

# A FLAG OF TRUCE

By MARTHA McCULLOCH-WILLIAMS.

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Maj. Hilliard sat in the chimney corner puffing big clouds from his after dinner cigar. Morris, his son and heir, who had come in late to the noon meal, was just filling himself a second glass of wine. The major chuckled fully, but pretended to frown as he said:

"Young man, I've been hearing things! Things that do not particularly please me."

"About me?" Morris asked. "That is a pity. Such a model son as I am known to be. What's the matter, governor?"

"No very great matter," the major said, with an indulgent laugh. "Still—I wish it hadn't happened. I'm got a bit straight-laced; you'll bear witness I have tried to raise you a man, not a milk-sop—with, I may say, fair success. A man must have his amusements. I have not thought of interfering with yours. All I ask is that they shall be in good taste."

"You surely don't accuse me of wasting any time on ugly women, sir?" Morris said, lightly, though his breath came a little quicker. The major laughed again—there was even a twinkle in his eye as he said:

"No, sir! That is so little a Hilliard trait I should certainly disown a son who showed it. Your river bend flame, Miss Swan Hinton, would do credit to a man of twice your experience. Don't think I mean to lecture you about her, neither about her parties, or clumping with her worthless father, old Nat. He is an entertaining old vagrant—and Lord! how he can fish! Besides, he is a sort of king among the poor whites. You must get to know them—you must, indeed, know all sorts and conditions of the people you may one day aspire to represent. The proper study of a politician is man—he had better be careful, though, how he mixes it with a study of woman. He cannot, of course, leave the ruler sex wholly out of it—the thing is to study that sex at just the proper angle."

"Thank you for nothing, governor. You've been setting me the example that is so much better than precept, ever since I was in short frocks," Morris said, gulping his wine. Then he walked to the fireplace and began kicking the hickory logs which smoldered and sputtered there, though the windows were wide open, and the world outside warm and sunlit with the warmth of late May. Maj. Hilliard, who loved his land, and his son, with almost equal passion, let his eyes range over the broad acres of his estate then brought them back to Morris and said in a voice of pity:

"On my soul, I'm sorry for those Hinton girls. Handsome enough for duchesses, every one, and then their gift! They truly have music in their souls, yet they would be better off without it."

"I don't know—they love it so. I believe they love, too, the distinction it gives them," Morris said, looking carefully away from his father. "They are proud of being the only woman around here—see, hereabout. They when they play, at the balls and barbecues and fairs, of course, they are brought in contact with—better people than their own sort."

"That's the rub—and the pity of it. Maj. Hilliard said thoughtfully: "This contact with the better sort will make their own sort distasteful to them. They are big, splendid animals, as soft-hearted as they are undisciplined, as innocent as they are ignorant. I wonder, indeed, that they are not old Nat's daughters—he is certainly a tough citizen. It must be they take after the mother, who is of decent farming stock. If only her girls were kept quietly at home, it is likely they would marry farmers themselves, and be happy ever after. But hawked about as they are, they learn to flout the decent youngsters who would make them such excellent husbands; even that, however, is not the worst. They will end by loving where love means ruin."

"Old Nat will not listen to any talk of marriage," Morris said, still looking away. "You know he lives easy, since the girls bring in so much money."

"I fancy whoever married one of them would marry the whole family," Maj. Hilliard said. "And that brings me to my grievance. Of course, it is ridiculous—I dare say you thought it was only a piece of innocent vaunting on the girls' part, but you should have checked her, Dick Daly toils me at the last party you stood quiet when Swan called herself Mrs. Morris Hilliard. For ourselves, it does not matter—but I have a feeling about it. You ought to have remembered that that was your mother's name."

The major was dark, with square jaws, black beetling brows, a firm chin, a thin-lipped, almost cruel mouth. His nose was fair and blue-eyed, with a pure Greek profile. He had indeed the face of the mother who had died when he was born. But some subtle inner stirring brought upmost the race likeness indefinable yet beyond mistake. It was a Hilliard of Hilliards who answered, slightly drooping his head as he spoke:

"I don't forget, sir! Swan spoke—the truth."

"The truth!" Major Hilliard reeled as from a blow, covering his eyes with his hands. Morris's face had affirmed his words. After a long minute the father held out his hand saying steadily:

"At least you show yourself my son. You had the courage not to lie to me. You knew I would believe you against the whole world—even against myself."

"That was why I couldn't do it," Morris said. Maj. Hilliard smiled again, but Morris did not offer to steady him. The two were comrades much more like close-knit brothers than father and son. The major's very life was bound up in his boy, whom almost from the cradle he had treated as a man, and an equal. He had aimed to teach him beyond everything, what it meant to have been born a gentleman and a Hilliard, the

last of a line of spotless gentlemen. He had no more dreamed that Morris could marry beneath himself than that the sun could drop out of the sky.

"You must love this girl—very deeply," he said at last, with his eyes on the smoldering fire. Morris set his teeth hard.

"Yes, I love her," he said, very slowly. "And away from her I hate her almost as much. I know all you can say—that she is ignorant, vain, vacuous, that she knows nothing of the reserves, and refinements, which should belong to the woman who shall take my mother's place. What is the good of talking, though? I am a man. She is the most beautiful woman in the world. And she loves me. Yes, she does—loves me madly. I might have made her anything I chose. You have brought me up to know that a seducer was worse than a mad dog, and so I married her. It seemed to me I must disgrace either your name, or your training, and I let the name go."

"You did not think of me?" the major said, very low. Morris covered his eyes and groaned.

"Over and over and over," he said; "but look back, governor, remember what it is to be twenty-two. Fancy yourself loved, and loving; fancy, too, leaving the woman you loved, in the recklessness of heartbreak, to throw herself into the bottomless pit. Swan is fond and gay, and free, but she is good. I kept my head until—well, until it happened that I kissed her. Then—well, nothing mattered beside keeping her always and only mine."

Maj. Hilliard's hands clinched hard upon the arms of his chair.

"Tell me what you mean to do?" he said lifelessly. Morris smiled a dreary smile.

"I have not made a plan, governor," he said; "but be certain of this—I shall not bring Swan here. My mother-of-mine forbids. Wherever Swan may go, there the tribe of Hinton will go likewise. Perhaps the best thing I can do is to ask you for money enough to take the tribe and vanish."

"By the Lord! you shall not! I will not be left desolate! You shall not throw away your life, your future, in this fashion!" the major roared, springing to his feet. "Morris! Morris! Why did you keep all this dark? You are under enchantment; clean out your mind! I saw nothing against this poor girl—but tell me, has the marriage been made public?"

Morris shook his head. "Old Nat suspects—but nobody knows, except 'the minister,'" he said. "The people at the party thought Swan was only fooling—as she was when she called herself Mrs. Ben Isham. Ben is mad about her—but she will hardly look at him now."

"You are sure of that?" Maj. Hilliard asked. Morris smiled, half angrily, half confidently.

"Swan would break her fiddle over his head if he even looked love at her," he said. "But tell me, governor, do you mean to disown me? You would be justified in doing it."

"God knows—perhaps—I do not," Maj. Hilliard said. "But promise me, my son, to keep quiet, for three days longer."

The shiftlessness of all the river bend settlement reached its flowering in the Hinton house. It was a tumble-down log structure, just on the edge of the water. There was a low rail fence about it. Where the gate should have been the rails were stretched apart. "Po' whites, they bound ter stick ter po' whites," old Nat Hinton said to Maj. Hilliard as that gentleman walked through the gap, upon the morning after Morris's confession.

Old Nat leaned against the jamb of the big room door, hitching up the single-string gaiters that supported his patched trousers. He was content, and had one shoe half off. A stubby black pipe sent up a mighty peck from one corner of his mouth.

"You'll take the money," Maj. Hilliard supplemented as she choked and grieved; "That is very wise. I am glad indeed, to find you so sensible."

"I ain't sensible—I am drove ter death," Swan cried, hiding her face in her hands. For a minute gusty sobs shook her whole frame. All at once she dashed the tears from her eyes, dropped her hands, and asked, watching Maj. Hilliard narrowly as she spoke: "Did Morris send you? Or did you come on yo' own account?"

"That has nothing to do with the case," Maj. Hilliard said diplomatically.

"See here! I want figgers. Sentiment's good, but gimme dollars an' cents," Old Nat growled from the door. "Dollars an' cents in a lump or a big lump at that?" he went on. "You may come yer soft saviour over that thar fool gal, but you don't come it over me."

Maj. Hilliard looked at Swan as though old Nat had not spoken. "I will settle \$10,000 on you, if you leave the state, and never come back to it," he said; "and give your father half as much tomorrow—upon the same condition."

"That ain't much fer er high toned gentleman—when jest er plain likely piggers's wuth fifteen hundred," old Nat began. Swan stopped him with a violent cuff, and rushed away in a passion of tears.

The house at Wake Forest stood quite three miles from the Tennessee river, yet the plantation ran down to the stream, and Maj. Hilliard had his own landing. In the third year of the civil war, a village of white tents about it stretched far back from the waterside. There was another smaller village of them up around the house. The fences were all swept away. Horses fully accoutred stood clamping and dancing all about the lawns. Men clattered up and down the broad veranda steps, some with swords clanking after them, more in undress uniforms, and a very few in the garb of civilians.

Not one of the original inhabitants remained. Major Hilliard and Morris were both in the Confederate army. Their hundreds of slaves had been sent further South as soon as the fall of Fort Henry gave the whole

"That does sound liberal," he said. "But it ain't! O, no, it ain't, not at all! Why it ain't half the wuth of the dower right in Wake Forest plantation—nor sayin' nothin' a bout all the money—an' niggers."

"My wife is the only person, who could claim dower in Wake Forest," Maj. Hilliard said slowly. "And, certainly, shall never marry again. My son, although my natural heir, has—nothing but what I choose to give him. It might happen that I would choose—to give him nothing—not even enough to keep him from starvation."

"But—but you won't, never, never do that! O, major, please say you won't never do that," a soft young voice cried from behind old Nat. Old Nat stepped sullenly aside. "You better go on in, and talk your talk out," he said. "You ain't no need ter beat about the bush. I knowed as soon as I seen you comin'—that I had suspicioned was the fact—so, yer boy is my son-in-law, and you don't like it. Well, now, what air ye goin' ter do about it?"

"All a man can do to save his only son," Maj. Hilliard said, stepping within the dingy room, which even Swan Hinton's surpassing beauty could not illumine out of sordidness. Swan was slender as a reed, yet had a figure of exquisite curves. Her skin,

river region into Federal control. Now the fortunes of war had made Wake Forest the camping ground and base of operations for a considerable Federal column. Its aim and object were secrets jealously guarded, since it was known that Forrest's flying horse, the most dreaded among the enemy, lay almost in full strength not so many miles away.

General Bruton, the ranking Federal officer, wisely made his headquarters upon the river bank, within range of the gunboats. But his chief lieutenant, Colonel Flowtow, who was really the working soul of the column, had quarters and himself in the plantation house, and from it directed everything that was done. He was not a military sycophant, yet made himself very comfortable there, drinking the good wines in the cellar and smoking the best cigars in the major's own special locker. The camps were both full of black vagrants—contrabands in the phrase of that time. Bruton gave them rations, and listened sympathetically to their stories. He had so many of them for servants, indeed, they were in each other's way. Flowtow hated them, whole and several. Brought up a lieutenant in the German army, he had resigned, come to America, engaged in business, dropped it at the call to arms, and gone

into the fighting almost purely from love of fighting.

"They cumber us—these blacks!" he said often. "They ruin discipline, too. Then how shall you keep army secrets when they go in and out like the air?" But now even he had taken one into his service. It had happened in this wise. Three days earlier he had been reconnoitering when his detachment was charged upon by a single mounted man, riding at full speed, and crouching low over the neck of the horse. The reason was plain. Behind came half a dozen men in gray, also mounted, spurring as for life and shooting as they rode. It seemed a miracle that some bullet did not touch the fugitive. The Federal cavalry parted to let him through as soon as they saw his face. He was a mulatto, evidently a camp servant making a dash for liberty, since he wore over his jean trousers a cast-off gray overcoat.

"Shoot me please! Don't send me back," he said, riding straight up to the colonel. Flowtow eyed him a minute, then asked gruffly: "Why did you run away?"

For answer the mulatto flung off his coat and bared his back. It was marked all over with cruel crimson welts. "Nobody ever dared to touch me before," he said; "I was a house nigger—and I don't belong to the man that done it."

"How come you in the army?" Flowtow asked suspiciously. The negro looked full in his eyes and said: "I went to take keer of my marster's son. He—he's dead now. I wanted to go and they tried to make me stay."

"Hump! Who is your marster?" Flowtow asked.

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"So," the exclamation was one of pleasure. "Then you may be worth keeping—if you will be a true guide," Flowtow said, pursing his lips, then brutally: "This major—he is your father, too, eh?"

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"I may have better use for you," Flowtow interrupted. "Ride you here beside me a little. If you serve me well you shall have money and freedom. If with a stern hook, you try to trap me—then I will cut you, alive, into little teeny bits."

"I don't want money, only to be free, and to learn readin' and writin'," the negro said. "As to trappin' you—no nigger can't do that. You are too smart for even our white folks."

So yellow Ned came to be free of Flowtow's quarters, following the colonel like a dog wherever he went, crouching patiently beside the hearth while Flowtow wrote or talked, alert for any service, but seemingly heedless of all he heard. He had found an old note book and stub of pencil. The sentry at the door had set him copies of letters and figures. These he reproduced in a thousand unheard-of combinations. The sentries, as they changed, were much amused at his efforts, and said one to another yellow Ned must be crazy—you simply could not teach him that two and two made four, or that a was not z.

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his sudden wealth old Nat had chartered a trading boat, a miserable seow-like affair, which was towed up or down stream as occasion served. In Ostensibly it was a sutler's boat, in reality it engaged in all manner of contraband trading. A cotton cargo, once safe under many weeks in camp, Old Nat had planned to smuggle such a cargo aboard, before the Lucey tied up at Wake Forest landing. He had slipped outside the lines spying where best to seize it, leaving his wife and Swan in charge of the boat.

Soldier villages gossip even more than ordinary villages. Everything at headquarters is soon the common property of the camp. Thus Swan came to know very soon all the particulars of yellow Ned's arrival. She pondered what she had heard a day, then just at sunset, started her mother by saying, "I'm going over to the outpost. Funny I never thought of it before—but there is my chance to see the inside of Wake Forest."

There was no protest. Mrs. Hinton never wasted breath in trying to turn Swan from her purposes. But something, she knew not what, made her kiss her daughter—once shyly, fearfully, once, as she felt Swan tussle at her touch, out of the fullness of her mother heart.

"I wish I could take you, too, but that would spoil everything," Swan said, patting her cheek, and almost running away. She had rummaged out her old fiddle, and put on a short frock, much frilled and spangled, which she had worn in the days of the band. It was black, and came low in the neck, so she threw over her shoulders a blue artilleryman's cape—disposing one end so the scarlet lining would show. At the very last she turned back and thrust something deep into her bosom, saying, with a lazy smile, "You don't never know what may come in handy when you go on a pessim hunt this time of the year."

As she picked her way through the company streets there were hills from every hand—cries of admiration, invitations to supper, banter for a time, just one—but she stayed for none of them. Words she flung back in plenty; her tongue had gained in license, in piquancy, and point. A very young officer, riotously full of beer, ran out and tried to kiss her in the face of all, but was rapped smartly over the nose with the fiddle bow, and ran back howling with pain.

As she came to the outpost the pickets made a feint of halting her. She stuck the fiddle under her chin, played three discordant bars, and said: "Let me through—or you'll hear worse than that." All the camp knew her—she had indeed the freedom of more than one army corps. She was kind in sickness or trouble, a good comrade in health, square—every man of them would have staked his life on that and straight, for all her freedom, both of speech and action. So she won easily to Col. Flowtow's door. She would have passed the sentry there, as she had passed the others, but that Flowtow himself was just coming out, with yellow Ned, as usual, at his heels.

"You! What do you do here?" he said roughly, catching her arm in a hard grip.

"Me? O! I just came to find out if you—all were dead," Swan said jauntily. "I didn't know but 'Mister Forrest's critter company' had slipped in and made 'crow's-meat' of the lot."

"What is that to you? Women are not for fighting!" Flowtow said, still roughly. Swan laughed, an airy, happy laugh.

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"You shall take the tune first!" Swan said, throwing off her cloak and setting the fiddle beneath her chin. Before Flowtow could protest she had struck up "Run, Nigger, Run!" looking as she played straight at Flowtow's new servant. Without a break she glided into another strain, almost an improvisation, full of swelling chords and soft wailing minors. She had played it first upon her wedding night—Morris had snatched the bow from her hands, and had dragged her down, clutching her bare shoulder.

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**PARAFFINE WAX**  
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"Many things impend upon me. Pay now—good measure, and when they are settled, I will bear you out, thou shalt paid for."

"But maybe you'll be done," Forrest is a bad man, a tough old man," Swan said, frowning at his lips. Flowtow pushed her aside and took a long kiss, then a second a stunning blow straight to the full length upon the forehead. Swan sprang up, livid with rage, but Swan struggling violently, the mulatto, who was gasping at the blazing eyes of a panther.

"O! You Dretman!" he thought that little love note, knock you down," she opened her look at this nigger, will you dare to murder me! Must be for you, you're like his white folks, you to be touched by the common law. That's what all the high-brow niggers think. I know I used to go down South. Where did you go, him up, Dutchy? Did you make made special for your punishment, gel?"

"Come again, wild Swanechen, you shall hear!" Flowtow said, "wait! I shall come back before midnight. We will drink together and have much games—and you play. As for the man—I will him to company with his horse, in darkness shall teach him better manners."

"Ho! I'll teach him myself!" he said to the sentry, as Flowtow slipped off, stepping past him on the edge of the veranda. There were guns to play—guns, reflecting that very shortly drew all the about her. Presently she flung on her fiddle, whirled about on her and said, sniffing vigorously, "I got it in my bones that there there drink close by."

She darted away, followed by a chorus of uproarious laughter, but she did not seek the cellar. In a minute she had reached a picket horse, and was whispering to the standing beside it. "Morris is away—for God's sake. Old man will know you—he has come back, he is coming here—to see. This is this very night. That was why I why didn't you keep quiet? Why did a kiss more or less matter? Why have bought your freedom?"

"Some things one cannot do," Morris said, breathing hard. "Swan I shall stay—until you agree to go with me."

"You are crazy—crazy as a hatter," she cried. "Fier! to come here, all these papers, I know what they are; so will old man Nat. He taught you, remember, the Murrel about things to me. Go away, I tell you, Flowtow will hang you at sundown, sure as he finds out how he has been fooled."

"If you will come with me," Morris said, springing into the saddle and holding out his arms. "I thought a minute, then went down. I must ride—and lead me with a halter," she said, "or you never get past the pickets. I will I'm driving you out of camp, but your own side, as usual. I hate you. Then, when we are on our side."

"You will have to come on," she said, doggedly. Swan slipped off her hat.

"We will settle that as happens," she said.

"You are my wife still, I will let you go back," Morris said. "The last picket was 200 yards off. Swan had slipped from the saddle, and was unfolding his hands, but had driven him mercilessly, flinging a silver-mounted derringer at his head. The pickets had looked at her, but had not tried to stop. It was only one of Swan's tricks. Swan, in their eyes, could do anything wrong."

The two halted in a broad road. The moon shone so bright, was nearly as light as day. A last knot came loose, there was a stir in the bushes at the road's end. Old Nat's snuffling, muffled through them, and old Nat cried: "So you've been a-sneakin' on Morris—and your wife's helpin' out? Mighty nice games—but block it—though I can't see you now. I owe your father a debt, harvest! I reckon the time's come when I can pay in full."

The last words came faintly, but set the mule off in a headlong gallop. Morris sprang into the saddle, and snatched Swan before him. She tried to wriggle of his arms—in three minutes after him—how could he escape? his horse doubly weightier?

"Be quiet! Give me that