

# MY LADY OF THE SOUTH



## A Fiftieth Anniversary War Story

By RANDALL PARRISH

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### PROLOGUE OF THE STORY.

Elbert King, a northern soldier left for dead on a southern battlefield, recovers consciousness and hides near a farmhouse, where he hears Jean Denslow, a beautiful daughter of the south, admit to her negro servant, Joe, that soon she must wed Calvert Dunn, a man she does not love.

King overhears a conversation between Colonel Denslow and the chaplain relating to a movement to surprise the Federal forces. King, anxious to get away with the information, intercepts the prospective bridegroom, Lieutenant Calvert Dunn, appropriates his uniform and is mistaken for Dunn. Under the cover of his disguise to save himself he is married to Jean Denslow. Still undetected, he starts with his bride to Dunn's home on horseback. While en route she discovers King's deception. Furious, she gallops off to warn the Confederates. Her horse stumbles and breaks its neck, while Jean injures her ankle. Hopelessly she accepts King's proffer of assistance to Dunn's home. King's kindnesses partially win her. He later arrives at the Federal outpost and is held up by the picket.

### We Find the Courier.

HE was a soldier of the Forty-second Illinois, Sheridan's division, and after five minutes of controversy the corporal, who came running forward at the sentry's first call, consented to escort me in person to his regimental headquarters. From the colonel's tent I was very promptly passed beyond to where Sheridan was taking breakfast on the rude porch of a log house, several of his staff clustered about him. Here I passed through some minutes of rapid questioning and was finally dispatched westward astride a fresh horse and accompanied by an aid. It was slightly after 8 o'clock when we arrived in the presence of Rosecrans. For a moment the general scanned the brief note handed him by the aid. Then he looked up, carefully scrutinizing my face with his quiet gray eyes.

"What is your name?"

"King, sir."

"You claim to have been a sergeant in Reynolds' battery, I understand?"

"Yes, sir."

He turned quickly to an officer at the end of the table.

"Morton, step outside and request Lieutenant McDermott to come here, for a moment."

We waited in silence, the general nervously rustling some loose papers about on the table before him and whispering short, snappy sentences to a man in a major's uniform seated beside him. Perhaps ten minutes thus elapsed before Morton returned with his man. Rosecrans glanced up inquiringly at the latter and then over toward me.

"Lieutenant," he said quietly, "kindly inform us if you have ever seen this man before."

The officer thus addressed stepped over toward me, confused by the light as well as the Confederate uniform I wore; then his bronzed face broke into a smile, and he extended his hand.

"By heavens, King, but I am glad to see you alive and safe again. We had you marked down as 'killed or missing,' and there are mighty few of us left."

"He belonged to you, then?" It was the voice of the general, breaking in impatiently upon our greeting.

"This man is Sergeant Elbert King of Reynolds' battery, sir," answered McDermott, turning instantly toward him, yet still retaining my hand clasped tightly within his own.

"Very well. Now, Sergeant King, we are prepared to listen to your story."

I told it swiftly, realizing the value of time and inspired by the interest I immediately perceived depicted in the faces clustered about. I related merely what they needed to know from the military viewpoint, leaving out all reference to the girl, except to mention that she was the cause of Lieutenant Dunn's night ride.

"You report," said the major, "that the plan, as you understood it, was to double the Confederate right wing to the rear past their center last night; then that during today, and under protection of those bluffs yonder, the center will also be moved to the left, thus massing their entire fighting force just back of Minersville soon after dark, with the intention of hurling it in solid mass against our unprepared right flank at daybreak tomorrow? Do I state this correctly?"

"That was my understanding, sir."

"Yet our pickets have reported no movement apparent in their front. Campfires were burning the full length of the Confederate lines from Minersville to Coulter's Landing all through the night."

"Then the most of them must have been dummy fires, sir, for I rode from Denslow's plantation to Coulter's without encountering a single man. I am positive that after midnight there was not a Confederate company left on duty east of Salter's creek. A few men may have been detailed to keep the fires going, but their regiments were certainly already on the march westward."

Rosecrans was leaning stiffly back in his chair, tapping on the table with the blunt end of a pencil, his keen eyes constantly studying my face. Suddenly he glanced over toward the group of officers standing clustered in the doorway.

"Captain Geer, were any of your scouts across the river last night?"

questioned Rosecrans.

"Daniels, sir."

"Bring him in."

He arrived shortly, still rubbing his eyes as though just awakened from sleep, as odd appearing a specimen of the typical mountain white as ever I saw—long, loosely jointed limbs, narrow, stooped shoulders, bushy whiskered face intensely solemn in expression and strangely wrinkled, yet ornamented with keen blue eyes containing some shrewd humor in their depths.

"Daniels," and the general's stern voice instantly commanded his attention, "Captain Geer tells me you were across the river during the night. What did you discover?"

"Waal, gin'ral," he piped out in a mere squeak of a voice, which sounded funny enough, although no one laughed, "long, maybe 'bout 10 o'clock, there 'bout 'bout 'bout dark, I got on the 'side o' a log an' sorter drifted with the current, steerin' a bit, o' course, till I come in agin' the south shore. I reckon I clumb out maybe fifty feet east o' the mouth o' Salter creek, whar bushes grow clear down to the edge o' the water. I got ashore all right an' wormed my way up to the top o' the bank, but that was 'bout all I did o' I never see such a picket line afore as them Rebs hed. That wasn't a hole that a black cat could 'a' crawled through. It made me think that something was happenin' fer sure, but every time I tried ter git out o' the bunch o' trees I run up agin' a picket. I tried ter crawl up along the creek even, wadin' in the water under the bank, but that was no good. So long 'bout 3 o'clock I decided that maybe I might better be gittin' back agin' over to this side afore it got light."

"And you neither saw nor heard anything?"

"Not a blame lot, anyway. I heard a battery goin' long the fellaers cussin' an' lickin' their hosses somethin' scandalous; an' that was a considerable mass o' cavalry marchin' behind 'em, fer their things was jingling, an' they stop-ped to water the hosses in the creek."

I couldn't git near 'nough to hear their talk. Ye see, gin'ral, it was a line o' fires what kept me back more'n the pickets, fer that wasn't a place but what was lit up. That was sure some sorter movement goin' on thar, but I couldn't make head nor tail to it, 'cept that all them troops that I saw was marchin' west."

Then Rosecrans spoke.

"This looks decidedly serious to me, gentlemen, and I feel sufficient faith in Sergeant King's report to act immediately upon it. If it be true that Johnston is massing against our right and has left the ford at Coulter's unguarded, this offers us an opportunity for a counter-march if we only move swiftly enough. Hand me the maps, major."

"I am fully aware of the danger involved in dividing our force in the presence of the enemy," he said at last, lifting his eyes to the faces anxiously watching him, "but to my mind the peril will be even greater if we permit the enemy to carry out their present plans unchecked. If at this juncture we can only strike unexpectedly in their rear we shall win. The aid of surprise will be with us, and it is worth much to an army just to feel that they are on the aggressive. Smiley, ride to McGirth and Williams; tell them to mass their brigades opposite Minersville and hold the ford at all cost; explain the situation to them fully. Wyatt, have Colt's brigade stationed in reserve in the hills back of the town. Now, Parker, Seaman, Just and Shea, start the remainder of our troops on forced march to Coulter's ford. Let there be no delay, not even to cook rations. Wilson will move first with the cavalry, to be immediately followed by Sheridan's brigade. These will proceed by the river road, while the others will follow the ridge as rapidly as they can be made ready. Further orders will reach them at Coulter's. That is all, gentlemen."

Rosecrans, the major, the scout Daniels and myself were left alone in the room. The general's glance fell upon me.

"Do you need rest, sergeant?"

"No, sir."

"Glad of that, as I require your services. There is no battery I can assign you to at present, but I judge from your story that you ride well and you should know the country thoroughly between the Landing and Salter's creek. I am going to appoint you temporarily on my staff with the rank of lieutenant and place you in command of the advance scouts. Major, see that Lieutenant King is furnished with a suitable uniform and a good horse and that he and his command get away at once."

Twenty minutes later I was galloping down the river road with an odd following at my heels.

There were twenty all told, exceptionally well mounted, I observed at a glance. There was, to be sure, a semblance of uniform, but exhibiting marks of rough service, and representative of every department, so that no two men appeared similarly attired. They had a sturdy and resolute fighting appearance that pleased me. What are they—enlisted men?"

"Some of 'em are," he answered slowly, shifting his eyes over the rabble behind, "but their mountain men mostly are jus' volunteer scouts, picked up yere in their desctrick 'cause they know their way round. I reckon maybe it's a tough lookin' outfit from a sojerin' plut o' view, but thar's some dern good scouts a-ridin' thar behin' yer. That yaller headed feller thar has been mostly my partner lately. He's Irish, name Con O'Brien; deserted twice from the Ninth Illinois cavalry, but since they put him scoutin' thar ain't no job to blame hard fer him ter tackle. I tell ye, leftenant, scout is born, not made."

"How long have you been at it?"

"Oh, mostly since the war begun. I started in with Buell in Kentucky."

"You came from up there?"

He looked at me almost suspiciously. Then his eyes shifted to the scene in front.

"I reckon I was born 'bout ten mile from yere, over yonder on the east ridge." His eyes narrowed, a new light visible within their depths. "It was jist ter git back yere with sich an outfit as this yere ahind me that made me a sojer," he acknowledged slowly. "I got some private work ter do in this yere kinty."

"A feud?"

"I reckon thet's what ye call it. Maybe it's bin a hundred years runnin' an' has caused a heap o' killin' one way an' 'nother, but it's sorter simmered down ther las' two year to Jem Donald an' me. Whin this yere war broke out he sorter took to the Confed side, an' thet naturally made me a Yank. They hed ther best o' it round yere in them days, an' arter awhile I skipped. But I'm back yere now, an' I ain't skulkin' round alone neither. I reckon I've got an o' woman an' some kids down thar on Salt creek, if ther house ain't been burnt over 'em 'fore now. An' if it has, God pity Jem Donald!"

There was a grimness in these words spoken deliberately, the tone utterly expressionless, which I cannot properly convey in written language, the glint of the eye, the compression of the thin lips, making the deadly

meaning perfectly apparent. It was the unyielding hate of savagery, long brooding over past wrongs. Involuntarily I glanced about into the fringe of woods.

"Is Donald about here then?"

"Who, big Jem Donald? Sure. He ain't ye never heard o' him?"

I shook my head, hoping thus to lead him on to his story.

"What is the special trouble between you and this Big Donald, Daniels?"

"Darn if I know whar it started," he acknowledged, as though the thought came to him almost as a surprise. "It was 'fore my dad's time, I reckon, an' seems ter me it was over a lot o' haws that got rootin' up some corn down on Rock creek. Thet's whar ther Daulsels an' Donalds lived in them days, but blame if I know which one owned ther corn an' which owned ther haws. Ther Donalds in them days hed a fine plantation, with a big house on it, an' maybe a hundred slaves. Ther Daulsels was allers pore, but thar was a monstrous lot o' us scattered 'long Rock creek, an' when they went gunnin' fer ther Donalds they gin'rally got 'em. All I know is thet when I come 'long, 'bout a hundred years later, ther Donalds was livin' in a log shack back o' Bald mountain an' ther fight was still goin' on. My dad was shot down at Milliken Bend by one o' ther crowd when I was eight year old; then my brother got o' man Donald somewhar on ther trail an' filled him full o' buckshot. Ther next thing they set fire to our house when nobody but man was to hum. She shot into ther bunch and got away with a broken arm, hidin' out in ther bush fer a week. Then ther Daulsels rode over ter Bald mountain, an' we come pretty near puttin' ther Donald tribe outer business, until a gang o' 'em ambuscaded us one night in ther bottoms. I got two bullets in ther fracas, an' my brother was killed."

"'Bout that time ther war broke out. Darned if I keered which side licked in ther war, but Jem Donald come out fer ther Confeds, an' so I went in fer ther Union. Waal, we fought it out yere fer maybe six months, but ther odds was all with his outfit; thar wasn't many Daulsels left able ter tote a gun, an' finally I skipped out and joined Buell."

"The secession sentiment was strong through this section, I suppose?"

"Waal, I don't know 'bout thet. Ther mountain men mostly didn't care much; mighty few o' 'em owned any niggers. But ther gen'y was with ther secessionists, an' Big Donald allets kinder nat'rally belonged to the bunch. I've been tell as how Jem Donald's wife was a Denslow."

This mention of the name of Denslow brought up before me instantly the face of the young girl whom I had left a few hours before. So she also was, in a way, connected with this fierce mountain feud that had cost so many lives. I had reason to know she was of fighting blood.

Coulter's Landing was apparently deserted of all inhabitants. Back along the opposite shore we could see the dust cloud rising above the column of advancing cavalry. A few brief orders scattered my nondescript command to right and left, Daniels and I riding along the road leading up toward the ridge, watchful that the others covered thoroughly the country on either side of us. We were a mile in advance when Wilson's men first began taking water at the ford.

The knowledge of what our rapid movement meant gave zest to this advance scouting. I observed how old Daniels' eyes narrowed like those of a cat as he scanned the hills. For the first time he became revealed to me as a savage, living merely for revenge, merciless and unfeeling. To him the war was only a greater feud, bringing with it a long sought opportunity for vengeance against his enemies.

His keen eyes first observed the signal of some discovery waved back from a scout far away to the left, who suddenly tipped a distant ridge, a mere black dot among the rocks.

"What is it, Daniels?"

"Ther feller out thar is wavin' us over. He's run up agin' something that's made him need help, I reckon."

We rode straight across the upland, side by side, I spurring cruelly to keep my horse even with his rawboned

"It's O'Brien," I said.

"What is it, O'Brien?"

He waved his hand backward.

"There's a house down there in the hollow, without nobody livin' in it, jist a shack of a place, but OI thought maybe OI bether look inside afore OI went by, an' thar's a dead man lyin' there. OI had to push the body aside to get the door open."

"A soldier?"

"Naw; one o' Daniels' sort, OI reckon."

"Killed?"

"Shot through the head."

I spurred my horse around the end of the ravine, Daniels keeping close at my heels. Apparently he needed no guide, for as we drew up to where O'Brien waited the old scout passed straight forward up a cleft in the ridge, and with a nod to the boy I followed silently.

Daniels swung down from the saddle and disappeared within. Following, I found him bent above the prostrate figure of a man lying upon his back, a haggard face covered by a straggly iron gray beard, staring with sightless eyes up into the black shadows of the rafters.

"It's one o' ther Farley boys," announced Daniels quietly. "He was shot in ther back o' ther head. He was a cousin o' mine and was hidin' out over Bald mountain way."

He stooped down suddenly and pressed open one of the dead man's tightly clinched hands. I caught the flutter of a white slip of paper as it fell to the floor.

"Thar's some writin' thar, sir, but it don't do me no good, 'cause I can't read."

The paper was an irregular strip, evidently torn from off a larger sheet.

What was this, a warning to Johnston of my message to Rosecrans? I could hardly decide. And Jean Denslow, unable to ride herself, had discovered and sent forward a courier. I desired to learn more.

"Daniels, you say this dead man was your cousin. What side was he on?"

"Waal, he was agin' Big Donald, an' thet's 'bout all ther side thar is up yere in ther mountings."

"What was he doing with this paper then? That was a message to Johnston warnin' him that I had taken a report of his plans to the Federal camp."

"Who sent it?"

"A young girl—Jean Denslow."

The seamed, whiskered face appeared to darken.

"You know her?" I questioned.

"I reckon I do tol'ble, but I don't know how she ever got no chance fer to butt in yere. She must have run up agin' Jake somewhar an' mistook him fer one o' Donald's outfit."

"Does Jean Denslow know Big Donald?"

He stared at me, his yellow teeth showing grimly.

"I rather reckon she does. Whar is she now?"

"At Fairview; Judge Dunn's place."

He drew his breath, whistling.

There was little more I could get out of him, but he went through the dead man's clothes, after which the three of us silently buried the mountaineer. Within a few moments we were riding away. To me it all seemed to center more and more about the girl with the blue gray eyes.

With Jean Denslow.

WE attained the east bank of Salter's creek early in the afternoon, still riding in advance of the main body, but encountering no force of the enemy sufficient to dispute our progress. Guerrillas had suddenly swarmed forth from the mountain lairs, swooped down upon several ill guarded supply trains, driven off the guards from at least two and rifled the wagons.

Rosecrans ordered me to capture Donald. "If you succeed it will mean a captaincy," he said. I routed Daniels and O'Brien from a comfortable campfire and set them to the necessary preparations. I cared nothing for his feud spirit—it seemed a small thing to me then.

"Where would you suppose, Daniels, is the best place for us to begin our search?" I asked.

"Long Sand creek. I don't know whar Donald holds out right now, but I reckon if we took thet o' villain Dunn an' held his feet in ther fire fer awhile he'd come mighty nigh showin' us ther spot."

"Daniels," I asked, "what have you got against old Judge Dunn?"

"Whar hev I got? Didn't he hold me fer murder? An' wouldn't he hev hung me if I hedn't got away? An' wasn't thet son o' his with Big Jem Donald when they shot inter my cabin up at Bald mounting? An' didn't he head ther posse that run me across ther Cumberland? Maybe ther o' judge ain't in ther feud, but he's got an enemy in Bill Daniels jist ther same."

It was a long night's tramp. I crept silently forth from the cleft where my party slept. Some strange impulse drew me toward the Dunn house. It may have been the memory of Jean Denslow, yet I persuaded myself it was hope of learning there something of the whereabouts of this Big Donald for whom we were searching.

I saw her first, yet with no opportunity to escape, for almost instantly she perceived my presence and flung up one hand, her eyes filled with apprehension. Fearful lest she should scream I remained motionless, but managed to say: "Do not be alarmed. I am not here to do injury."

"But what are you doing here? You—you are a Yankee!"

"I command a scouting detachment back in the hills," I explained, "and came down here seeking information I thought might be gained from your negroes."

"Perhaps you would like to question me?"

"I will test you. Where can I find Big Donald—Big Donald is the name he is known by in our army—the guerrilla leader who holds a Confederate commission."

"And if I knew, do you suppose I would ever tell you? I know nothing of Big Donald."

I could see the flush spring to her cheeks, the swift rising and falling of her bosom, but her unflinching eyes were upon mine.

"Whose house is this?"

"You know already—it is Judge Dunn's plantation, Fairview."

"Are you his daughter?"

"No; merely a guest."

"Of whom does the family consist?" She hesitated, biting her lips.

"Why do you ask all this? Are you gallantly contemplating an attack on the house?"

"No," I said; "we are soldiers, not guerrillas. I confess it is curiosity more than anything else, and—because I like to talk with you."

"With me, indeed! You have the insolence of the north. Who are you?"

"A lieutenant on the staff of General Rosecrans."

"What is your name?"

"King."

She drew a quick, startled breath, her hands clasping tightly.

"King—how strange! Do you know an Elbert King of your army? A—sergeant of artillery?"

I waited as if thinking, endeavoring to determine which would be best, to

deceive her or confess the truth outright. Something in her face favored me to the falsehood.

"Yes, Reynolds' battery. He was reported killed in our last battle. Did you know him?"

"No, not really; indeed, I have never seen his face. I wondered if you could be the same," her voice faltering over the words.

"That sounds strange that you should know his name and all about him, yet never have seen his face."

"He was not killed, only wounded. He came to our plantation in the night endeavoring to escape into your lines. I—I aided him."

"Then you surely don't hate all Yankees," I exclaimed, almost eagerly.

"You mistake, with dignity. "He was nothing to me. I assisted him unintentionally, not even knowing he was a Yankee."

"If you had known would you have betrayed him?"

"Not merely as a fugitive perhaps, but as a bearer of important news to our enemies I would."

"And me?"

She looked at me, her eyes almost angry in their gray depths, her lips pressed closely together.

"We are enemies, not friends," she returned calmly. "Is your mission peace?"

"So far as this house is concerned I come in peace, but I come seeking the man Donald. Is he concealed here?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"If I return with my men and see the premises—"

"We could not prevent such an outrage, she broke in swiftly. "B will be needless to call your The house is open. You may the search yourself."

Had I been older, more experienced and had the invitation come some other than this quick wit I might easily have questioned her.

"You mean you will act as guide? Who are within?"

"Judge Dunn, his daughter and a few house servants; need fear," a touch of sarcasm low tone.

"And you are?"

"Jean Denslow, at y dropping me a courtesy."

"Very well, Miss Den can satisfy me that no harbored here I will a left undisturbed in the

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