

Dave Mann---A Civil War-Time Story

By LeRoy Armstrong.

Part of the story I knew—there is no telling how long ago. It was one of those things that seem never to have been told the first time. It was a tradition I found as I grew up to it; for the little Wabash was a land of legend, at least of the homely kind.

The first time Dave Mann came consciously into my life was one night when I sat in a high chair, clad in a gown, and toasted my feet at a fire of hickory logs. Nothing had happened to bring the prodigal to my mind. I had only fallen thinking of him, sitting there in the silence, and the warmth, and, without the smallest provocation had conjured up a meeting in which I had measured arms with him, and conquered him in a most remarkable and heroic manner. My childish fancy took no account of the improbable; of the man's widely bruted prowess or my own puny strength, made even less than usual in a child of seven by a troublesome illness. It was as easy, and a good deal more thrilling, to picture a collision in which I avenged society, than one in which society confessed me another victim to Dave Mann.

I remember after I had in fancy disposed of him, the thought was forced upon me that the high chair was becoming uncomfortable, I was a big boy, now; really far past the high chairs, and almost tall enough to dispense with the intermediate stool. So I had concluded to slide down and go to bed, when some one called out:

"Hello!"

It was a challenge that always dispelled reverie. In so new a country the visit was an event. Mother ceased rocking, and gathered up her knitting, tapping a long gray stocking swiftly and the needles thrust through a ball of yarn. Father recalled his feet with a sudden arousing movement. He had been reading the "Genesee Farmer", a York State paper, and one of the few of any kind that came to the western country. The paper was held in his left hand, while the right travelled forward and back, the length of a line, and carried a candle by which he read. He dropped the paper as the call was repeated, and put the candle down upon the table. Then he opened the door carefully, guardedly, and called out in a tentative, inquiring tone:

"Well?"

Mother was resting her right elbow in the left hand, and was holding the knitting needles against her teeth. She was listening.

"Seen anything of Dave Mann tonight?" asked the voice outside. The visitor was evidently in the road. As he mentioned

the name my small heart chilled with the recollection that I had seen him tonight, and that I had done his violence. How swift and deep was my repenting! I looked affrighted into the shadowy depths of the bedroom where I had just intended retiring. He might be in there. Really, he was a more formidable creature than when I strangled him a moment ago.

"No," said father, relaxing his guard, and opening the door wider—more hospitably. His tone told that he recognized the visitor, and trusted him. "Will thee come in, Basil?"

"No, we can't come in very well. We're out after Dave Mann. He killed Lett Evans at the shivaree tonight."

Mother started, horrified, and half rose from her rocker. I unwedged myself from the rather too tight arms of the high chair, slid down, and went over to her side. Father let the door swing wide open, lifted his head in astonishment, and started down the walk.

"Killed Lett Evans!" he exclaimed. "Killed him dead?"

"That's what they say—dead as a hammer."

"Why—how?"

"Shot him, and then threw him in the river."

From that point the memory of the evening is a very dim one. That father did not go with them I am very sure, for he was a man of peace. But just at what point in the conversation I fell asleep, and just who carried me into the forbidding depths of the bedroom just when I was awakened in that strangest of darkneses to a tumult still more strange—all these are things about which I cannot testify.

Years seem to have elapsed before the next chapter came; but in those years I never saw that man again. I could only remember my childish impressions of his immense stature—more than a head taller than my father. I could only call up in my memory that tossing shock of shining black hair, that scant beard, and the gleaming white teeth that showed when he laughed. But that was as much as any on Little Wabash could do. For Dave Mann disappeared on the night of the charivari—or the shivaree, as we called it then—with the blood of a fellow man upon him, and the snarl of pursuit at his heels.

He was very real to me. I knew where his mother lived, up there on the hill; and I knew the tremor that crept through the neighborhood now and again when some one started the story that he had been at home. Why, he was an outlaw! The grand jury had indicted him—the first grand jury that ever sat in the county. The sheriff offered reward for capture; and there was no sentiment upon which the pioneers of Little Wabash were more thoroughly united than in the belief of his guilt, and the resolve to punish him, sometime—whenever he appeared, though that might be years and years in the future. They knew he would come back sometime; and there was no day so long and no night so dark in all those dragging years when they would not have leaped from their beds or risen from their beds to follow him with dog and weapon, and bring him to account.

He must have supported his mother. She had no other means of living. The little patch of ground his father had cleared before yielding in the struggle with malaria fever would scarcely have provided her with summer vegetables. Yet she always had a little money to hire the chopping of her winter's wood, and a little more for the buying of those things that only the stores could furnish.

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GOOD telephone service depends largely upon mutual courtesy. The telephone is more useful to those who talk as if face to face, for civility removes difficulties and facilitates the promptest possible connections.

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