her gratitude to Heaven for her deliverance from the horrid death from which she had so narrowly escaped. For a while she could only tremble and weep but at length the violence of her emotions began gradually to subside, exhausted nature would be cheated no longer, and she sunk in slumber, for so sound, so happy, to permit her to dream over the fearful scenes of the past.

When she awoke, it was broad daylight, and all was quiet within while without the birds were chanting the morning melodies. At first she could scarcely believe that the scene she had passed through was not the disordered imagining of some frightful dream. But there, on the blood stained floor beneath her, lay the carcass of a dead wolf, and the scattered bones of the slain Indians, to attest the dreadful reality. Hastening down from the loft into the room, and averting her eyes from the revolting spectacle, she hurried forward with a shudder to the door, effected an opening sufficient for her egress and rushed out into the open air, of which she now drew a long grateful inhalation, more expressive than words of the deep sense of inward pleasure she experienced in being freed from this den of horrors.

Believing that, by the advantages daylight would now afford her, she might be able to retrace her way to the room, she immediately sought out and entered the old path by which she had approached the cabin; and this serving to indicate the general course she must pursue to accomplish her purpose she followed it back to the end, and then passed through the forest in the same direction. She had proceeded but a short distance, however, before she was startled by the unexpected appearance of a man advancing through the thick intervening undergrowth directly towards her. As she was about to strike out obliquely into the forest to avoid him, her steps were arrested by his voice calling out to her.

"Don't be alarmed at a friend, young lady," he said, in a plausible manner, as he came forward and stood at a respectful distance, "don't be alarmed at my appearance, at all; for you are the one, take it, that we are searching for. It is Miss Haviland, is it not?" "Yes sir," replied the latter looking doubtfully at the man, whom she thought she had somewhere before seen—"Yes, that is my name; but as there may be both friends and foes out in search of me, you will excuse me for saying that I do not know to which of these you belong."

"True, true," said the other in a wheedling tone—"true, I don't blame you for being a little cautious. So I must tell you that, living in these parts, and being acquainted with Captain Woodburn I volunteered, when I heard you were lost last night, to go with the rest in search of you. And being now so lucky as to find you, I will direct you out to Coffin's farm or five miles from this. I suppose—where your friends are anxiously waiting to see or get word of you."

Although our heroine was not exactly pleased with the manner and countenance of the man, yet the charm of the name of Woodburn, to whom he had so artfully referred, restored her confidence and she at once and thankfully accepted of his proffered guidance, little suspecting that she had yielded herself to the most subtle of her foes—the deceitful and treacherous David Redding.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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