

MY LADY OF THE NORTH

The Love Story of a Gray Jacket

by RANDALL PARRISH
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SYNOPSIS.

The story opens in a Confederate tent at a critical stage of the Civil War. Gen. Lee is in the field with an important message to Longstreet. Accompanied by Bergt, Craig, an old army scout, Wayne starts on his mission. They get within the lines of the enemy and in the darkness Wayne is taken for a Federal officer and a young lady on horseback is given in his charge. She is a northern girl and attempts to escape. One of the horses succumbs and Craig goes through with the dispatches, while Wayne and My Lady of the North are left alone. They seek shelter in a hut and entertain it in the dark a huge mass of soldiers. Wayne the girl shoots the brute just in time. The owner of the hut, Jed Bungay, and his wife appear and soon a party of horsemen approach. They are led by a man claiming to be Red Lowrie, but who proves to be Maj. Brennan, a Federal officer whom the Union girl recognizes. He orders the arrest of Wayne as a spy and he is brought before Sheridan, who threatens him with death unless he reveals the secret message. Wayne believes Edith Brennan to be the wife of Maj. Brennan. He is rescued by Jed Bungay, who starts to reach Gen. Lee, while Wayne in disguise penetrates to the ballroom, beneath which he had been imprisoned. He is introduced to a Miss Minor and barely escapes being unmasked. Edith Brennan, recognizing Wayne, says she will save him. Securing a pass through the lines, they are confronted by Brennan, who is knocked senseless. Then, bidding Edith adieu, Wayne makes a dash for liberty. He encounters Bungay; they reach the Lee camp and are sent with reinforcements to join Early. In the battle of Shenandoah the regiment is overwhelmed, and Wayne, while in the hospital, is visited by Edith Brennan. Wayne and Bungay are sent on a scout. Wayne meets Miss Minor and Mrs. Bungay. Edith appears. Wayne's detachment is besieged by guerrillas. Brennan and his men arrive and aid in repelling the invaders until a rescuing party of bluecoats reach the scene.

CHAPTER XXXIII.—Continued.

"Damn ye, Red told you not to fire!" he yelled. "Come on, you dogs! You could eat 'em up if ye wasn't sich blamed cowards. There's only two, and we'll hang them yet."

He leaped straight up the broad steps, his long cavalry sabre in hand, while a dozen of the boldest followed him. Brennan swung his sword high over head, grasping it with both hands for a death-blow, even as I thrust directly at the fellow's throat. The uplifted blade struck the chain of the hanging lamp, snapped at the hit, and losing his balance the Major plunged headlong into the ruck beneath. The downward fall of his body swept the stairs.

As I stood there, panting and breathless, a woman rushed downward. Believing she would throw herself into that tangled mass below, I instantly caught her to me.

"Don't," I cried anxiously. "You cannot help him. For God's sake go back where you were."

"It is not that," she exclaimed, her voice thrilling with excitement. "Oh, Captain Wayne, do you not hear the bugles?"

As by magic those hateful faces vanished, disappearing by means of every opening leading out from the hall, and when the cheering bluecoats surged in through the broken door, I was yet standing there, apparently alone but for the dead, leaning weak and breathless against the wall, my arm about Edith Brennan.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

After the Struggle.
A young officer, whose red face was rendered extremely conspicuous by the blue of his uniform, led the rush of his soldiers as they came tumbling gallantly into the hall.

"Up there, men!" he cried, catching sight of me, and pointing. "Get that Johnny with the girl."

As they sprang eagerly forward over the dead bodies littering the floor at the foot of the stairs, Brennan scrambled unsteadily to his feet, and halted them with imperious gesture.

"Leave him alone!" he commanded. "That is the commander of the Confederate detachment who came to our aid. The guerrillas have fled down the hallway, and are most of them outside by now. Wayne," he turned



A Gentle Hand Was Stroking Back the Hair From Off My Temples.

and glanced up at us, his face instantly darkening at the tableau, "kindly assist the ladies to descend; we must get them out of this shambles."

He lifted them one by one and with ceremonious politeness across the ghastly pile of dead and wounded men. "Escort them to the library," he suggested, as I hesitated. "That room will probably be found clear."

I was somewhat surprised that Brennan should not have come personally to the aid of his wife, but as he ignored her presence utterly, I at once offered her my arm, and silently led the way to the room designated, the others following as best they might. The apartment was unoccupied, exhibiting no signs of the late struggle, and I found comfortable resting places for all. Miss Minor was yet sobbing softly; her face hidden upon her mother's shoulder, and I felt constrained to speak with her.

"I shall go at once," I said kindly, "to ascertain all I can regarding Lieutenant Caton, and will bring you word."

She thanked me with a glance of her dark eyes clouded with tears, but as I turned hastily away to execute this errand, Mrs. Brennan laid restraining hand upon my arm.

"Captain Wayne," she said with much seriousness, "you are very unselfish, but you must not go until your own wounds have been attended to; they may be far more serious than you apprehend."

As I gazed at her, surprised by the anxiety she so openly displayed, I chanced to behold myself reflected within a large mirror directly across the room. One glance was sufficient to convince me her words were fully justified. My remains of uniform literally clung to me in rags, my bare shoulder looked a contused mass of battered flesh, my hair was matted, and my face blackened by powder stains and streaked with blood.

"I certainly do appear disreputable enough," I admitted; "but I can assure you it is nothing sufficiently serious to require immediate attention."

As I stepped without and closed the door behind me, I was at once startled by the rapid firing of shot from the rear of the house, and the next moment I encountered the young, red-faced officer hurrying along the hallway at the head of a squad of Federal cavalrymen. Recognizing me in the gloom of the passage he paused suddenly.

"I owe you a belated apology, Captain," he exclaimed cordially, "for having mistaken you for one of those miscreants, but really your appearance was not flattering."

"Having viewed myself since within a mirror," I replied, "I am prepared to acknowledge the mistake a most natural one. However, I am grateful to be out of the scrape, and can scarcely find fault with my rescuers. Five minutes more would have witnessed the end."

"We rode hard," he said, "and were in saddle within fifteen minutes after the arrival of your courier. You evidently made a hard fight of it; the house bears testimony to a terrible struggle. We are rejoiced to learn that Lieutenant Caton was merely stunned; we believed him dead at first, and he is far too fine a fellow to go in that way."

"He is truly living, then?" I exclaimed, greatly relieved. "Miss Minor, to whom he is engaged, is sorrowing over his possible fate in the library yonder. Could not two of your men assist him to her? She would do most to hasten his recovery than any one."

"Certainly," was the instant response. "Haines, you and McDonald get the officer out of the front room; carry him in there where the ladies are, and then rejoin us."

I left, remembering then my own need. By using the back stairway I avoided unpleasant contact with the traces of conflict yet visible at the front of the house, and finally discovered a bathroom which afforded facilities for cleansing my flesh wounds and making my general appearance more presentable. I found I could do little to improve the condition of my clothing, but after making such changes for the better as were possible, soaking the clotted blood from out my hair, and washing the powder stains from my face, I felt I should no longer prove an object of aversion even to the critical eyes of the women, who would fully realize the cause for my torn and begrimed uniform.

A glance from the window told me the Federal cavalrymen were bearing out the dead and depositing them beyond view of the house in the deserted negro cabins. Ebers and one or two of my own men were standing near, carefully scanning the uncovered faces as they were borne past, while scraps of conversation overheard brought the information that the long dining room where I had passed the night on guard had been converted into a temporary hospital.

Irresolute as to my next action, I passed out into the upper hall. It was deserted and strangely silent, seemingly far removed from all those terrible scenes so lately enacted in the rooms beneath. My head by this time throbbled with pain; I desired to be alone, to think, to map out my future course before proceeding down the stairs to meet the others. With this in view I sank down in complete weariness upon a convenient settee. My heavy head sank back upon the arm of the settee, and deep sleep closed my eyes. It was in my dream I felt it first—

light, moist touch upon my burning forehead—and I imagined I was a child once more, back at the old home, caressed by the soft hand of my mother. But as consciousness slowly returned I began to realize dimly where I was, and that I was no longer alone. A gentle hand was stroking back the hair from off my temples, while the barest uplift of my eyelids revealed the folds of a dark blue skirt pressing close to my side. Instantly I realized who must be the wearer, and remained motionless until I could better control my first unwise impulse.

She spoke no word, and I cautiously opened my eyes and glanced up into her face. For a time she remained unaware of my awakening, and sat there silently stroking my forehead, her gaze fixed musingly upon the window at the farther end of the hall. Doubtless she had been sitting thus for some time, and had become absorbed in her own reflections, for I lay there drinking in her beauty for several moments before she chanced to glance downward and observe that I was awake. I think the very intensity of my gaze awakened her from reverie, for she turned almost with a start and looked down upon me. As our eyes met, a warm wave of color dyed her throat and cheeks crimson.

"Why," she exclaimed in momentary confusion, "I supposed I should know before you awoke, and have ample time to escape unobserved. I discovered you lying here. You were resting very uncomfortably when I

found you."

"I was standing there apparently alone, but for the dead."



"I Was Standing There Apparently Alone, but for the Dead."

first came, and I felt it my duty to render your position as easy as possible. I did not forget that your fatigue came in our defense."

"Could you not say in yours?" I corrected. "But I have already been more than repaid. Your hand upon my brow was far more restful than I can tell you—its soft stroking mingled in my dreams even before I awoke. It brought back to me the thought of my mother. I do not think I have had a woman's hand press back my hair since I was a child."

"There was a look of pain upon your face as you lay sleeping, and I thought it might ease you somewhat. I have had some experience as a nurse, you know," she explained quietly. "You mentioned your mother; is she yet living?"

"She is in Richmond, stopping with friends, but since my capture we have lost all trace of each other. I was reported as having been killed in action, and I doubt if she even yet knows the truth. Everything is so confused in the capital that it is impossible to trace any one not directly connected with the army, once you lose exact knowledge of their whereabouts."

"Your father, then, is dead?" "He yielded his life the first year of the war; and our plantation near Charlottesville has been constantly in the track of the armies. One rather important battle, indeed, was fought upon it, so you may realize that it is now desolate and utterly unfit for habitation."

"The house yet stands?" "The chimney and one wall alone remained when I was last there," I replied, glad of the interest she exhibited. "Fortunately two of the negro cabins were yet standing. Doubtless these will form the nucleus of our

home when the war ceases; they will prove a trifle better than the mere sky."

"The south is certainly paying a terrible price for rebellion," she said soberly, her fine eyes filled with tears. "I am sure I have tarried here quite as long as I should, now that I can be of no further service."

As she gathered her skirts in her hand preparatory to descending the stairs, I yielded to temptation and stopped her. Right or wrong I must yet have one word more.

"I beg of you do not desert me so soon. This may prove our final meeting—indeed, I fear it must be; surely, then, it need not be so brief a one?"

"Our final meeting?" She echoed my words as though scarcely comprehending their meaning.

"Yes," I said, rising and standing before her. "How can we hope it shall be otherwise? I am not free to remain here, even were it best for other reasons, for I am a soldier under orders. You undoubtedly will proceed north at the earliest possible moment. There is scarcely a probability that in the great wide world we shall meet again."

"The war will soon be over; perhaps then you may come north also." "I scarcely expect to do so. My work then will be to join with my comrades in an effort to rebuild the shattered fortunes of Virginia. When the lines of lives diverge so widely as ours must, the chances are indeed few that they ever meet again."

"But surely you can remain here until we leave?" she questioned, evidently striving not to reveal the depth of interest she felt in the decision. "It will not be until tomorrow that all details are arranged so as to permit of our departure. I had supposed you would certainly be with us until then."

"Mrs. Brennan!" I exclaimed almost passionately, "do not tempt me! Your wish is a temptation most difficult to resist."

"Why resist, then?" She did not look at me, but stood twisting a handkerchief nervously

"How can I ever thank you?" she asked gravely. "Captain Wayne, you make me trust you utterly, and place me constantly in your debt."

"Then you realize that I am right?" "Yes," slowly, but making no effort to release her hands. "Yet is no other escape possible?"

"None within my knowledge." "And you must go?" "I must go—unless you bid me stay."

"Oh, I cannot; I cannot at such a cost!" she cried, and I could feel her body tremble with the intensity of her emotion. "But, Captain Wayne, our friendship surely need not be severed now for ever? I cannot bear to think that it should be. I am no cold, heartless ingrate, and shall never forget what you have done to serve me. I value every sacrifice you have made on my behalf. Let us indeed part now if, as you say, it must be so; yet surely there are happier days in store for both of us—days when the men of this nation will not wear different uniforms and deem it manly to fight and kill each other."

"The great struggle will certainly cease, possibly within a very few weeks," I answered, greatly moved by her earnestness, "but I fear the men engaged in it will remain much the same in their natures however they may dress. I can only say this: Were the path clear, I would surely find you, no matter where you were hidden."

"How terrible it is that a woman must ever choose between such evils," she said almost bitterly. "The heart says one thing and duty another all through life, it seems to me. I have so much of suffering in these last few months, so much of heartless cruelty, that I cannot bear to be the cause of any more. You and Major Brennan must not meet; but, Captain Wayne, I will not believe that we are to part thus forever."

"Do you mean that I am to seek you when the war closes?"

"There will be no time when I shall not most gladly welcome you."

"Your home?" I asked, wondering still if she could mean all that her words implied. "I have never known where you resided in the north."

"Stonington, Conn." She smiled at me through the tears yet clinging to her long lashes. "You may never come, of course; yet I shall always feel now that perhaps you will; and that is not like a final goodby, is it?"

I bowed above the hands I held, and pressed my lips upon them. For the moment I durst not speak, and then—a voice suddenly sounded in the hall below:

"I am greatly obliged to you, Miss Minor; she is probably lying down. I will run up and call her."

We started as if rudely awakened from a dream, while a sudden expression of fright swept across her face.

"Oh, do not meet him," she begged piteously. "For my sake do not remain here."

"I will go down the back stairway," I returned hastily, "but do you indeed mean it? May I come to you?"

"Yes, yes; but pray go now!" Unable longer to restrain myself, I clasped her to me, held her for one brief instant strained to my breast, kissed her twice upon lips which had no opportunity for refusal.

"This world is not so wide but that somewhere in it I shall again find the one woman of my heart," I whispered passionately, and was gone.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A Plan Miscarried.
I remembered as I hurried down the back stairway her flushed face, but could recall no look of indignant pride in those clear eyes whose pleasant memory haunted me. She loved me; of this I now felt doubly assured, and the knowledge made my heart light, even while I dreaded the consequences to us both.

I stepped out into the kitchen and came to a sudden pause, facing a table laden with such a variety and abundance of food as had been strange to me for many a long day. Directly opposite, a napkin tucked beneath his double chin, his plate piled high with good things, sat Ebers, while at either end I beheld Mr. and Mrs. Bungay similarly situated. The astonishment of our meeting seemed mutual. The Sergeant, apparently feeling the necessity of explanation, wiped his mouth soberly.

"I vos yoost goin' to fill me op mit der dings like a good soldier, Captain," he said in anxiety.

"No doubt; well, I am rather hungry myself. Mrs. Bungay, in memory of old times cannot you spare me a plate? If so, I will take pleasure in joining your happy company. Thank you. I see you have found your man."

"I have that, sir," she answered, grimly, "an' I reckon as how he's likely ter stay et hum arter this."

"But you forget he is my guide," I protested, not disinclined to test her temper. "Surely, Mrs. Bungay, you would not deprive the South of his valuable services?"

"An' wouldn't I, now? An' didn't that little whiff promise me long afore he ever did you uns? Ain't he my nat'ral protector? What's a lone female a goin' ter dew yers in ther mountings w'out no man?"

"Come, Jed, what do you say? Are you tired fighting the battles of the Confederacy, and prefer those of home?"

"I like ter read all 'bout fightin' well 'nough, but dern it, Cap, it kinder hurts whin they hits ye on ther head with a gun." His face lit up suddenly. "Sides, I sorter wanter hev Mariar git 'quainted with that thar muel o' mine, Beelzebub. He's out thar now, hitched ter a tree, an' a eatin' fit ter bust his biler—never a durn mark on his hide fer all he went through."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)



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