

My Lady of the North



THE LOVE STORY OF
A GRAY JACKET

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"WHEN WILDERNESS WAS KING"

Illustrations by Arthur T. Williamson

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"I am more than delighted to meet you, Colonel Curran," she said calmly, although I could feel her lips tremble to the words, while the fingers I held were like ice. "Myrtle was one of my dearest friends, and she chanced to be in my mind even as we met. That was why," she added, turning toward Miss Minor, as though she felt her momentary agitation had not passed unobserved, "I was so surprised when you first presented Colonel Curran."

"I confess to having felt strangely myself," returned the other, archly, "although I believe I concealed my feelings far better than you did, Edith. Really, I thought you were going to faint. It must be that Colonel Curran exercises some strange occult influence over the weaker sex. Perhaps he is the seventh son of a seventh son; are you, Colonel? However, dear, I am safe for the present from his mysterious spell, and you will be compelled to face the danger alone, as here comes Lieutenant Hammersmith to claim the dance I've promised him."

Before Mrs. Brennan could interfere, the laughing girl had placed her hand on the lieutenant's blue sleeve, and, with a mocking good-bye flung backward over her shoulder, vanished in the crowd, leaving us standing there alone.

The lady waited in much apparent indifference, gently tapping the floor with her neatly shod foot.

"Would you be exceedingly angry if I were to ask you to dance?" I questioned, stealing surreptitiously a glance at her proudly averted face.

"Angry? Most assuredly not," in apparent surprise. "Yet I trust you will not ask me. I have been upon the floor only once to-night. I am not at all in the mood."

"If there were chairs here I should venture to ask even a greater favor—that you would consent to sit out this set with me."

She turned slightly, lifted her eyes inquiringly to mine, and her face lightened.

"No doubt we might discover seats without difficulty in the ante-room," she answered, indicating the direction by a glance. "There do not appear to be many 'sitters' at this ball, and the few who do are not crowded."

The apartment contained, as she prophesied, but few occupants, and I conducted her to the farther end of it, where we found a comfortable divan and no troublesome neighbors.

As I glanced at her now, I marked a distinct change in her face. The old indifference, so well assumed while we were in the presence of others, had utterly vanished as by magic, and she sat looking at me in anxious yet impetuous questioning.

"Captain Wayne," she exclaimed, her eyes never once leaving my face, "what does this mean? This masquerade? This wearing of the Federal uniform? This taking of another's name? This being here at all?"

"If I should say that I came hoping to see you again," I answered, scarce knowing how best to proceed or how far to put confidence in her, "what would you think?"

"If that is true, that you were extremely foolish to take such a risk for so small a reward," she returned calmly. "Nor, under these circumstances, would I remain here so much as a moment to encourage you. But it is not true. This is no light act; your very life must lie in the balance, or you could never assume such risk."

"I would trust you gladly with my life or my honor," I replied soberly. "If I had less faith in you I should not be here now. I understand that I am condemned to be shot as a spy at daybreak."

"Shot? On what authority? Who told you?"

"On the order of General Sheridan. My informant was Lieutenant Caton, of his staff."

"Shot? As a spy? Why, it surely cannot be! Frank said—Captain Wayne, believe me, I knew absolutely nothing of all this. Do you think I should ever have rested if I had dreamed that you were held under so false a charge? I promised you I would see General Sheridan on your behalf. Frank—" she bit her lip impatiently—"I was told, that is, I was led to believe that you were—had been sent North as a prisoner of war late last night. Otherwise I should have insisted upon seeing you—on pleading your cause with the General himself. The major and I breakfasted with him this morning, but your name was

not mentioned, for I believed you safe."

She did not appear to realize, so deep was her present indignation and regret, that my hand had found a resting place upon her own.

"You must believe me, Captain Wayne; I could not bear to have you feel that I could prove such an ingrate."

"You need never suppose I should think that," I replied, with an earnestness of manner that caused her to glance at me in surprise. "I confidently expected to hear from you all day, and finally when no word came I became convinced some such misconception as you have mentioned must have occurred. Then it became my turn to act upon my own behalf if I would preserve my life; yet never for one moment have I doubted you or the sincerity of your pledge to me."

She waited quietly while a couple passed us and sought seats nearer the door.

"Tell me the entire story," she said gently.

As quickly as possible I reviewed the salient events which had occurred since our last meeting. Without denying the presence of Major Brennan during my stormy meeting with General Sheridan, I did not dwell upon it, nor mention the personal affair that had occurred between us. Even had I not supposed the man to be her husband I should never have taken advantage of his treachery to advance my own cause. As I concluded there was a tear glistening on her long lashes, but she seemed unconscious of it, and made no attempt to dash it away.

"You have not told me all," she commented quietly. "But I can understand and appreciate the reason for your silence. I know Frank's impetuosity, and you are very kind, Captain Wayne, to spare my feelings, but you must not remain here; every moment of delay increases your danger. Sheridan and those of his staff who would surely recognize you were expected back before this, and may appear at any moment—yet how can you get away? How is it possible for me to assist you?"

There was an eager anxiety in her face that pliqued me. Like most lovers I chose to give it a wrong interpretation.

"You are anxious to be rid of me?" I asked, ashamed of the words even as I uttered them.

"That remark is unworthy of you," and she arose to her feet almost haughtily. "My sole thought in this is the terrible risk you incur in remaining here."

"Your interest then is personal to me, may I believe?"

"I am a loyal woman," proudly, "and would do nothing whatever to imperil the cause of my country; but your condemnation is unjust, and I am, in a measure, responsible for it. I assist you, Captain Wayne, for your own sake, and in response to my individual sense of honor."

"Have you formulated any plan?" she asked quickly, and her rising color made me feel that she had deciphered my struggle in my eyes.

"Only to walk out under protection of this uniform, and when once safe in the open to trust that same good fortune which has thus far befriended me."

She shook her head doubtfully, and stood a moment in silence, looking thoughtfully at the moving figures in the room beyond.

"I fear it cannot be done without arousing suspicion," she said at last, slowly. "I chance to know there are unusual precautions being taken to-night, and the entire camp is doubly patrolled. Even this house has a cordon of guards about it, but for what reason I have not learned. No," she spoke decisively, "there is no other way. Captain Wayne, I am going to try to save you tonight, but in doing so I must trust my reputation in your keeping."

"I will protect it with my life." "Protect it with your silence, rather. I know you to be a gentleman, or I should never attempt to carry out the only means of escape which seems at all feasible. Discovery would place me in an extremely embarrassing position, and I must rely upon you to protect me from such a possibility."

"I beg you," I began, "do not compromise yourself in any way for my sake." "But I am myself already deeply involved in this, she interrupted, "and I could retain no peace of mind were

I to do otherwise. Now listen. Make your way back to the ballroom, and in fifteen minutes from now be engaged in conversation with General Carlton near the main entrance. I shall join you there, and you will take your cue from me. You understand?" "Perfectly, but—" "There is no 'but,' Captain Wayne, only do not fall me." Our eyes met for an instant; what she read in mine God knows—in hers was determination, with a daring strange to woman. The next moment she had vanished through a side door, and I was alone.

CHAPTER XVII.

Through the Camp of the Enemy.

A glance at my watch told me that it was already within a few moments of midnight. There was, however, no diminution in the festivities, and I waited in silence until I heard the sentries calling the hour, and then pressed my way back into the noisy, crowded ballroom. I was stopped twice by well-meaning officers whom I had met earlier in the evening, but breaking away from them after the exchange of a sentence or two, I urged my course as directly as possible toward where the spectacled brigadier yet held his post as master of ceremonies.

We had been conversing pleasantly for several minutes when Mrs. Brennan appeared. Standing so as to face the stairs, I saw her first coming down, and noted that she wore her hat, and had a light walking-cloak thrown over her shoulders. My heart beat faster as I realized for the first time that she intended to be my companion.

"Oh, General, I am exceedingly glad to find you yet here," she exclaimed as she came up, and extended a neatly gloved hand to him. "I have a favor to ask which I am told you alone have the authority to grant."

He bowed gallantly.

"I am very sure," he returned smilingly,



"Halt! This Road is Closed."

"that Mrs. Brennan will never request anything which I would not gladly yield."

She flashed her eyes brightly into his face.

"Most assuredly not. The fact is, General, Colonel Curran, with whom I see you are already acquainted, was to pass the night at the Major's quarters, and as he has not yet returned, the duty has naturally devolved upon me to see our guest safely deposited. We are at the Mitchell House, you remember, which is beyond the inner lines; and while, of course, I have been furnished with a pass," she held up the paper for his inspection, "and have been also instructed as to the countersign, I fear this will scarcely suffice for the safe passage of the Colonel."

The General laughed good-humoredly, evidently pleased with her assumption of military knowledge.

"Colonel Curran is certainly to be congratulated upon having found so charming a guide, madam, and I can assure you I shall most gladly do my part toward the success of the expedition. The Major was expected back before this, I believe?"

"He left word that if he had not returned by twelve I was to wait for him no longer, as he should go directly to his quarters. I find the life of a soldier to be extremely uncertain."

"We are our country's servants, madam," he replied proudly, and then taking out a pad of blanks from his pocket, turned to me.

"May I ask your full name and rank, Colonel?"

"Patrick L. Curran, Colonel, Sixth Ohio Light Artillery."

He wrote it down rapidly, tore off the paper, and handed it to me.

"That will take you safely through our inner guard lines," he said gravely. "That being as far as my jurisdiction extends. Good-night, Colonel; good-night, Mrs. Brennan."

We bowed ceremoniously, and the next moment Mrs. Brennan and I were out upon the steps, breathing the cool night air. I glanced curiously at her face as the gleam of light fell upon it—how calm and reserved she appeared, and yet her eyes were sparkling with excitement. At the foot of the steps she glanced up at the dark, projecting roof far above

us. "Do you suppose he can possibly be up there yet?" she asked, in a tone so low as to be inaudible to the ears of the sentry.

"Who? Bungay?" I questioned in surprise, for my thoughts were elsewhere. "Oh, he was like a cat, and there are trees at the rear. Probably he is safe long ago, or else a prisoner once more."

Beyond the gleam of the uncovered windows all was wrapped in complete darkness, save that here and there we could distinguish the dull red glare of camp-fires where the company cooks were yet at work, or some sentry post had been established. We turned sharply to the left, and proceeded down a comparatively smooth road, which seemed to me to possess a rock basis, it felt so hard. From the position of the stars I judged our course to be eastward, but the night was sufficiently obscured to shroud all objects more than a few yards distant. Except for the varied camp noises on either side of us the evening was oppressively still, and the air had the late chill of high altitudes. Mrs. Brennan pressed more closely to me as we passed beyond the narrow zone of light, and unconsciously we fell into step together.

A few hundred yards farther a fire burned redly against a pile of logs. The forms of several men lay out stretched beside it, while a sentry paced back and forth, in and out of the range of light. We were almost upon him before he noted our approach, and in his haste he swung his musket down from his shoulder until the point of its bayonet nearly touched my breast.

"Halt!" he cried sternly, peering at us in evident surprise. "Halt! this road is closed."

"Valley Forge," whispered the girl, and I noticed how white her face appeared in the flaming of the fire.

"The word is all right, Miss," returned the fellow, stoutly, yet without lowering his obstructing gun. "But we cannot pass any one out on the countersign alone. If you was going the other way it would answer."

"But we are returning from the officers' ball," she urged anxiously, "and are one way to Major Brennan's quarters. We have passes."

As she drew the paper from her glove one of the men at the fire sprang to his feet and strode across the narrow road toward us. He was smooth of face and boyish looking, but wore corporal's stripes.

"What is it, Mapes?" he asked sharply.

Without waiting an answer he took the paper she held out and scanned it rapidly.

"This is all right," he said, handing it back, and lifting his cap in salute. "You may pass, madam. You must pardon us, but the orders are exceedingly strict to-night. Have you a pass also, Colonel?" I handed it to him, and after a single glance it was returned.

"Pass them, guard," he said curtly, standing aside.

Beyond the radiance of the fire she broke the silence.

"I shall only be able to go with you so far as the summit of the hill yonder, for our quarters are just to the right, and I could furnish no excuse for being found beyond that point," she said. "Do you know enough of the country to make the lines of your army?"

"If this is the Kendallville pike we are on," I answered, "I have a pretty clear conception of what lies ahead, but I should be very glad to know where I am to look for the outer picket."

"There is one post at the ford over the White Briar," she replied. "I chance to know this because Major Brennan selected the station, and remarked that the stream was so high and rapid as to be impassable at any other point for miles. But I regret this is as far as my information extends."

I started to say something—what I hardly know—when, almost without sound of warning, a little squad of horsemen swept over the brow of the hill in our front, their forms darkly outlined against the starlit sky, and rode down toward us at a sharp trot. I had barely time to swing my companion out of the track when they clattered by, their heads bent low to the wind, and seemingly oblivious to all save the movements of their leader.

"Sheridan!" I whispered, for even in that dimness I had not failed to recognize the short, erect figure which rode in front.

The woman shuddered, and drew closer within my protecting shadow. Then out of the darkness there burst a solitary rider, his horse limping as if crippled, and would have ridden us down, had I not flung up one hand and grasped his bridle-rein.

"Great Scott! what have we here?" he cried roughly, peering down at us. "By all the gods, a woman!" The hand upon my arm clutched me desperately, and my own heart seemed to choke back every utterance. The voice was Brennan's.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Reputation of a Woman.
Like a flash occurred to me the only

possible means by which we might escape open discovery—an instant disclosure of my supposed rank, coupled with indignant protest. Already, believing me merely some private soldier straying out of bounds with a woman of the camp as companion, he had thrown himself from the saddle to investigate. Whatever was to be done must be accomplished quickly, or it would prove all too late. To think



"Put Down Your Pistol," She Ordered Coldly.

was to act. Stepping instantly in front of the shrinking girl and facing him, I said sternly:

"I do not know who you may chance to be, sir, nor greatly care, yet your words and actions imply an insult to this lady which I am little disposed to overlook. For your information permit me to state, I am Colonel Curran, Sixth Ohio Light Artillery, and am not accustomed to being halted on the road by every drunken fool who sports a uniform."

He stopped short in complete surprise, staring at me through the darkness, and I doubted not was perfectly able to distinguish the glint of buttons and gleam of braid.

"Your pardon, sir," he ejaculated at last. "I mistook you for some runaway soldier. But I failed to catch your words; how did you name yourself?"

"Colonel Curran, of Major-General Halleck's staff."

"The hell you are! Curran had a full gray beard a month ago."

He took a step forward, and before I could recover from the first numbing shock of surprise was peering intently into my face.

"Damn it!" he cried, tugging viciously at a revolver in his belt, "I know that face! You are the mesaly Johnny Reb I brought in day before yesterday."

There came a quick flutter of drapery at my side, and she, pressing me firmly backward, faced him without a word.

The man's extended arm dropped to his side as though pierced by a bullet, and he took one step backward, shrinking as if his startled eyes beheld a ghost.

"Edith?" he cried, as though doubting his own vision, and the ring of agony in his voice was almost piteous. "Edith! My God! You here, at midnight, alone with this man?"

However the words, the tone, the gesture may have stung her, her face remained proudly calm, her voice cold and clear.

"I certainly am, Major Brennan," she answered, her eyes never once leaving his face. "And may I ask what reason you can have to object?"

"Reason?" His voice had grown hoarse with passion and surprise. "My God, how can you ask? How can you even face me? Why do you not sink down in shame? Alone here,—he looked about him into the darkness—"at such an hour, in company with a Rebel, a sneaking, cowardly spy, already condemned to be shot. By Heaven! he shall never live to boast of it!"

He flung up his revolver barrel to prove the truth of his threat, but she stepped directly between us, and shielded me with her form.

"Put down your pistol," she ordered coldly. "I assure you my reputation is in no immediate danger unless you shoot me, and your bullet shall certainly find my heart before it ever reaches Captain Wayne."

"Truly, you must indeed love him," he sneered.

So close to me was she standing that I could feel her form tremble at this insult, yet her voice remained emotionless.

"Your uncalled-for words shame me, not my actions. In being here with Captain Wayne tonight I am merely paying a simple debt of honor—a double debt, indeed, considering that he was condemned to death by your lie, while you deceived me by another."

"Did he tell you that?"

"He did not. Like the true gentleman he has ever shown himself to be, he endeavored to disguise the facts, to withhold from me all knowledge of your dastardly action. I know it by the infamous sentence pronounced against him and by your falsehood to me."

(Continued next week)