

# MY LADY OF THE SOUTH



## A Fiftieth Anniversary War Story

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### PROLOGUE OF THE STORY.

Elbert King, a northern soldier left for dead on a southern battlefield, recovers consciousness near a farmhouse, where he hears Jean Denslow, a beautiful daughter of the south, tell her negro servant, Joe, that soon she must marry Lieutenant Calvert Dunn, whom she does not love. King learns of a movement to surprise the Federals. Anxious to get away with the information, he intercepts the prospective bridegroom, appropriates his uniform and is mistaken for him. Under cover of his disguise and to save himself he is married to Jean Denslow. Still undetected, he starts on horseback with his bride to Dunn's home. En route she discovers the deception and, furious, gallops off to warn the Confederates. Her horse falls 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 reports to the Federal commander, Rosecrans, who appoints him lieutenant of a body of scouts, including Daniels, head of a feud faction fighting Jem Donald, a Confederate guerrilla chief. The expedition leads King to Dunn's home, where he again meets Jean, who leads him into a trap. He escapes, only to stumble across the body of a slain Confederate officer. Fearful lest he be stigmatized with the crime, he voluntarily surrenders to Big Jem Donald and is accused by Calvert Dunn. King shows fight, but is subdued and finds himself a prisoner in the cellar of the house until visited by Jean, who wants protection, as all but Judge Dunn, an invalid, have left the house. She releases King on his word of honor not to escape. While watching he has an encounter with what he thinks is the assassin, finding himself overpowered by Big Jem Donald, to whom Jean explains her faith in King's innocence. The reclining figure of Judge Dunn attracts their attention. They find he has been assassinated. King is suspected. O'Brien King's aid, arrives with soldiers, who are surprised by Calvert Dunn's Confederates. The Federals intrench themselves within the house, where King and O'Brien seek to discover the secret passage through which Donald escaped. Held up by Jean, they are locked in a room, from which they escape with difficulty, disarming and imprisoning Jean. Searching for the hidden passage, the fireplace opens, revealing the insane features of a woman, which instantly disappear. They explore the passage and find Big Donald wounded.

### Colonel Donald.

**A** MOMENT Colonel Donald appeared to hesitate, then his expression became more natural and he made a weak effort to smile.

"King—King? Oh, certainly, I remember now. Your men came, and I— He stopped, evidently struggling to recall what had occurred to him after the arrival of the troopers.

"It was a troop of Federal cavalry dispatched to my aid, Colonel Donald. I sent Miss Denslow up the stairs, intending you should thus have an opportunity for escape, and was still parleying with the fellows on the front porch when a squad of concealed Confederates poured a volley into us. They hit a few, but the remainder made the house and drove the others back when they attempted to rush us. We've been defending the house ever since, and I made a search for this secret passage. I found my way into it at last and discovered you lying here apparently dead, with a wound in your throat just as those others had."

He put his hand up to the gash as if just made aware of it.

you with Jean, intending to search this tunnel. I had opened the fireplace and was lighting the lantern when your men came, and I stole back as far as the head of the stairs to learn what was happening. Then Jean came up with your message, and I decided to escape to my own men as quickly as possible. Having no longer any thought of search and knowing the way perfectly, I blew out the light and came down the ladder in the dark. I have made the trip in that manner a dozen times and felt no fear. I must have advanced through the tunnel for a hundred feet or more, one hand touching the wall to keep the direction, when something struck me so unexpectedly that I reeled backward and fell. I have no recollection of seeing anything; only of feeling the blow and realizing I was falling. The next I remember is looking up into your face, wondering where I was."

The man was far too weak and dazed to be questioned at any length; in his present state it would be useless to describe the woman's face we had seen or Miss Jean's effort to hold us prisoners. Here was an explanation of why no attack had thus far been made upon us from the rear; either no one outside knew of this passage, or else Dunn, if he was present and in command, lacked the nerve necessary for directing such an assaulting party. Whichever was the cause, I desired to satisfy myself—I must seal the tunnel, or else (the idea coming to me as an inspiration) lead a sortie through it, and thus take the unconscious besiegers in the rear.

"How far are we from the entrance?" I questioned.

"Not over fifty feet. I should say. You pass out through a trap door into a log storehouse."

"Could you manage to walk that far?" He held on to O'Brien and the wall, thus succeeding in lifting himself until he stood erect, but his movements were so uncertain that I grasped him also. In this manner we advanced slowly along the passage. Twice we permitted him to lie back on the packed earth floor to rest. He was swaying dizzily when we finally attained the foot of a short ladder leading upward. The trap was closed, yet as I held the lantern higher I could perceive the outlines of the door.

"Is the trap locked?" His eyes opened slightly, staring deeply at the lantern flame.

"No; all you need do is push against it."

I climbed the few steps of the ladder, leaving the light below, and without great effort lifted the door, turning it silently back until it rested securely against some obstacle. I could perceive little outside the narrow zone of light radiating from below, yet the small room into which my head projected appeared unoccupied. Satisfied as to this, I returned below, considerably puzzled as to how Donald was to be got up the ladder. Water from the canteen applied externally, with the last drops of the brandy flask as inward stimulant, brought the injured man once again to his feet. I buckled the sling strap of the carbine beneath his arms and led the way, O'Brien boosting sturdily from below, and thus, aided a little by his own efforts, we succeeded in dragging his almost inert body up the short reach of ladder and out upon the floor above. The man fainted as his head fell back upon the planks, and he lay limp and scarcely breathing.

My own exhaustion, complete as it was temporarily, was not lasting. I held the lantern before Donald's face, bending down to make certain he still breathed, and then began searching for the door of the cabin. We were di-

lines of a well curb with a sweep above it, and beyond that rose the trunk of a large tree. This comprised about all I could distinguish with any certainty. I called to O'Brien in a whisper.

"See if you can fill your canteen there at the well without making a noise," and I pointed toward the vague outline.

I clung watchfully to the doorway until the boy came safely back.

"There was water in the pail, so," he explained, letting me feel the wet canteen, "and there's two or three fellows sittin' there on the back porch."

"Well, you go inside and remain with Colonel Donald. Don't permit him any opportunity to get away or sound an alarm."

I crept cautiously forth, moving slowly backward down the short line of negro cabins, until I attained the edge of a small grove. Under this concealment I circled to the right, purposing to advance through the weeds along the east of the grape arbor. I felt convinced that the force of attacking Confederates would be drawn as close in to the house as the shelter would permit.

I began worming my way in toward the grape arbor, discovering nothing to obstruct progress. The thickness of the vines finally prevented further advance in this direction, and I consequently turned more toward the front of the house, heading directly toward a great tree, at the north end of the arbor. The spreading branches cast so black a shadow that I was almost within arm's length of the trunk before becoming aware that two men were standing there together, their backs toward me. The sound of a voice first awakened me to the peril of the position in which I had unwittingly placed myself.

"Thellen certainly will be here by daylight, and then we shall have enough men to turn the trick. That was his messenger who just left."

"How much of a force will he bring?" It was Calvert Dunn who asked the question.

"He should have a hundred men, with my fellows picked up on the way. He was sent over to Bitter Creek to waylay a Yankee foraging party."

There was a pause; Dunn kicked restlessly at the root of the tree.

"Well, it can't be more than an hour now until daylight," he said at last, "and altogether that will give us about 165, won't it?"

"That or more; my fellows have been dropping in here all night and you brought five with you."

"I didn't expect to fall into this sort of an affair," in a tone of evident disgust, "I merely came over to take back that Yankee prisoner to camp. Did you count the blue bellies?"

"No; but there are about twenty of them, I reckon, and they must have bottled out the colonel or he'd have been out here with us before this. Those fellows can shoot, too, better'n any troopers I ever come up against before." He paused, thinking. "Didn't you say awhile ago, lieutenant, that you knew a way leadin' into the house that would let us take 'em in the rear?"

"Yes, I did, Dodd, but there's no use trying to turn that trick until we get more men. If Thellen reaches here by daylight we'll gobble up that whole



"WE'LL Gobble UP THAT YANKEE OUTFIT." Yankee outfit easy, but it's better to wait and make a clean job. As things are they can't possibly get away."

"Some of 'em will sure get hurt if they ever try it. Well, I'm goin' round the lines again, lieutenant. Maybe you better wait here, where I can find you easy. Besides, this is about where Thellen will strike for when he comes. He'll follow that path up from the creek most likely."

The guerrilla sauntered off, gun across his shoulder. Dunn remained quiet a moment and then moved slowly round behind the tree trunk. I heard him scratching a match. A window of the house split flame to the sharp crack of a carbine, the ball tearing along the bark of the tree. My rascals within evidently were awake, and the startled lieutenant dropped the blazing match as though it had burnt his fingers. Another carbine spoke from a window farther to the left, the missile whistling through the

ered men enough to safely risk the attempt, and he was the only one in the party who was aware of its existence. Then my work was cut out for me—I must take care of Dunn.

There was brief time in which to arrange the play, with both daylight and Thellen already so close at hand. Thellen! Why, of course, a report of his approach would throw Dunn off his guard, and I might inveigle the fellow far enough back from the lines to make an open attack possible. Here, at least, was the only course which seemed to promise success. I tore off my jacket, turning it inside out to hide the gleam of buttons; ripped off the insignia from the front of my slouch hat and pulled the wide brim low over my eyes. There would be nothing pretty about Thellen's irregulars, and the color of my clothes could not be easily guessed at in the gloom. All else was sheer luck and audacity. I was within five feet of the fellow before he even saw me. Before he could draw his weapon, I asked hurriedly:

"Is this Captain Dodd?"

"No; I am an officer of Johnston's staff," peering forward in a vain endeavor to decipher my face. "Who are you? What do you want?"

"I have been sent forward by Captain Thellen. He wants to know where he is to bring his men."

The lieutenant stiffened up, the slight faltering of his voice vanished in an effort at command.

"Oh, I see! Well, I am technically in command here, being of the regular service. Where is Thellen?"

"Back yonder on the creek. He's waitin' for orders and a guide."

"Well, hurry back and bring him up. You know the way, don't you?"

I stared off into the black night, as though it hid a thousand mysteries.

"Well, I don't exactly know," I confessed unwillingly. "I got here all right because the firing from the house sorter guided me, but them weeds is mighty confusin', an' I reckon it will take me a right smart while to find my way back again. You couldn't go along, could you?"

There was nothing in the request to arouse suspicion, yet he hesitated, apparently at first inclined to refuse, perhaps considering such a service beneath his dignity.

"Maybe if you got me as far the head of that path I might make the rest all right," I suggested doubtfully.

It was plain enough he would prefer remaining where he was, but anxiety to have these welcome reinforcements hurried forward caused him grudgingly to consent.

"How large a force have you?"

"A few over a hundred, I reckon."

"Well, come on; I'll show you to the path. You could follow that with your eyes blindfolded."

I had forgotten the way myself, or rather, the night confused me as to the points of compass, yet as he started off to the right I followed, perfectly satisfied so long as every step took us farther away from the immediate vicinity of the house. We had traversed the orchard and were upon the edge of the weed patch when he came to a sharp halt.

"Here's where the path begins leading down to the creek. It's not very straight, but you can't lose it, for the growth is solid on both sides."

"It all looks the same to me," staring beyond him. "Where did you say the entrance was?"

"Right here in front," half angrily. "What is the matter with your eyes? I'll lead you into it, and then, perhaps, you can follow your nose."

He gripped my sleeve, forcing me forward. The next instant I had my leg twined about his. I never had my easier job at taming a man, and before he got his scattered senses together I pressed a revolver barrel against his temple, threatening instant death if he so much as moved. Whatever other ambitions Lieutenant Calvert Dunn may have possessed, departure from life surely was not included, and I doubt if he winked an eyelash while I stripped him of weapons and tightly buckled his waistbelt about his arms, binding them helplessly against the body.

"Sorry to be compelled to treat you in this manner," I remarked coolly, "but it seems to be your luck to get in my way constantly. Besides, I believe you advocated hanging me only a few hours ago."

He recognized me then, and the sudden gust of anger overcame his prudence, yielding him voice. He burst forth into a volley of oaths.

"Stop that!" the words like bullets, the grip of my hand shutting off his wind. "I hold your life in this one finger and you either obey me or die. How many men are about this house?"

He squirmed under the pressure of the gun barrel, but comprehended the necessity for an immediate answer.

"About sixty."

"All Donald's guerrillas?"

"Except the small squad I brought with me."

"How are they posted?"

"Thirty or so in front of the house perhaps a dozen at the rear, the others scattered so as to watch the side windows."

"No patrols thrown out to protect the rear?"

"Not so far as I know. There may be a picket on the main road. We had no reason to expect any Yankees from this direction."

There was no occasion to doubt the truth of his replies, and they coincided exactly with my own conception of the situation. These were irregulars and not disciplined soldiers, trained merely as raiders and naturally careless as to guard lines. Besides, they had every reason to suppose the small body of Federal cavalry opposing them was

was to my liking, but what could I do with Dunn? The only feasible method was to take the lieutenant with me back to the hut, where O'Brien could stand guard over him, while I gathered together our men for a sortie. With this in view I gripped him by the collar.

"Now, Dunn, keep exactly one step ahead of me along the edge of these



I NEVER HAD AN EASIER JOB AT TAMING A MAN

weeds until you reach the orchard. Yes, I know where we are going, and any effort to break away or any noise will put you beyond rescue. Step out lively now, only be quiet about it."

I heard him swearing fiercely under his breath, but he pushed on as I ordered. We slipped within the shelter of the cabin, where O'Brien promptly held us up with leveled carbine.

### We Organize a Sortie.

**O**BRIEN was very clearly in a mood to shoot first and make inquiries afterward. Yet even in that darkness he recognized my voice and consented to lower the gun which was jammed against my breast. Donald had not recovered consciousness, I paused long enough to feel his pulse, which appeared rapid and strong, yet there was nothing we could do to relieve his condition before the application of water. I used O'Brien's belt to strap the lieutenant's feet together, placed him in as comfortable a position as possible and then, with strict injunction to the trooper to remain close beside him, took up the extinguished lantern and groped my way down the short ladder to the dismal tunnel, closing the trap behind me.

While the brisk action of the past half hour had served somewhat to steady my nerves, yet the memory of that ghostly woman's face still haunted me, and I felt no inclination to attempt that passage alone in the darkness. The possibilities of murder lurked at every step, and, while I was not truly afraid, I felt my flesh creep at the thought and took precaution to light the lantern the instant I was safe at the foot of the ladder. Holding it well in advance, yet not so as to blind my eyes, I hurried forward, watchful of the shadows, but with mind busy with details of the coming attempt at escape. Here certainly lay our only chance of getting away. If we delayed until after daylight and Thellen's command arrived meanwhile we would be caught like rats in a trap. But if we could manage to strike Dodd's scattered followers from the rear, surprising them by suddenness of attack, we might succeed in breaking away and by swift marching attain our own lines in safety. This plan offered a fighting chance at least, and the more I studied it the stronger became its appeal.

I arrived at the bottom of the ladder stairs, having seen nothing but the bare stone walls, and the hard-packed earth floor, reflected by the yellow glow of the lantern. But at the top I met with a surprise that left me staring blindly, for the moment distrusting my own eyes; there was no opening into the hall! The mantel had been swung back into place, leaving me fronting an apparently solid wall. Surely that heavy mantel would never have swung back into position without human assistance. Who in the house would have any reason to operate it except Jean Denslow? The possibility of her escaping from that room in which I had locked her had not before seriously occurred to me, yet hers was a nature to dare much, and achieve. If she had done the trick, then she would be on guard within. I rapped against the front of the chimney, pausing to listen, but hearing no sound in response. Then I put my lips close and spoke loud enough so I felt certain my voice would carry to the hall without.

"Miss Denslow, are you there?" Nothing beyond the dim echo rewarded this effort, yet so convinced was I of her presence that I persevered.

"I am Lieutenant King; we found Colonel Donald seriously wounded in the tunnel, and I have come back after help. For the sake of his life open this door."

"Are—are you telling me the truth?" "As God is my witness, yes; I am alone, and O'Brien is with Donald. If you care to save his life you must let me through."

"But I cannot! I do not know how the door opens."

"Pull straight upward on the and-iron farthest to the north."

She obeyed without the slightest hesitation, and the mantel swung so suddenly I barely escaped being struck. The next instant, lantern still in hand, I was beside her, noting how she shrank back, half frightened, at my quick appearance from out the dark recess.

"Don't be alarmed," I exclaimed hastily, feeling nothing must longer delay my plans. "No, you are not to go into that hole alone. There is something mysterious about the passage; we found Donald with his throat slashed exactly as those others were, only he still lives, and I believe will recover. I mean to take you to him in a moment, but you must wait here until I come back. You will, will you not? I can trust you?"

Her face was white, her eyes full of appeal.

"Yes, yes, but—but are you certain he will live?"

Even then these words, the deep feeling in the voice, hurt, almost angered me.

"There is no apparent reason why he should not," I answered, not altogether pleasantly. "There is nothing particularly serious about his injuries so far as I could discover. A surgeon and a nurse could bring him around in short order. The important matter is to get back to him just as soon as possible. No, Miss Denslow," and I caught her by the arm in restraint, "you are not to venture into that passage alone. I shall be back here in a moment to accompany you."

"But why cannot I go? You say he is hurt and suffering, and yet order me not to go to him?"

"I merely request you to remain here for a moment until we can guard you through the tunnel."

"Guard me?" her eyes searching the dark opening. "From what? Is there any peril there?"

"Honestly, I do not know, but it is no place for you to attempt to traverse alone. I will not permit it. See, I am going to trust you fully to wait my return. Take this revolver and watch that opening until I come back."

She accepted it, our hands touching for an instant, before a vague suspicion of my real purpose dawned upon her.

"What—what are you planning to do? Take your men through here?"

"Yes," I acknowledged, already at the head of the stairs. "This is our opportunity for escape."

"And you believe I will be an accomplice? You intend to use me for the defeat of my own people?"

"No, Miss Denslow," and I came back, looking directly into her indignant eyes. "There is no manner in which you can possibly prevent our escape in this way unless you deliberately choose to kill me. You can do that, for you have my weapon in your hand, and I stand here unarmed. Are you willing to do that for the Confederacy?"

I saw the flush sweep into her cheeks, the gray-blue eyes falling before mine.

"No—no," she faltered, "not that."

"Then you are helpless to interfere. I desire to take you with us to the assistance of Colonel Donald, but if it is your intention to make trouble, then we shall have to lock you up again and leave you behind. Which is your choice?"

She could not doubt my sincerity, for the earnestness with which I spoke was convincing. Her eyes uplifted to mine for one single questioning instant.

"I will wait," she said slowly, "but—but I believe I hate you."

"I would far rather you felt thus, Miss Denslow," I returned quietly, "than to be utterly indifferent toward me."

I caught her sudden look of surprise, the quick uplift of her face, but before she could find expression in words I had slipped down the stairs to the hall.

They came straggling forth from the various doorways, blackened with powder smoke and sleepy eyed from the long night vigil, yet a fairly tough looking bunch of fighting men, and ranged themselves before me. They had scarcely had opportunity to observe me before in the rush of that first attack, but the cavalry officer's uniform I wore had an immediate effect, and they remained respectfully silent, leaning on their carbines, waiting for me to speak.

"Well, men," I said soberly, "we're going out of this, but we are liable to have a bit of stiff fighting before we get away. I'll explain the situation, because you will have to operate in the dark, and each man must use his own judgment to some extent, although we will try to keep together. Those fellows out yonder are part of Donald's band of guerrillas, with a small squad of regular cavalry. They'll outnumber us a little over three to one, but are scattered around the house, the main force bunched in front. I've been out and looked them over, and if we can strike them suddenly in the rear we ought to have them on the run in five minutes. They haven't any guards out, and I have found a secret passage leading underground to a negro cabin a hundred feet west of the house kitchen. But we've got to act at once, and before daylight, for another bunch of those fellows are marching this way