

THE BATTLE=CRY

—By CHARLES NEVILLE BUCK—

Author of "The Call of the Cumberlands"

Illustrations by C. D. RHODES

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SYNOPSIS.

Juanita Holland, a Philadelphia young woman of wealth, on her journey with her guide, Good Anse Talbott, into the heart of the Cumberlands to become a teacher of the mountain children, falls at the door of Fletch McNash's cabin. While resting there she overhears a talk between Bad Anse Havey, chief of his clan, and one of his henchmen that acquaints her with the Havey-McBriar feud. Juanita has an unprofitable talk with Bad Anse and they become antagonists. Cal Douglas of the Havey clan is on trial in Peril, for the murder of Noah Wyatt, a McBriar. In the night Juanita hears feudists ride past the McNash cabin. Juanita and Dawn McNash become friends. Cal Douglas is acquitted. Nash Wyatt attempts to kill him but is himself killed by the Haveys.

CHAPTER VI.

When, just before sunset yesterday afternoon, a verdict of acquittal for Cal Douglas had come from the jury room, the town of Peril had once more held its breath and doors had closed and the streets had cleared of such as wished to remain noncombatants. But with no comment or criticism Milt McBriar mounted his horse and rode out of town, shaping his course over the hills toward his own house. Following his example with equal quiet, his kinsmen mounted, too, and disappeared.

As for Cal Douglas, he reserved any enthusiasm his vindication may have brought to his heart until he was back again in the depths of the hills. He and his kinsmen turned their horses by a shorter and steeper trail to the house where the dance was going forward with shuffling and fiddling and passing of the jug.

When Milt McBriar and his fellows started home an informer or two from the Havey ranks kept them in view, themselves unseen, until they passed through the gap and started down the other side of the ridge into their own domain.

That they were being so watched was either known to the McBriars or assumed by them. But a picked squad on fresh mounts was waiting over there in a place where the road ran deep through the forest and laurel, and this squad was equipped with repeating rifles. Milt McBriar himself did not go with them. He had made all his arrangements in advance, and it was not seemly that the chief should take a personal part in an execution which he had decreed.

"Let me hear the news, boys," Old Milt had said with a wave of his hand, and then he had ridden on stolidly toward his own domain.

The house where the dance was being held stood between the knees of two hills.

Near midnight a half-dozen men who had not been invited rode carefully over an almost obliterated trail



Slowly Three of the New Arrivals Hitched Their Way Forward.

which wound blindly through the hills at the back of the place and hitched their horses in a rock-surrounded hollow a half-mile from the house. Other horses and mules were hitched all along the country road, but these belonged to the legitimate guests.

As the half-dozen men, whose arrival had been so cautiously accomplished, began slipping down, each holding his own course in the cover of the laurel, there was nothing to indicate that any warning had gone ahead of them.

From the houses with their yellow windows and their open doors came no note of apprehension—no intimation of suspicion. A medley of voices, now and then a laugh, a din of scraping feet, and the whine and boom of fiddles gave out a careless chorus to the night.

Slowly, with an adept craft that hardly broke a twig underfoot, three of the new arrivals hitched their way forward to a point of vantage down near the road.

They went crouched low, holding to the shadows with rifles thrust out

ahead and faces almost smiling in their grim foretaste of sure success. In a few moments they would have before them the doors and windows as lighted targets. Then whoever saw Cal Douglas would crook forefinger on trigger and the error of the jury would be rectified. The others would follow with a volley at random for good measure.

It was almost too easy. It seemed a shame to snatch a full and red revenge with such scant effort.

Then, as the foremost figure, crouching in easy range of a window, braced himself on one knee and peered forward under his upturned hat-brim, there came the reports of several rifles—but they were not the rifles of the McBriar squad, and they came not from the hills in front, but from the laurel at the back. They broke from directly between the carefully picked squad and its horses.

The man who had braced his knee and cocked his rifle gave out a brief, gurgling sound as an oath was stifled off in a hemorrhage of the throat, and pitched forward on his face. After that the figure lay without stirring, its own blood reddening the rifle whose trigger-guard pressed against its forehead.

The doors vomited men. There was a trailing and ragged outburst of firearms, and many dark figures plunged here and there across the silvered spaces where the shadows did not fall.

Of the six men who had crept down, three had lain within one hundred yards of the house when the shots came from their rear. The other three were off at the side, ready to bring up the horses as close as might prove safe when the moment came for flight. But they, too, found themselves cut off. Had the man who fired on the one who was about to fire waited one minute longer, there would have been more deaths than the single one. His colleagues would then have been, like himself, covering their respective victims—victims who confidently thought themselves executioners. But as it was, they had not quite yet worked themselves into positions untrammelled by intervening rock and timber.

The man who fired first knew this, for he had not heard the perfectly imitated quaver of "scritch-owls" which was to signify a common readiness. But as he had eyed his crouching victim across his rifle-sights he had also been able to look beyond him, and had seen the figure of Cal Douglas pause at the lighted window. He knew that to wait a moment would be to wait too long. So the others had to fire blindly through the black undergrowth at speeding shadows—and they missed.

The fleeing murder squad melted back into the black timber, and some of them, signaling with the call of frog and owl, came together in temporary safety. They dared not go to their own horses, since they might be discovered in the effort. The road that led into the McBriar country would be watched. If they were to carry away unpunctured skins they must flee the other way—into the Havey territory and astride stolen Havey horses. It was every man for himself, and they had not paused to count noses. They hurriedly swung themselves into saddles at the remote end of the line of hitched mounts and galloped pell-mell down the road toward the cabin of Fletch McNash.

When the theft of the horses was discovered Anse Havey sent pursuing parties to ride the roads in both directions.

It had seemed to Havey wiser to withhold his warning from all save those whom he needed to use. To all the rest the affair had come without notice, and the hue and cry which followed the rifle-shots was genuine in its excitement.

But in a very few moments the pandemonium fell away and sullenness supplanted the shouting. The mountains behind, where several men were stealthily seeking escape and many others were stalking them, lay silent in the moonlight.

A hundred yards beyond the window a small and inquisitive knot of men gathered around a figure that had hunched forward, sprawling on a cocked rifle. Someone turned the figure up and straightened its limbs so that they should not stiffen in such grotesque attitude. The face, with the yellow lantern-light shining down on it, was the face of a boy of twenty. Its thin lips were set in a grim smile of satisfaction, for death had overtaken him without a suspicion of its coming.

Perhaps, had a photograph of his retina been taken, it would have disclosed the portrait of Cal Douglas pausing at the open window.

"Hit's Little Nash Watt!" exclaimed a surprised voice, using the diminutive which in the mountains takes the place of junior and stays with a man well on in life. The victim who had been designated to avenge the death of Noah Watt had been Noah Watt's younger brother.

Meanwhile the pursuing horsemen were gaining slowly on those that fled. The murder squad had failed and must bear back to Milt McBriar, if

they ever got back, a narrative of frustrated effort. They were bitterly angry and proportionately desperate. So, as they clattered along the empty road, meeting no enemy whom they could shoot down in appeasement of their wrath, they satisfied themselves with raising their war cry for the benefit of the sleeping cabins.

A little distance beyond Fletch McNash's place lay a cross-trail by which they might find a circuitous way back over the ridge, but it was too steep and broken to ride. They could make better time on foot over the "roughs," so there they abandoned their mounts and plunged into the timber. When the pursuers came up with the discarded horses they realized that further effort in the nighttime would be bootless. Yet, since the heaving flanks and panting nostrils of the horses testified that they had been only a few minutes late, they took a last chance and plunged into the thicket.

There a single defiant shot, sent from a long way up the hillside, was their only challenge, and their volley of reply, fired at the flash, was merely a retort of hatred. But even in the isolation of the hills certain news travels on wings, and the morning would find every cabin dweller wearing a face of grim and sullen realization. The phrase which Fletch McNash had whispered to his boy would travel to the headwaters of every fork, and the faces of the women would once more wear the drawn misery of anxiety for their men.

CHAPTER VII.

It was into this newly charged atmosphere that Juanita Holland and her missionary guide rode in the morning mists.

Good Anse Talbott was in many ways an inadequate ally. He was both narrow and illiterate, but he was earnest.

At last the girl rode resolutely up to her escort's saddle-skirts and asked: "Brother Talbott, hadn't you better tell me what it all means?"

The missionary lifted a face that was almost haggard. "Hit means," he said, with no idea of irreverence, "thet Satan's got both underholts—an' God help this country."

Then he sketched for her the history of the feud and deduced conclusions from what they had both seen and heard.

She listened with a sickening heart until he changed the subject and told her that the Widow Everson, with whom she was to stop, had a sizable house where she would be comfortable.

At last the girl saw, still a long way off, a fertile little valley, where the corn seemed taller and richer than on the scattered coves. There, like a tiny matchbox, on a high level near which the wall of mountain broke into a broad gateway, she could make out a house. It was not of logs, but of brick, and stood in an inclosure that looked more like the Blue Grass than the mountains.

"Does ye see yon brick house nigh ther gap? Thet's Bad Anse's place, an' over thar across ther ridge, three mile away by crow-flight an' a half-day's ride by ther roads, is whar Milt McBriar dwells. Ye kain't see hit from hyar."

It was almost sundown when they reached the house of the Widow Everson, and at sight of the woman standing at the fence to meet them Juanita's heart took strength. This house was not of logs, but of undressed boards, with gaily painted window and door frames of red, and although two days ago she would have called it mean, she had revised her views enough to regard it now as almost magnificent.

The widow dwelt here with her two sons, and the trio, by virtue of great diplomacy, had succeeded in maintaining a neutrality throughout the strife. The comforts of the place were such as must serve to give contentment where teaming is arduous and the mail carrier comes twice a week, but cleanliness dwelt there and homely cheer of a sort.

Before they had yet entered the house the girl saw a horseman approaching with an escort of several men who carried rifles balanced across their pommels. They came from the east, and though Juanita did not know who they were, she recognized the central rider, himself unarmed, to be a person of consequence.

He was tall, and under his faded coat his rather lean figure fell into an attitude of well-muscled strength despite his fullness of years.

"Evenin', ma'am," said the newcomer. "No, I hain't a-goin' ter light. I jest heered thet Brother Talbott was a-comin' over hyar, an' I wanted speech with him."

The missionary nodded. "All right, Milt," he said, and the girl knew, as she had already suspected, that here was a second of her chief enemies.

"I reckon ye all knows what happened last night," she heard him saying slowly. "Hit war a pity, an' I

hears thet ther Haveys are a-chargin' hit up ergin me. Thet's nat'ral enough, I reckon. They 'lows thet I'd walk plumb across hell on a rotten plank ter do 'em injury. Ef they stopped ter reason hit out a spell they'd recollect thet I went over thar ter Peril an' let a jedge thet didn't own his own soul an' a jury they hed done packed, clear one of their kinfolks fer killin' a cousin o' mine—an' thet I never raised a hand. I reckon they didn't hardly hev no call ter figger thet I was skeered of them. I done what I done because I wanted peace. I was fer lettin' ther law take hits co'se, even when I knowed the cote war crooked es a drunkard's elbow."

He paused, and no one spoke, so at last he went on again.

"But little Nash Watt war young an' hot-hearted. He could hardly see hit in ther light of wisdom, and he didn't come ter me fer counsel. So he jest went hell-spittin' over thar with some other boys thet he overspurred—an' he didn't come back. I'm sorry. I was



"I 'Lowed I'd Ask Ye Ef Ye'd Fetch the Body Home."

right fond of Little Nash, but I hain't complainin' none. He started trouble an' he got hit."

Again the dark giant paused; then he came to his point. His voice was regretful, almost sad, but tinged with resignation.

"So Little Nash is a-layin' dead down thar, an' no McBriar durstn't venture down ter fetch his body home."

He waved a hand toward the west, and the faces of his escort lowered. They seemed the faces of men who "durst" go anywhere, but their chief went on.

"I knowed, Brother Talbott, thet ye sарves Almighty God, an' thet thar hain't no word ye carries but what all men will listen ter ye, so I've done come ter ye in behalf of Little Nash's maw, an' his wimmenfolks. I 'lowed I'd ask ye ef ye'd ride down thar and fetch home ther body?"

The missionary nodded, and though he was travel-stained and very tired, he said: "I'll start right now."

Then Milt McBriar continued: "An' ef ye sees fit, ye kin tell Anse Havey thet I hain't a sun' fer peace, but thet I hain't a-blamin' him nuther, an' thet ef he wants ther truce ter go on I'm a-willin' ter hev hit thetaway. I hain't holdin' no grudge on account of last night."

Juanita's eyes grew a little misty as she thought of that desolated cabin where a mother and sisters were grieving for the boy who had been "hot-hearted." Even the sight of his older kinsman, who sat his horse with such composure while his eyes wandered off to the purple haze of the far mountains, stirred in her an emotion of sympathy.

Of course she knew nothing of the ten acres of "bottom land" which were to be Little Nash's when Cal Douglas should have ceased to breathe, nor how it was covetousness and cold thrift that sent him out with his rifle in the night. She only heard the McBriar say, "I'm much obliged;" and saw him turn his cavalcade east.

The tired missionary started his mule west again, and she herself followed the Widow Everson into the cabin which was for the time to be her home. When the widow left her she rummaged in her saddlebags and drew out a small leather case. She sat for a long while silent in her shuck-bottomed rocking chair, gazing wearily out at the west, where sunset fires were beginning to kindle, and where an old-rose haze was drowsing over the valley and glowing more brightly in the twisting ribbon of a far-away stream. But her eyes came often back from the panorama out there to dwell a little wistfully on a photograph in the leather frame.

It was the picture of the man she had sent away. Had he himself been there just then, with her courage at

ebb-tide, and had he stretched out his arms, she would have shaken her head wearily on abstract resolves and come into their embrace. But he was not there.

In the quaint conversation of the Widow Everson and her sons Juanita found so much of the amusing that she had to school herself against too great an appreciation of their utterly unintentional humor. Though she was a "fotched-on woman" to be taken on probation, it was only a matter of hours before the family capitulated, as people in general had a fashion of doing under the spell of her graciousness and charm. Jerry Everson, whom men accounted surly, for the first time in years brushed his shapeless hat and remembered not to "hang it on the floor," and Sim Everson hied him into the misty woods at dawn and brought home squirrels for her first breakfast in his house.

In the forenoon of her first day she left the house and, crossing the tiny garden where the weeds were already growing tall and rank enough to hint of future ragged victory, she made her way by a narrow trail that led to the crest of the ridge.

Juanita was steering her course for a patriarchal poplar that sent a straight shaft heavenward at the rim of the crest, opening its verdure like a great flag, unfurled on a mighty parapet. She knew that up there she could look two ways across the divide, and that her battleground would be spread before her.

She looked to the east, and line after line of hills melted into the sky. She looked to the west, and there, too, they rose, phalanx on phalanx, to dissolve in a smoky haze that effaced the horizon. It seemed as if in a majesty of relentlessness they reached from sunrise to sunset, and so, as far as the locked-in life of their people went, they might.

She stood there a long while, and finally she saw, where for a space the road ran near the brick house, unshaded by the woods, a straggling little cortege. At its front rode a stoop-shouldered man in whom, even at that far distance, she thought she recognized the missionary. Behind him came a few horsemen riding in two squads, and between the squads crawled a "jolt-wagon" drawn by mules. She knew that the Haveys were bringing back to the frontier the enemy's dead, and she shuddered at the cold reality.

It may have been three hours later that Good Anse Talbott rode up to the Widow Everson's. When the girl, who had returned long ago from the crest, came out to meet him at the door she found him talking there with Milt McBriar, who had also ridden up, but from the other direction.

"Anse Havey 'lows," the preacher was saying, "thet he hes done fotched home ther body of little Nash Watt, an' thet ther boy was shot ter death a layin' in ther la'rel a hundred paces from the winder whar Cal Douglas was a standin'!"

"I've done already acknowledged thet," declared Milt in a voice into which crept a trace of truculent sullenness.

The missionary nodded. "I hain't quite through yet, Milt," he went on evenly, "and the girl who stood leaning against the door-frame, caught for an instant a sparkle of zealot earnestness in his weary eyes.

"Anse is willin' ter take yore hand on this truce. He's willin' ter stand pledge thet ther Haveys keeps faith. But I'm a preacher of the Gawsel of God, Milt, and I don't low ter be no go-between without both of you men does keep faith."

Milt McBriar stiffened resentfully, and his dark brows drew together under his hat brim.

"Does ye doubt thet I'll do what I says?" he inquired in a voice too soft for sincerity.

The missionary did not drop his steady and compelling eyes from the gaze direct. It was as if he were reading through the pupils of the other and searching the dark heart.

"I aims ter see thet ye both starts out fair, Milt," he said, still quietly. "An' ter thet end I aims ter admonish ye both on ther terms of this meetin' atween ye."

For an instant Milt McBriar's semblance of calm reflectiveness slipped from him and his voice rose raspingly. "Did Anse Havey learn ye thet speech?"

Good Anse Talbott shook his head patiently.

"No, I told Anse ther same thing I'm a-tellin' you. Neither Anse ner ther four men thet fetches ther body will hev any sort of weapon about 'em when they comes acrost thet stile. Ye've got ter give me yore hand thet none of yore men hain't a goin' ter be armed. I'm a servant of ther Most High God." For an instant fire blazed in the preacher's eyes and his voice mounded with fervor. "Fer years I've done sought ter teach ther grace an' his hatred of murder ter ther people of these hyar hills. When you two men shakes hands on this truce I aims ter be standin' by with a rifle-gun in my hands, an' ef I sees anything crooked I'm goin' ter use hit."

The dark giant stood for a time silent, then he gravely nodded his head. "Them terms suits me," he said briefly.

The two men walked down to the fence and separated there, going in opposite directions.

A few minutes later Juanita, still standing fascinatedly in the doorway, was looking out across the shoulder of the missionary. He presided at the threshold with grave eyes, and, even after these peaceful years, there was something of familiar caress in the way his brown hand lay on his rifle-lock. Then the girl saw a strange and primitive ratification of treaty.

On either side of the little porch stood a group of solemn men, mostly bearded, mostly coatless, and all unarmed. In front of those, at the right stood Anse Havey, his eyes still the dominant feature of the picture.

Over across from him was the taller and older chieftain of the other clan. They stood there gravely, with a courtesy that cloaked their hatred. Out in the road was the "jolt-wagon," and in its deep bed the girl could see the canvas that covered its burden.

As Bad Anse took his place at the front of his escort his gaze met that of Juanita. He did not speak, but for an instant she saw his face harden, his eyes narrow, and his lips set themselves. It was the glance of one who has been lashed across the face and who cannot strike back, but who will not soon forget.

This time the girl's eyes did not drop, and certainly they held no hint of relenting or plea for forgiveness.

But at that moment the head of the Haveys turned from her and began speaking.

"I got yore message, Milt," he said casually, "an' I reckon you got my answer. I've brought back Little Nash."

"I'm obliged ter ye." The McBriar paused, then volunteered: "Ef ther boy had took counsel of me, this thing wouldn't never hev happened."

Bad Anse Havey stood looking at the other, then he nodded.

"Milt," he carelessly announced at the end of his scrutiny, while the ghost of an ironical smile glinted in his eyes, though it left his lips grave, "I've got several hosses an' mules down thar in my barn that we found hitched out in ther timber when Nash an' his friends took to the la'rel." Again he paused and studied the faces of the McBriar men before he went on. "One of 'em is yore own roan mare, Milt. One of 'em b'longs ter Sam thar, and one is Bob's thar." He pointed out each man as he spoke. "Ye can get 'em any time ye send down for 'em."

The girl caught her breath and, despite her dislike, acknowledged the cool insolence with which Anse had answered Milt's plea of innocence. Milt replied only with a scowl, so Anse contemplatively continued, as though to himself:

"Hit's right smart pity for a feller to go out shootin' in the night-time an' to take a kinsman's horse—with-out takin' his counsel. It might lead to some misunderstandin'."

A baleful glare flashed deep in the eyes of the taller man, and from the henchmen at his back came an uneasy shuffle of brogans.

But the voice of Good Anse Talbott relieved the tension. "Stiddy, thar, men," he quietly cautioned. "Ye didn't hardly meet ter talk 'bout hosses. I'll lead them nags back myself, Milt."

Then Anse Havey stepped forward and held out his hand.

"I gives ye my hand, Milt McBriar," he said, "thet ther truce goes on."

"An' I gives ye mine," rejoined the other.

After a perfunctory shake the two turned together and went down the



"I Gives Ye My Hand, Milt McBriar."

steps. The girl saw both squads lifting the covered burden from the wagon and carrying it around the road, where the other wagon waited. She believed that the feud was ended, but it is doubtful if either of the principals whose hands had joined parted with great trust in the integrity of the other's intentions. It is certain that one of them at least was already making plans for the future, not at all in accordance with that compact of peace.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Haying for Deer.

Winters when the snow is deep for long stretches of time deer congregate in yards in the Adirondacks and many of the weaker ones die of starvation. Their skeletons may be found in various parts of the great wilderness when the snows are gone. This year game protectors have been cutting tons of marsh hay on the beaver meadows in the remote sections of the Adirondacks and stacking it in sheltered places to be fed to the deer next winter when the snow is so deep that other food is not obtainable. The conservation commission believes that it will save the lives of hundreds of deer that otherwise would perish. The stacks have been encased in pole frames and liberally salted. Deer will not eat marsh hay unless it is so treated.