

The RED MIST

A TALE OF CIVIL STRIFE
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SYNOPSIS.

Confederate Sergeant Wyatt of the Staunton artillery is sent as a spy to his native county on the Green Briar by General Jackson. Wyatt meets a mountaineer named Jim Taylor. They ride together to a house beyond Hot Springs. In the house Wyatt and Taylor meet Major Harwood, father of Noreen and an old neighbor of Wyatt, who is sent to bed while the two other men talk. Wyatt becomes suspicious, and finds that Taylor has murdered Harwood and escaped. Wyatt changes to the U. S. cavalry uniform he has with him, and rides away in the night, running into a detachment of Federal cavalry, to whom he identifies himself as Lieutenant Raymond, Third U. S. cavalry, by means of papers with which he has been provided. Captain Fox finds Harwood's body and follows Taylor's trail.

CHAPTER V.

The Night Attack.

The incidents of that ride do not remain with me in any special clearness of detail. We rode steadily, keeping well together, conscious that in all probability we were watched by hostile eyes, peering out from behind rock and thicket. We foraged through deserted shacks, finding poor reward, yet managed to subsist, although with hunger unsatisfied. The men grumbled and Fox swore, as, long before night came, he comprehended the fact that we were on a fool's errand; that his little squad was being lured deeper and deeper into a hostile country, but no opportunity to turn aside presented itself. The night overtook us in the midst of a mountain solitude. The scouts had discovered a spring at the bottom of a rocky hollow, and there Fox reluctantly ordered camp to be made, the horses finding scant pasture beyond. The grumbling and cursing soon ceased, however, and those not on duty slept fitfully. I made the round of the sentries with Fox, slipping and stumbling over the rough way, through the darkness.

"This weird place gets on the nerves," he said, as if half ashamed of the confession. "Do you know, Raymond, I have felt for the last hour as if we were riding into some trap." He glanced nervously behind him. "I don't believe there has ever been a Federal detachment down as far as this before. We're in old Ned Cowan's country."

"Confederate?" I asked, interested at once by the name.

"Heaven knows! To the best of my belief the fellow doesn't give a whoop for either side. He's just a natural born devil and this war gave him a chance to get the hell out of his system. Still, I guess, he calls himself a Reb."

"And his followers?"

"Mountain men mostly, together with a bunch of deserters and conscripts from both sides. Nobody knows how big a band he has, but it would take an army to run them out of these mountains. We had orders to do it—but piffle! Ramsey came down as far as Fayette Court House with a regiment of infantry, and a cavalry guard, and sent out a flag of truce asking the old devil to come in and talk with him. He actually did come; rode right up to headquarters, with a dozen of his ragged followers, heard what Ramsey had to say, and then simply told the general to go to hell, and rode off again."

"Were you there? Did you see the men?"

"No, but the sergeant did; he was detailed at that time as headquarters orderly."

"Yes," I said, determined on my course. "I was talking with Hayden during the noon halt. He described Cowan to me, and I believe he is the same man I encountered at Hot Springs, Captain Fox—the fellow Taylor we are in pursuit of."

The captain stared into the black night, silent for several minutes.

"I've been suspecting the same thing for the last three hours," he admitted at last slowly, "and that he hoped we would follow him. The fellow hasn't ridden fast, and has purposely left a plain trail. More than that he was expected along this road and there were relays of horses waiting. He only changed once, but he was met by another party near that ruined mill. Ever since then I have felt that we were being watched by unseen eyes. Did you observe the curl of smoke to our right just before dark—how it rose and fell in rings?"

"I saw the smoke, yes—a thin spiral, but supposed it to be from the chimney of some mountain shack."

"Well, it was not. That was an outside fire, and the smoke was smoothed and then thrown up by blankets. That is their way of signaling. I tell

you, Neutenant, this murder of Harwood is more than an army matter. It was either the culmination of a feud—done for personal revenge—or else the major had papers in his possession bearing on the situation here that could only be gained over his dead body. The man who killed him was old Ned Cowan."

"But Harwood must have known him," I protested.

"Of course he did; they were neighbors before the war and met there by appointment. For all I know the major may have had some confidential communication from the war department. God knows what it was. All I am sure about is that I would give a good deal to be out of this fix right now and twenty miles to the north of here."

We sat there for half an hour discussing the matter and endeavoring to convince ourselves the danger was less than we imagined. There was nothing to be done but wait for daylight. Finally Fox crept forth again to make another round of the pickets, to assure himself they were alert, and before he returned I had fallen asleep.

The chill of the night awoke me, cold and shivering. The wind had arisen and swept down the tunnel in which I lay with an icy breath against which my single blanket afforded no protection. The man who had been lying next me was gone, and so there must have been a change of guard while I slept. I could distinguish, dimly outlined against the sky, the overhanging rock-wall which inclosed our camp, and the deeper shade of a cleft a yard or two to my left, where the dead trunk of a tree stood like a gaunt, ugly sentinel.

As I lay staring the figure of a man slipped out from behind its protection and, dropping on hands and knees, crept forward across the open space. Another and another followed, mere ghostlike shadows, scarcely appearing real. For the instant I doubted my eyesight, imagined I dreamed. Then, before I could raise voice in alarm, a rifle spat viciously, the red flame of its discharge cleaving the night. A fusillade followed and in the flare I caught grotesque glimpses of men leaping forward, and there was a confused yelling of voices, a din of noise.

I was upon my knees, revolver in hand, but in the melee below could not distinguish friend from foe—like they were a blur of figures, one instant visible, the next obscured. Yet there could be no doubt as to the final ending of the struggle. Taken by surprise, outnumbered, the little squad of troopers would be crushed, annihilated. Nor was there reason why I should sacrifice myself in their defense—a valueless sacrifice. My choice was instantly made, as there flashed to my mind what my fate would be if I ever fell into Cowan's hands attired in Federal uniform.

On hands and knees I crept to the cleft in the rock wall and began to clamber up over the irregular rocks. The shouts and yells, the cries for mercy, the sound of blows, grew fainter and finally ceased altogether. Leaning back and looking down I could perceive nothing in the black void. A voice shouted an order, but it sounded far off and indistinct. I was in a narrow gully, the incline less steep than amid the rocks below, and could perceive the lighter canopy of the sky not far above me.

As I crept out into the open space someone touched a match to a pile of dry limbs in the cove below, and the red flames leaped high, revealing the scene. I caught a glimpse of it—staring down as though I clung at the mouth of hell, seeing moving black figures, and the dark, motionless shadows of dead men. The one glimpse was enough, the fearful tragedy of it smiting me like a blow, and I turned and ran, stumbling over the rough ground, my only thought that of escape.

There were stars in the sky, their dim light sufficient to yield some faint guidance. My course led me close beside the edge of the ridge. Here the ground fell away to the banks of a shallow stream and some instinct of woodcraft led me to wade down with its current for a considerable distance, until the icy water drove me to the bank once more. I knew I had covered several miles and was beyond pursuit and safe from discovery. I remained there until dawn, the first gray light giving assurance that my flight had been to the north along the foothills. From the ridge top a wide

vista lay revealed of rough, seemingly uninhabited country, growing more distinct as the light strengthened. There was no house visible, no sign of any road; all about extended a rude mountain solitude, but to the northwest there was a perceptible break in the chain of hills, as though a pass led down into the concealed valley beyond. With this for guidance I plunged forward, eager to get out of that drear wilderness.

It was considerably after the noon hour before I came upon a dismal shack of logs in the midst of a small clearing. The light streaming in through the open door revealed that it was unoccupied. Yet someone had been there, and not so very long ago, for there were scraps of food on one of the overturned boxes. Unappetizing as these appeared, I sat down and ate heartily, then got to my feet and, closing the door securely behind me, plowed through the tangle of weeds back to the road.

Just before sundown I emerged from the narrow gap and looked down into the broad valley of the Green Briar. It was a scene to linger in the memory, and at my first glance I knew where I was, recognizing the familiar objects outspread before me. Lewisburg lay beyond a spur of hills, invisible from my position, although distant spirals of smoke indicated its presence. A few log huts appeared along the curving road, the one nearest me in ruins, while a gaunt chimney beside a broad stream unbridged was all that remained of a former mill. Beyond this, in midst of a grove of noble trees, a large house, painted white, was the only conspicuous feature in the landscape. I recognized it at once as the residence of Major Harwood.

My gaze rested upon it, as memory of the man, and his fate, surged freshly back into mind. The place had been spared destruction; it remained unchanged—but from that distance it had the appearance of desertion. This condition was no particular surprise, for Harwood's daughter, scarcely more than a girl to my remembrance, would doubtless be with friends, either in Lewisburg or Charleston; and that the mansion, thus deserted, still re-



And Began to Clamber Up Over the Irregular Rocks.

mained undestroyed was, after all, not so strange, for the major's standing throughout that section would protect his property.

I moved on down the steep descent, losing sight of the house as the road twisted about the hill, although memory of it did not desert my mind. Some odd inclination seemed to impel me to turn aside and study the situation there more closely. Possibly some key to the mystery of Harwood's murder—some connection between him and old Ned Cowan—might be revealed in a search of the deserted home. Fox had said that his party halted at the house on their march east toward Hot Springs. Some scrap of paper might have been left behind in the hurry of departure, which would yield me a clue. If not this, then there might be other papers stored there relating to military affairs in this section of value to the Confederacy. Harwood was the undoubted leader of the Union sympathizers throughout the entire region; he would have lists of names, and memoranda of meetings, containing information which would help me greatly in my quest. An exploration could not be a matter of any great danger, and might yield me the very knowledge I sought.

The great house loomed before me black and silent. If I had ever questioned its desertion its appearance lulled every such suspicion. Nor had it escaped unscathed from the depopulation of war. At a distance, gazing from the side of the mountain, I could perceive no change. But now, close at hand, even the intense darkness could not hide the scars left by vandals. The front steps were broken, the door

above was tightly closed, yet both the windows to the right were smashed in, sash and all, leaving a wide opening. I crept forward, and endeavored to peer through, but the darkness within was opaque. I was wet through, chilled to the bone, my uniform clinging to me like soaked paper. At least the inside promised shelter from the storm, a chance for a fire, and possibly fragments of food. And I had nothing to fear but darkness.

My revolver was under the flap of my cavalry jacket, dry and ready for use. I brought it forward, within easy grip, and stepped over the sill. My feet touched carpet, littered with broken glass, and I felt about cautiously. My recollection of the interior of the house was vague and indistinct, but I knew a wide hallway led straight through from front door to back, bisected only by a broad stairway leading to the upper story. I groped along the inside wall, found the door at last, standing wide open, and emerged into the hall. The way was clearer here, and there came into my mind the recollection of a bracket lamp, on the wall at the foot of the stairs. My remembrance of the position of the lamp was extremely vague, yet my fingers found it at last, and lifted it from the bracket. The globe contained oil, and, in another moment, the light revealed my immediate surroundings.

The total desertion of the place was evident; the destruction which had been wrought was plainly the work of cowardly vandals, who had broken in after the Harwoods left. Convinced of this truth, I proceeded fearlessly to explore, seeking merely the warmth of a fire and food. The library, a large room, the walls lined with bookcases, afforded no encouragement, but I stopped in amazement at the door of the dining room—the light of my lamp revealing a table at which someone had lately eaten, apparently alone. There was a single plate, a cup and saucer, a half loaf of bread, with a slice cut, part of a ham bone, with considerable meat remaining untouched, and a small china teapot. For an instant the unexpected sight of these articles fascinated me, and then my eyes caught a dull glow in the fireplace at the opposite end of the room—the red gleam of a live ember.

The shock of this discovery was so sudden as to give me a strange, haunted feeling. The house had seemed so completely deserted, so desolate, wrapped in silence and darkness, that the very conception that someone else was hiding there came upon me like a blow. Who could the person be? Well, I would find out. Thus far the advantage was mine, for I knew of another presence, while the fellow, whoever he might prove to be, in all probability possessed no knowledge of my entrance.

My heart beat fast, but from excitement, not fear. With cocked revolver in one hand, the lamp in the other, I silently opened door after door, peering into vacant apartments, half thinking every shadow to be a skulking figure. The search revealed nothing; not even further evidence of any presence in the house. The kitchen fire was cold, the cooking utensils clean, and in their proper places.

Satisfied already that the mysterious invader had departed, yet sternly determined now to explore the whole house, and have done with the business, I mounted the back stairway, a strip of rag carpet rendering my steps silent, and, with head above the landing, flashed my light cautiously along the upper hall. There were doors on either side, the most of them open, but the third to the left was closed. There was no transom over it, but the door was far enough away from the radius of my lamp so as to reveal a faint glow of light at the floor line. I set the lamp down on the landing, and crept noiselessly forward to assure myself; it was true, a light was burning within the closed door.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

No Italian Anthem.

Musicians will doubtless wish to add an Italian national anthem to their repertoire. They cannot find it. Italy has many patriotic songs, as the "Royal March" and "Garibaldi's Hymn," but no recognized national anthem, though the last-named song has almost come to the supremacy. In this respect Italy is at the same disadvantage as Turkey. After the revolution the Young Turks offered a prize for a national anthem, but so far the poet of patriotism has not come forward to claim it.

Value of Expert Testimony.

The value of insanity experts and handwriting specialists grows of less and less value the more they are used in the courts. If a man doesn't demonstrate his mental incapacity to the extent that it is observable to the judge and the jury there isn't much use to attempt to prove him crazy by expert testimony. The old Quaker who said: "They are all crazy except thee and me and thee are a little queer" spoke a near truth.

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