

tions to some one in the lower windows. An answer came up thin and faint from below.

There were anxious calls and answers down the roof. Hurley understood from them that one of the three men had been lost in the smoke. A rescuing party slid down the ladder after him. He was drawn up through the skylight and laid on the roof. Three of the crew fanned air into his lungs with their helmets, while Hurley and the others, at the captain's orders, dragged the ladder from the skylight and carried it over to the cornice where he stood.

It was lowered over the front of the building till it hung by its hooks, and the two other men, black as negroes, with red and watering eyes, climbed up it from the windows and hauled it up after them. The captain turned from conversation with them to order a fireman to report below that the roof was open and the fire creeping along the floor below. The others waited.

There was an explosion under their feet that shook the building. Hurley recognised it as the 'puff' of the back draft.

'Just missed it, Bill,' the assistant foreman said.

Bill showed a row of white teeth in the black mask of his face. Sparks began to whirl up in the smoke from the vents, and the captain fumed at the slowness of the engine companies. He sent half the men to report for work in the street.

The others still waited. The smoke was growing ruddy with the flames at its base. There was a sound of voices over the roof, and Hurley turned to see pipemen dragging an empty hose from the neighboring building. He ran with the others to help, and they drew the pipe from the trap in the roof until it stretched like an angworm plucked from the clod.

There was a shout of orders given and repeated, a breathless pause, and then the hose stiffened to the roundity of a huge serpent, and poured its stream of water into the raw wound of tin and wood.

Hurley shook the spray from his eyes and laughed. When he looked again the smoke was black, there was the top of a ladder pointing through it and the last of the pipemen was disappearing in the cloud.

The captain cried: 'Well, boys, I guess there's nothing more to do here but the wetting down! Better get below again.'

The pipemen, following the proud tradition of the brigade, had gone to 'fight from the inside'.

It seemed to Hurley as if it had all happened in a minute, and yet it was a good quarter of an hour since he had started up the stairs, with the assistant foreman treading on his heels. The fight had only just begun and already it was over for him. The men were carrying their tools and ladders across the roof to take them below. He turned to follow them, disappointed that the fun had been so soon finished.

But the hammering of the old roof, the explosion of the back draft, and the running to and fro of the crew had had an effect that had not been foreseen. A beam cracked with the report of a pistol. The captain wheeled with a cry of alarm. 'The tank!' he shouted, and threw out his arm towards it.

Hurley, over his shoulder, saw the great water-tank that had been supported on rotten beams across the lower portion of the roof, fall, and felt the weakened roof sink under his feet like the deck of a rolling ship.

He sprang for the parapet and leaped upon it as his footing gave way beneath him, heard the rush of waters hiss above the snapping of the timbers, heard the men cry out in horror, and turned to find a dead silence broken by a single low groan from the wreckage hidden in the smoke. The three pipemen who had gone down the skylight ladder, were imprisoned there. The four remaining truckmen had escaped.

There was no confusion. The captain called out his orders quickly and coolly—to one to report to the chief, to another to lead up another line of hose, to a third to bring up the life lines from the truck, to a fourth to warn the men below that the whole weight of the roof now rested on the beams of the floor that was already burning and might fall at any moment.

Hurley did not wait for any orders. He had but one thought in mind, to save the men who would be slowly roasted between burning floor and burning roof. Snatching an axe from the nearest hand he ran along the parapet to the cornice, and began to creep down the incline of the fallen roofing into the smoke.

He heard the captain shout, 'Back there! Three's enough!' and then the smoke blew over him in a wave that blinded him, choked him, and seemed to fill his ears even, so that he heard nothing more.

The tin grew hot under his hands. His throat seemed to contract convulsively so he could not breathe. He shambled forward desperately, and the slope steepened, and he pitched forward, sliding on his stomach, to find air in a low current along the tin.

A groan sounded in the pit ahead of him. He turned to get his feet foremost, thrust himself forward, and slid down the incline on knees and elbows, clinging to

his axe; dropped over a rough edge of tin that cut his hands; struck with his feet something soft among the timbers, and knew from the groan that answered that he had found one of the men.

What followed was never afterwards clear in Hurley's mind. He was like a drowning man held below water in an entanglement of wreckage, gasping, suffocating, and fighting in the darkness to get himself free.

He found that the pipeman lay unconscious, with a broken leg caught under a beam, and when Hurley struggled to raise the beam he moaned, making a dry clucking in his mouth like a child in a fever. Hurley got his great hands under the timber and strained to raise the broken ends of it until the cords in his back pained at the roots. Then he fell on it furiously with his axe, his head swimming; and the blows cut into the timber with a sound that grew fainter and fainter to him.

He was dizzy and bewildered. He was growing sick and weak with the heat. The axe became so heavy that he could hardly lift it. His knees began to tremble, there was the roar of a whirlpool in his head, and he sank on his face and fainted.

On the parapet of the neighboring building Captain Dougherty abused Hurley, the pipeman, the roof, the fire, and his own keen eyes that had failed to note the insecurity of the water-tank. He stamped on the coping like a sailor on his deck. He had given his orders. There was nothing to do now but to wait.

It was a thing Captain Dougherty had never learned to do. When a truckman returned with the lifelines, he snatched the ropes from him, tied one quickly under his own arms, attached the other to his wrist and ordered them to lower him to Hurley.

They braced themselves for his weight. He threw a leg over the parapet.

'Hurry there, men!' he shouted to the pipemen appearing with the hose. 'Hurry there! Train her on the blaze in the middle! All right. Lower away.'

A shower of water from above revived Hurley in the wreckage. His helmet had fallen off, and the cool stream poured on his head. He struggled to his feet and attacked the joist with his empty hands. He was delirious.

'You would, would you?' he kept muttering. 'You would, would you?'

In his madness he fought with the beam until his hands were numb with bruises, and then he straightened up and threw himself at it, and his huge bulk came down like a sack of sand on the end of it and finished the work his axe had begun.

The rest was a delirium—years of delirium—in which he finally got the pipeman free and passed him to captain Dougherty, who appeared through the smoke from nowhere. He staggered and fell back in the timbers when he was relieved of his burden, and he rested happily there until some one tied a rope around him and stood him up again, despite his protests.

The roof fell from his feet, and he seemed to soar up miles into the clouds struggling. He thought he had been tied to a balloon and he was talking foolishness when the men lifted him over the parapet and laid him on the roof.

He was saved, and he had saved the only pipeman who had escaped. The floor had fallen with the others just as it had come to him.

He knew nothing of it until the following day, when he found himself lying on his back between the cool sheets of a hospital cot, and passed his bandaged hands over the bandages of his face. He heard Captain Dougherty say, 'He's all right. A bit singed, I guess. How are his eyes?'

A strange voice answered, 'We'll know to-morrow.'

Hurley said weakly, 'They're all right. I can see down here,' and he laid his hand on the side of his nose, where there was glimmer of light below the dressings.

The captain laughed. 'Couldn't bandage over that beak, eh? Lie quiet now, Hurley. We want you back to the house as soon as you can get on your feet. The chief's promoted you.'

Hurley tried to understand what that meant, but the pain in his head prevented him. 'Where,' he said, 'where was the balloon?'

They called him 'Balloon' Hurley at the station when he reported for duty three days later, but he had been entered on the roll of honor, and his promotion had increased his pay.

Captain Dougherty shook hands with him to congratulate him.

'You should have waited for orders, Hurley,' he said gruffly.

'Yes, sir,' Hurley apologised. 'I didn't know.'

'No harm done,' the captain said. 'You'll be on the ladder committee. There's another man on the bright work'—'The Youth's Companion.'

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