

When morning came, everything around us was calm. A dismal smoke still filled the air, and the smell seemed worse than ever.

What was to become of us I did not know. My wife hugged the child to her breast, and wept bitterly.

God had preserved us through the worst of the danger. The flames had gone past, so I thought it would be both ungrateful to Him and unmanly to despair now.

By this time the blaze of the burning forest was gone. The remains of the fires were still burning in many places, though, and it was dangerous to go among the burnt trees.

After resting for some time, we prepared for the long walk home. Taking up the child in my arms, I led the way over the hot ground and rocks. After two weary days and nights of suffering, we reached what was left of our farm. There was nothing here for us.

Two more days brought us to the nearest town, which had been free from the fire. We soon came to a house, where we were kindly treated.

We have never returned to the woods. Since then I have worked hard as a lumber-man; and, thanks to God, we are safe, sound, and happy.

A FOREST ON FIRE



An Old American Tale



A LearningIsland.org
15 - Minute Book

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A Forest on Fire/An Old American Tale

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We plunged down among the rushes, by the edge of the water. There we laid ourselves down flat, to await the fire. We prayed for a chance of escaping from being burned or devoured. The water was cool, but we could not enjoy the freshness.

On went the fire, rushing and crashing through the woods. Such a morning may we never again see! The heavens themselves, I thought, were frightened.

All above us was a bright, red glare, mingled with, dark, threatening clouds and black smoke.

Our bodies were cool enough, but our heads were scorching. The child, who now seemed to understand the danger, cried with such terror it broke our hearts.

The day passed on, and we became hungry. Many wild beasts came plunging into the water beside us. Others swam across to our side, and stood still nearby. They were more afraid of the fire than they were of each other. Although faint and weary, I managed to shoot a porcupine, and we ate it raw. There was fire all around us, but we dared not climb from the safety of the lake.

The night passed, I cannot tell you how. Smoldering fires covered the ground. The trees stood like pillars of fire, or fell across each other.

The stifling and sickening smoke still rushed over us. The burnt cinders and ashes fell thick around us.



A FOREST ON FIRE

We were sound asleep one night. Our horses and cattle were ranging quietly in the woods. Suddenly, about two hours before day, the snorting of our horses and lowing of our cattle awoke us.

I took my rifle and went to the door to see what beast had caused the hubbub. That's when I was struck by the glare of light reflected on all the trees before me, as far as I could see through the woods.

My horses were leaping about, snorting loudly. The cattle ran among them in great confusion.

As I ran to the back of the house, I plainly heard the crackling made by the burning brushwood. I saw the flames coming toward us in a far-extended line.

I ran to the house. "Dress yourself and the child as quickly as possible. And grab our money. I'll get the horses." I raced back outside and managed to catch and saddle two of the best horses we had.

The heat of the smoke was unbearable. Sheets of blazing fire flew over us in a manner beyond belief.

When we reached the shore, we had to go alongside for a while. We finally got around to the sheltered side. There we gave up our horses, which we never saw again.



All this was done in a very short time, for I felt that every moment was precious to us.

We then mounted our horses, and made off from the fire. My wife, who is an excellent rider, kept close to me. My daughter was just a small child and I took her in one arm.

As we rode away, I looked back and saw that the frightful blaze was close upon us. It had already taken hold of the house.

By good luck there was a horn attached to my hunting-clothes. I blew on it, hoping it would lead the remaining cows and the dogs after us.

The cattle followed for a while. Then they all ran, as if mad, through the woods. That was the last we saw of them.

My dogs, too, ran with us for a bit. Then they began chasing after the deer that raced past them ahead of the death that was so rapidly approaching.

We heard blasts from the horns of our neighbors. We knew that they were in the same unfortunate condition that we were in ourselves.

I was intent on saving our lives. Suddenly I thought of a large lake, some miles off. If we could make it that far, ahead of the raging fire, we might find safety.

I urged my wife to whip up her horse. We set off at full speed, making the best way we could over the fallen trees and brush heaps. They lay like kindling piles, placed there to block our way and fuel the fire that roared in upon us.

By this time we were suffering greatly from the heat. We were afraid that our horses would be overcome and drop down at any moment.

A sweeping breeze passed over our heads, racing toward the fire to give it more fuel. The glare of the burning trees shone more brightly than the daylight. I was starting to feel faint, and my wife looked pale.

The heat had produced such a flush in the child's face that, we feared for her life.

For ten miles we raced on, praying for swift horses. When we finally reached the borders of the lake we were quite exhausted, and our hearts failed us.