

## THE EAGLE'S NEST.

[CONCLUSION.]

I studied over the manoeuvre that would be necessary to place me in the desired position. I saw that it would involve my having for a short time both legs on one side of the trunk of the tree; that for a moment I would be seated sideways upon it, as a woman sits upon a horse. It would be no trick at all if performed on a pole in a gymnasium. It was wholly in the thousand feet of space below me that the trouble lay. I therefore determined to perform the feat of reversing my position with my eyes shut. The branches which my hands grasped were about two feet apart, which would give me a good deal of purchase.

When I felt myself thoroughly nerved for my manoeuvre of facing about, I accomplished it almost in an instant, that I might have no time in which to think of the perilous position it involved.

Not until I had again firmly clasped the trunk of the cedar with both hands did I venture to open my eyes; and then I directed them in advance so that they would rest upon the edge of the cliff at the root of the tree.

As I completed my reversal-act, I had heard a sort of tumultuous cry from my friends on the cliff—the first sound I had yet heard from them—which I took to be a spontaneous outburst of applause, but when I opened my eyes I saw at once that it must have been a cry of horror.

My tree was rapidly sinking—was giving way at the roots. Now that my attention was directed to what was occurring, I could hear the cracking of small roots as the tree settled down and swung in towards the wall. I could no longer see any one on top of the cliff, for I was already several feet below its brow. I could see the earth crumbling and dropping from the brow of the cliff as the roots of the trees stretched in the ground.

Each moment I expected the tree to tear loose and carry me with it to the bottom of the abyss. Strange as it may seem, I did not in this situation experience any such feeling of terror and horror at that which for the moment overwhelmed me when I looked down after the falling eaglets. The calmness of desperation now took possession of me. There was no more of the tingling and thrilling of the nerves. All would doubtless be over in a few seconds, and I was braced for the shock. I knew the worst and was prepared to endure it. I even looked down to the rocky floor of the canon a thousand feet below without a tremor. Space gaping beneath no longer had any terrors for me. I was already no better than a dead man.

But the roots of the tree did not tear loose as I had expected to see them do. When the top of the tree had turned directly downward the roots still held, and I clung to it ten feet below the verge of the cliff. I was astride the trunk just at the point where the main boughs, spreading out like the ribs of a fan, supported the whole weight of my body; indeed, the trunk of the tree being about eight inches in diameter, I could not so clasp it except with my arms as to sustain any weight.

The tree did not hang flat against the vertical face of the cliff. There were projecting branches that kept it about three feet away from the wall. In this position it stopped; and as the roots still held, I began to hope that they would continue to hold until I could be rescued; however, with the least motion or agitation it might give way at any moment.

Finding that I was was not to be instantly hurled down to death, I presently ventured to lift my eyes to the brow of the cliff. I could see no one, nor could I hear the voices of my late companions. I began to fear that I was deserted. Having seen the tree sink down out of sight, they probably believed it had fallen and carried me with it to the bottom of the canon. Not one of them would have the nerve, in view of the happenings of the day, to come to the brink and peer over in search of me.

I looked upward along the trunk of the tree, meditating as to whether an attempt to climb it would be likely to prove successful. I saw as once that to escape in that way would be impossible.

Even though I should be able to climb the trunk, I could do nothing when I came to the brow of the precipice. I also feared that even the slightest motion—the least jar might cause the tree to give way.

My thoughts then again turned to my friends. My soul sickened at the thought that they might have gone away—gone up to the flume camp to report the latest accident.

I was scanning the line of the cliff as far as my eyes could follow it, in the hope of seeing one of my party out at some curve, when I heard a voice far below me, in the sky, as it sounded to me: "Are you still alive and safe?" it said.

Was I "still safe"? It seemed a cruel joke.

I turned my face upward to answer, but for a short time I hesitated. I feared that my mere exertion in shouting would so agitate the small tree as to tear loose its root. At last, however, using my voice carefully, I cried: "Can you hear me?"

"Yes, plainly," was the reply.

"Well, then, I am still alive and on the tree, but not safe!"

"Hang on," came back. "Hang on, and we will try to save you!"

I looked up. No one was visible on the verge of the wall. They were afraid to approach it; afraid to stand where I would have given worlds to have been placed. What to them seemed a place of peril would have been to me as the Rock of Ages.

Again I was left to my thoughts and fears. I did not like this seeming desertion. It appeared to me to be very cowardly in them not to show themselves and stand by me. In such a situation, even the sound of the voice of a fellow-man is comfort.

At last another voice—one that seemed almost by my side—called to me. I looked up and saw peering down at me over the brink of the precipice a face that I recognized as that of a young man named Peter Bowers.

"Hold on as you are," said young Bowers. "My brother John has gone back to the flume-camp on the best horse for a long rope. He will soon be back!" Good God! "Soon be back!" It was a mile-and-a-half to the camp. I must wait until a man had ridden three miles. Here was a wet blanket for me.

Somehow, when I saw a face within ten feet of mine, I had felt as though I was saved. I would be up on the cliff at once. Now they were going to make me wait until a man could ride three miles before trying to save me. It was rascally! Why not help me at once?

"Can't you drop me the end of a lariat?" cried I.

"No. We've only got one lariat. That's tied around me and the men are holding the other end."

"What is all that for?" cried I, in astonishment.

"Why, to keep me from falling over into the canon."

"To keep you from falling! Good Lord! Why, aren't you safe enough anywhere up there on the solid rock?" sneered I.

"No. I can hardly stay here with the lariat fast to my waist. My head wants to go down and my heels feel as if they'd fly right up into the air in spite of all I can do!"

"What a cowardly set!" thought I. "All up there is so solid and safe, yet every man here is afraid to come near enough to give me the end of that lariat!"

But I was in no position to fight any one, therefore I softly said: "Surely they can come near enough to drop me the end of the lariat!"

"Yes, but who is to come to the edge to drop it to you if he is not held fast?—and we've got but one lariat."

I groaned.

After a moment's thought I said: "Where is Bob Paxton?"

Pete turned his head and looked. "Out holding your horse!" said he. "Ah," said I, "he is always thoughtful. Bob is determined I shall not go home on foot."

I was so mad I did not much care whether the tree held or pulled up by the roots.

"Wait a bit and hold fast. Do have patience!" said Pete. "John will soon be here with the rope."

"Well if I am to wait till then I wish you'd send me down a lunch. I saw Bob Paxton slipping some biscuits and cold meat into his pockets just before we left the flume boarding-house."

Pete's head disappeared. It may to some appear very unlikely that I talked and felt in my situation as I have reported. My situation was in truth so desperate that I also became utterly desperate; and coolly so. The brink of the precipice, which an hour before would have turned my head, was now as nothing. I could have danced along it from end to end. I could now gaze down into the chasm without a qualm. My greater danger, my imminent peril, had killed all the smaller dangers. To paraphrase Pope—

Small dangers intoxicate the brain, But great ones sober us again.

My danger was so great that I was perfectly sobered by it. I was about the same as lost. There was, however, a chance of a rope's coming before the tree gave way, and I would make the best fight I could for that chance.

Again I was left alone, suspended between heaven and earth. To add to the terrors of the situation gusts of wind began to sweep through the canon and sway me and my tree. I was still keenly alive to whatever threatened the stability of my tree—if stability could be said to pertain to such a thing. Occasionally I could hear a root snap, and at times dirt fell from the edge of the cliff; as if the tree were slowly giving way. All these things gave me keen little starts and pangs, but had no power to overwhelm me—to upset my brain.

To find all drawing back from me and keeping out of sight disturbed me not a little. I thought they should have appeared to be doing something—might at least have given me the comfort of their presence. I have seen how eagerly a man who is about to have the hangman's noose placed about his neck catches at a kind word or even a nod of recognition, and I know that the word and nod filled a yearning vacancy.

Finally, after it seemed to me, I had been hanging over my grave a month, I heard a great—a mighty cheer.

"John Bowers has come with the rope!" thought I.

Soon Pete Bowers again peered down at me and said: "They have got a long rope.

They are going to tie one end of it to a tree, and will then make a noose in the other end and let it down to you. Hold on a little longer and we'll get you."

"I can hold on a month," said I. "I am well enough fixed for holding on, but what is the good of my holding on if the tree gives way? You fellows seem to think all depends upon me and my holding on. This tree is giving way all the time."

Pete withdrew to impart this information.

It seemed an hour before he again crawled to the brink—for he came by crawling on his belly. "I've got the end of the rope," said he, "but I'm afraid to come square over you to drop it. I'm afraid to go near the roots of the tree. The ground there is all cracked and loose."

"For God's sake, keep away from there!" cried I. Then, "Can't you throw the rope so that the loop will pass beyond the trunk, and slide along down to me as it slacks in drawing back?"

Pete threw the rope, but it fell short.

Again and again he tried. Once it came near me and I reached out and clutched at it. As I did so there was an ominous cracking above, and some small clods of earth fell and rattled down through the branches of the tree that rested against the wall.

I clutched the tree, afraid to wink or breathe for some moments. Then I said to Pete: "What is the matter with you?—why can't you fling the rope as I told you?"

"I can't throw so hard."

"Why not?"

"If I do my heels will fly up and I'll go head first into the canon."

"What! With a lariat around you and a dozen men holding you?"

"Only four, and they'll let go and run if they see me go over. They say we've lost too many men already to-day to take any more chances."

"Oh, yes, I see!" said I, again beginning to forget that I was not on terra firma.

I thought a moment, and then said: "Tell the men to cut a long, slender pole; sharpen the upper end of it, then twist the strands of the rope at the noose backward and thrust in between them the point of the pole; then you can pass the noose down into my hands. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I'll have it fixed," and Pete withdrew.

In about ten minutes—it seemed to me as many hours—Pete was back with the pole and rope.

I clasped my legs tightly about the trunk of the tree in order to have free use of both hands.

Down, down came the noose at the end of the pole. I never saw a thing move more slowly. At last I clutched it, and with a death-grip. I soon had the noose over my shoulders and about my waist. I then told Pete to haul up the slack. As soon as the noose tightened, I felt that I was safe.

With my left hand I took a vise-like grip on the rope above the noose and prepared to emerge.

"How many men are now holding you?" I asked Pete.

"Only three now."

"Can they hold you while you give orders?"

"I guess so."

"Well, don't let your heels fly up. How many men are holding me?"

"Four or five."

"And is the end of the rope still fast to the tree?"

"Yes, sir, still fast."

"Well, then, I may as well make a move and get out of here. However, now I think of it—where is Bob Paxton?"

"On the rope, sir?"

"My rope or yours?"

"Yours, sir."

"Tell him that I'm hungry, and ask him to please to save for me the lunch he has in his coat pocket."

Pete opened his eyes in astonishment, but turned his head and gave the order. Though I felt almost as safe as if out on the brow the cliff, I felt that the "space fright" still held Pete in its power and I did all this talking to try his steadiness before giving him my real business orders.

The first thing was to taut the rope in line; for Pete was still holding it. I told him to let go of it and tell the men to haul gently on it until I cried halt.

Pete did as directed, and repeated my order when I called a halt. The rope did not lie directly in a line with the trunk of the tree, and I made him veer the men by motioning with his hand till it was right.

I had studied out the whole programme while waiting for the rope. I wanted to steady myself by the trunk of the tree in going up, instead of swinging in against the wall and banging about, as the butt and roots of the tree would be of assistance in getting up to the crest of the cliff.

I explained this to Pete after the rope was in line and taut. Then I said to him: "Now, Pete, if you feel quite safe, we'll start up."

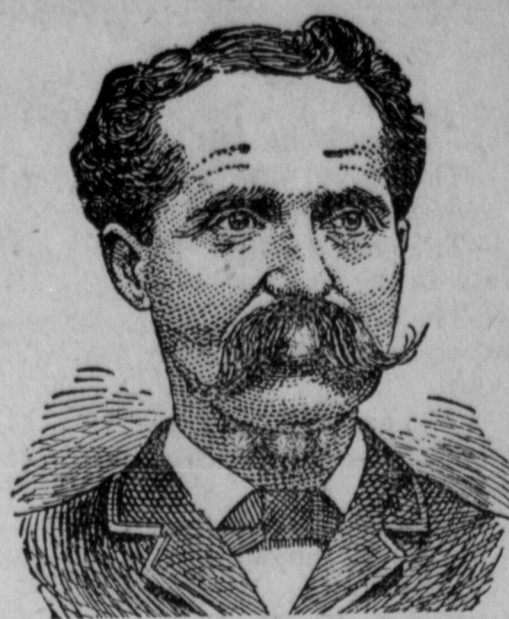
"I am ready, sir."

"Very well. Now repeat my orders to the men instantly and exactly as I give them."

"Yes, sir."

"Haul away steadily!" cried I.

The order was repeated and acted on. Up I went, calling out as I went: "Steady, steady!—not so fast!—steady, so!"



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