

A Dark Night's Work.

BY PAUL INGELW.

Continued from 1st page.

CHAPTER XLII.—IN PERIL.

The wagon had commenced to go slower, and the anxious Le Britta could not make out the reason. It proceeded at least five miles, and was probably nearing its destination.

He saw at a glance his mistake in directing Vance to make haste in leaving the wagon, and he was about to turn back, but he remained only a moment to hold up the loose plank while Le Britta crawled through, both would now be speeding away to liberty.

Where was Vance? Surely, he would leave his rescuer in peril, coward-like, abandon him to his fate? No, a slight jangle at the rear doors told that some one was fumbling with the lock. Then the doors creaked and strained, but they remained intact, and Le Britta knew that his friend must be following the wagon under the cover of the darkness and gloom of the night.

No further evidence of the proximity of his late companion in captivity was forthcoming for nearly half an hour. Then, in a manner more original and startling, Sydney Vance announced his feat to his rescuer and his desperate resolve to reach and aid him, even at the cost of discovery, and an unequal conflict with the two knaves on the wagon-seat, who, all unconscious of what had so far occurred, smoked placidly as if engaged in occasional conversation.

Of a sudden, something landed against the two locked doors of the vehicle with a force that split one of the panels clear in twain.

Pieces of rock and splintered wood were showered about the astonished Le Britta as that crash resounded, and the light started up affrightedly. Instantly, too, Le Britta saw out into the road through the broken door, and discerned also that the rent thus made in the thin wood could be enlarged to an aperture of escape very speedily, were time only afforded.

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"It struck the wagon?"

"Jump down and see."

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"Tom, look here!"

"Mercy! what does this mean?"

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"But how?"

"A rock. See! the jagged ends of this board!"

"Maybe he's escaped?"

"What! tied hand and foot?"

"I'll look and see."

One of the men drew forth a match and ignited it.

Extending it through the rent, he peered into the darkness void beyond.

"Great goodness! it is—"

The sentence was not concluded, for as wonder-eyed, incredulous, the startled eyes of the plotter took in the outlines of the form in the wagon, that form sprang forward.

"Puff! a quick breath blew out the match. Recalling, the man seemed too overcome to speak.

"Tom!" he gasped.

"Wall!"

"He ain't there!"

"What?"

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"Yes, but it ain't our man!"

"Nonsense!"

"It's another, and he ain't bound."

"Ridiculous!"

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The other flared a second match. A sudden cry announced his surprise, but he was quicker to retreat than the other.

"Treachery! trickery!" he cried.

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A rock struck the hand of the man clutching the weapon.

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There was a crash, a stumble, a loud neigh of terror, and then the horse and wagon again, flew on, wind, but no longer encumbered with the wagon.

That, with his human captives, had it seemed, struck a post in the form of the bridge. It crashed, it toppled. There was a tearing sound, and over and over it went, ripping the bridge guard from place and carrying it away. In one hour or ten, he knew not whether, for insensibility instantly supervened.

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A meal and rest put the photographer in shape for his part, and a new action was needed in behalf of those he would befend now if ever.

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The minister knew everything, he stated, and the minister's home was down the street, "that way" and he directed a neat cottage a square or two west.

Le Britta proceeded thither. It would do him no harm to make a few inquiries, but was he to knock at the door of the house there to reply to his summons, and he decided that the entire family must be away.

In a cheerful mood, he sat down on the porch step of the cottage.

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