

MY LADY OF THE SOUTH



A Fiftieth Anniversary War Story

By RANDALL PARRISH

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CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MAN IN THE TUNNEL.

I HAD an hour then in which to attempt the solving of this mystery and still retain opportunity for escape. To my mind there remained only the underground passage to search, and I proposed making my search thorough in every particular. I went back to the front chamber seeking my revolver, but found no trace of it. A bit uneasy at being weaponless, I took the precaution of glancing again into each room to reassure myself of the emptiness of all before plunging into the tunnel.

The fire screen moved easily, and I wrapped it back with a chair so it could not be closed upon me without human aid and lit the lantern, which had apparently remained undisturbed since our last trip that way. The shaft leading down was black and silent, and I held the yellow flame higher to examine the iron bars arranged ladder-like along the back wall. I had scarcely thought of this seriously before, but now I observed there were three of these steps and that the third was a wide strip which extended along the side wall. This rather peculiar arrangement aroused my curiosity, and I clambered up, discovering a somewhat similar bar at the top of the shaft, which gave me a hand hold, thus enabling me to walk the lower step. A single step revealed the description of the appearance from below. Before me was painted canvas, not rock, and the framework to which it was nailed yielded instantly to my grasp. The lantern revealed nothing but a bare narrow closet, with a door to the right. I clambered in and opened the latter, looking out into one of those unoccupied rooms I had previously examined. It was plain enough now how the woman had disappeared so suddenly—she had slipped into this chamber and, by way of the closet, found entrance to the tunnel. And here must be where she had hidden before.

So complete was my feeling of security that I even came to a pause, exploring my jacket pocket for pipe and tobacco, experiencing a desire to smoke. I found these and was searching for a match when something seemed to whiz out of the blackness, crashed against the glass of the lantern, instantly whirling out the yellow flame. It was not a bullet, for there was no report, yet surely the woman could never have thrown a stone with so precise an aim. This flashed over me instantly, for I was given no time for thought. Something rushed at me through the blackness, and we grappled each other in mad, desperate struggle, yet the numbing sense of fear left me as I realized that my adversary was a man.

He was a man, yet he fought with all the ferocity of a beast. It was God's mercy that I caught his wrist in my grip and forced a knife from his uplifted hand. I heard it clatter to the floor even as I struck him with the lantern. Then it was naked hands, the fellow clawing wildly for my throat, while I drove my fist violently into his face. I had an advantage in this even in that darkness, for I knew how to handle my arms and had him sufficiently located to make undercuts efficient. I landed twice, the second blow sending him staggering back against the wall. But what he lacked in science he made up in savagery, and he came back, clawing at me in the darkness and kicking viciously at my body. Had I been able to see I would have known I had the fellow whipped, but in that hole, fearing treachery or the use of some weapon, I kept remorselessly at him until he sank at my feet, begging for mercy under punishment. I soon relit the lantern, and its rays revealed the face of my opponent. I loosened my grip, staring at him in amazement. His whiskers were torn in the struggle, his face bloodstained, but I could not

doubt his identity—Daniels the mountaineer.

The woman had disappeared—vanished as mysteriously as she had come—but here was this man creeping into the house through the tunnel, knife in hand, urged by the same spirit of hatred, the same insanity of revenge. I could have trumped on him as upon a snake. Even as he recognized me he read the truth in my eyes and shrank back against the rock wall, his arms uplifted as if for protection.

"Was it you, lieutenant? By God, I didn't know!"

"It makes no difference what you knew," I returned hotly. "You made no effort to find out. You tried murder, and there has been too much of that done here already."

"What is it you mean—murder, here?"

"Yes, and I have no doubt you know more about it than I do. Three men have been assassinated here in the dark—stricken down by the knife, and the fourth barely escaped with a serious wound."

"Three killed? Who were they?"



ITS RAYS REVEALED THE FACE OF MY OPPONENT.

"A Confederate lieutenant, a private of the Third Ohio cavalry and Judge Dunn. The man injured but not killed was Jim Donald."

It seemed to me a new light almost of exultation leaped into the gray eyes, but it vanished instantly.

"My God!" he exclaimed incredulously. "Who did it?"

I caught his wrist, staring straight down into his face.

"That is what I want you to tell me, Daniels," I said sternly. "That feud of yours is at the bottom of this thing. I am going to have the truth out of you if I have to choke it out."

"As God is my witness, lieutenant, I know nothing. I didn't even know of the murders until you told me. I've known of this passage a long while, and I've got reason enough to feel hard against ther of Judge, as well as Jim Donald, but I've fought 'em fair—that is, fair accordin' ter ther way we fight sich things out in ther mountings. I ain't no murderer, an' I don't come creepin' long in ther dark ter knife anybody. I went fer yer, but yer had me trapped yere in this hole, an' I s'posed yer was one o' ther outfit."

The evident earnestness of the man brought me a certain measure of faith. Yet I could not entirely free him from suspicion.

"Where were you yesterday and last night?"

"Scorin' Lost Creek," he answered

promptly enough. "Las' night I took a notion to look up my own people. I said nothing, and he went on."

"They're purty well cleaned out, leftenant—killed an' skipped. Some of 'em are hidin' out in ther mountings an' some he've gone inter ther army. Dern if I ain't 'bout all ther's left fit ter keep matters bilin'. Twixt ther war an' hard luck, ther Donald crowd has just 'bout cleaned us up. Burnt my cabin too." He got up upon his feet, his gray eyes burning like two coals of fire. "But, by God, sir, I'm yere ter be reckon'd with yit, an' o' Bill Daniels, has got a mighty big score ter wipe out. Maybe I never kin do it, but I'll git Jim Donald if I hev ter betch him in hell."

"Daniels," I urged earnestly, "I understand how you feel, but I know Donald, and I cannot believe him guilty of such an act. Come with me to Jim Donald and let's find out the truth. Will you do that, Daniels?" And I held out my hand.

He stared at me in a moment's silence, apparently unable to find expression; then mouth and eyes hardened.

"I reckon maybe yer mean well," he said, "but yer don't understand. I've had houses burned afore," his voice choked, "but somethin' 's happened ter my wife an' the kids; I can't find hide nor hair of 'em."

"Surely you do not think they have been injured—gone away with?"

"It wouldn't be ther first time sich a thing was done. Ther women fight as well as ther men in these mountings."

"Yes," I assented, remembering, "I have reason to believe it was a woman who committed the murders in this house."

"I could hardly see the expression of the man's face in the miserable light of that smoldering lantern when he leaped forward gripping me by the shoulder so fiercely that for the instant I thought it an attack. His voice alone reassured me."

"A woman?" he cried. "Are you sure? Did you see her?"

"Yes," I answered, beginning to understand his suspicion. "I saw her twice—it was the haggard face of an insane woman, with gray hair and the wildest eyes imaginable. I was trailing her just now through this tunnel."

"What is it you suspect—that it may be your wife? Did she know of this entrance?"

"Yes," he almost sobbed, his head lowered, "she knew." He stared about into the darkness, apparently dazed.

"Who else saw her? Did any one else see her?"

"Only Jean Denslow."

"She saw her and said nothing?"

"There was not a word said, Daniels."

He buried his face in his hands, swaying on his feet like a drunken man. Perhaps here and now was the opportunity to end this century feud.

"See here, Daniels," and I grasped him by the arm, compelling him to lift his face to the light. "I am not ready to think this was the work of your wife, but there ought to be some way to settle it. Would Jean Denslow know her?"

"Yes."

"Then come with me to Jean Denslow. You are surely not afraid to meet her, and she will tell the truth."

"But you say ther house is under guard."

"True; but the soldiers don't know you. Miss Denslow is here alone; both Donald and Calvert Dunn are absent. I judge you my word no harm shall befall you if you will go with me at once. If this strange woman is your wife Jean Denslow will know it. If not, then we must all unite to find out who she is."

I could read the struggle in his face. "I'll go to her with yer, leftenant, I'll go, but I never thought I'd ever go ter one o' ther breed on no mission of peace, an' blame me if I would to nary one but her. I allers reckoned she was s'quar, an' I ain't got no fight with her."

I could not wonder at his trepidation for he was in the home of hereditary foes, with only my word as assurance of safety. I heard the soft pressure of feet on the stairs, and then the swish of a dress in the hall.

"You!" she burst forth before I could speak. "Lieutenant King, what is this man doing here?"

I caught the extended hand, drew her within the room and closed the door. She seemed to yield to me without effort at resistance, but stared into Daniels' face with inexpressible horror.

"Miss Denslow, wait," I urged eagerly. "Wait and listen to my explanation. Daniels is not here to do injury. No doubt you have been taught to consider him as a deadly enemy, cruel and vindictive, but he is only a man who has been driven to acts of violence by the conditions of birth. He possesses all the feelings natural to humanity and is here now in peace. Will you listen to me? Will you hear the story?"

"Yes," she said, but reluctantly. "I will listen, but—bit make him stand where he is."

"He shall not move until I am done, Miss Jean, and I can explain all in few words. You had scarcely left me alone when this door was pushed open and I saw reflected in the mirror there the awful face of that woman who seems to haunt this house. I sprang toward her, but tripped and fell, so that when I reached the hall she had vanished. I searched every room on the floor vainly. Although my own escape depended on my getting away at once, I did not dare leave you comparatively alone here with that creature at large. I found O'Brien on guard below and set forth myself to explore the tunnel once more. Half way through I met Daniels. It doesn't make any difference what happened between us down there, nor how he came to be there, but I told him about

had seen her, and he wanted to ask you something. Will you answer him?"

She looked at the man, wringing her lips, her eyes opened wide in bewilderment.

"Yes," she said, "I will answer." Daniels spoke with difficulty.

"Wal, miss," he said, forcing his words out. "I reckon yer don't think come too much o' me, an' I 's'pect I hev done some pretty blame mean things, but they weren't a darn bit meaner than what's been done ter me. When I went off ter ther war I hed a cabin up on Lost Creek, whar I thought it was safe, an' I left a wife an' three kids ther nwaitin' my comin' back. Last night I got a chance ter ride ther way, an' I found some hell bounds hed burnt ther cabin, an' either murdered ther woman an' ther kids, or else drove 'em inter ther hills. I couldn't git no trace o' them high er low, an' I nat'rally hid it up agin your people. Now, miss, maybe I'm tough, but I'm man enough ter care a heap fer my wife an' ther kids jist ther same, an' I started out ter find what hed become o' them. Ther's what fetched me yere, an' I come fightin' mad. I reckon yer know what we uns are in ther mountings, an' how hard we hate. Wal, I never hated no worse than I do now."

"Mr. Daniels," she broke in. "I have been taught to fear you, but I am not afraid now," and she looked quickly from his face into mine. "You seem to think that we—that Jim Donald—has burnt your cabin, driven your family out; but it is not so. I know it is not so. I—I am just as sorry as any one to hear this—indeed I am, for I have met your wife. She—she was kind to me once, years ago."

The man choked, much of the sternness gone from his haggard face.

"Yes, she told me 'bout ther, an' it was because you'd know her that I kin yere ter question yer. Ther leftenant says you saw ther woman who has been murderin' in this house. If yer did, I want yer ter tell me ther truth—was it Maria?"

"Yes, I—I saw the face," she answered, shuddering. The very memory seemed painful. "An awful face, scarcely human. It was white and haggard, with wild black eyes and wisps of gray hair dangling on either side. It seemed to me like a vision of hate, and I cannot banish the recollection from my mind. But—but I never saw that face before—never; as God hears me, it was not your wife."

A long moment the mountaineer looked at her, apparently seeking the truth in the girl's eyes, then he collapsed into the chair, shuddering as he buried his face in his hands.

I could scarcely realize the truth—that this grim mountaineer, savage in cruel instinct, utterly devoid of human tenderness, responsive only to the demands of the blood feud, was yet at heart a real man, his heart wrung by sorrow and weak as a child in suffering.

"I am so glad I can assure you of this, Mr. Daniels," she said softly. "I—I never saw your wife except that once. But she was kind to me when I needed kindness, and I have never felt the same bitterness since. Surely between you and me there is no quarrel. I would rather help than injure you. Will you not take my hand?"

The man raised his head, staring at her in astonishment.

"Yer men, miss, we are ter be friends?"

"Certainly. Why should we remain enemies?"

"I—I don't understand," he stammered. "Ther feud, ther years of fightin', don't yer suppose I know who yer be?"

"Yes, of course you know," her slender form straightening, but her hand still outstretched. "Yet if I can forget and forgive so can you. I want to act and feel like a woman, not a fiend. I don't hate you, Bill Daniels. I don't hate your wife or your children. I would rather do you good than evil. Can't you understand that? Can't you forget who I am and accept my hand in the same spirit with which I offer it?"

As God is my witness, there were actually tears shining in the man's cold gray eyes, but I thought he would never move, never answer. He appeared paralyzed, stricken motionless and speechless. Then his hand, which had been convulsively gripping the arm of the chair, seemed to steal forth without volition, touched hers and clung to it in pitiful uncertainty.

(To Be Continued.)

In Police Court.

Tom McCarthy was found yesterday afternoon by Chief Rainey heavily intoxicated, or, in more euphonious language, slightly inebriated, at least to the extent that his propellers would no longer perform their function. Tom was hauled before Police Judge Archer this morning and the proper remedy applied under the law. The young man was assessed \$2 and costs taxed at \$3, a total of \$5. He was given till Friday to raise the money.

Mrs. J. H. Kuhns visited the metropolis this morning, going on No. 15 for a few hours.

CASTORIA

For Infants and Children.

The Kind You Have Always Bought

Bears the Signature of *W. D. Mitchell*

Straw Hats!

We just received a case of panama straw hats Saturday direct from the importers, but straw hats are not on the program just now. Just now its Overcoats and Winter Suits at such genuine money saving reductions that the difference will buy you the best panama in the store next summer. We're making a final closing of all odd overcoats in the house at...

\$7.50
CASH

Also some Winter Suits to close at the same price. You can't afford to miss these bargains.

C. E. Wescott's Sons

Always the Home of Satisfaction

MYNARD.

(Special Correspondent.)

The warm weather for the past two days has melted the snow and made the roads very bad to travel over.

Mrs. Ben Marler has been confined to her bed for several days on account of grippe.

William Fight shipped a carload of horses to the South Omaha market Tuesday.

Eleven of the Mynardites attended the Knights and Ladies of Security meeting at Plattsmouth Monday evening.

Lewis Crabtree and niece, Mrs. Irons, attended the funeral of Calvin Crabtree's wife, held at Elmwood last week.

John Schwartz is packing his goods preparatory to moving to Canada.

Daniel Kiser of Wakeeney, Kansas, is visiting friends in this vicinity for a few days. He expects to return to the land of sunflowers in the near future.

Frank Marler of Murray was called to Mynard on account of the illness of his mother.

Henry Johnson and family will move to the farm, three miles west of town, known as the Kiser farm, where he will engage in the poultry business.

A goodly number of farmers have shelled and delivered corn to the local buyers.

W. T. Richardson is making a much needed improvement in the rear of his store building.

Warren Toulne visited in our town for a few hours Monday.

Frank Barnard of Glenwood, Iowa, brother of our genial townsman, Charles Barnard, is visiting in the neighborhood for a few days.

A raffish match, conducted by Lee Cole, last Saturday evening, resulted in the lucky No. 37 drawing a pump gun, and Mr. Giles Lair carried the article home.

Jacob Bengen shipped a carload of fat cattle to the South Omaha market Monday.

The snow is melted off the fall wheat and the wheat never looked better at this time of the year.

For Sale!

Team of mules, harness and wagon for sale. Good mules and harness and wagon new. Address Alex Campbell, Route 1, Plattsmouth, Neb.

It is rumored that the Nehawka Commercial club contemplates putting on a fiddlers' contest.

OMAHA MAN HAS A HOLD-UP EXPERIENCE

Street Car Conductor Had Close Call From Being Shot by Robber.

J. N. White, residing at 2403 Harney street, Omaha, a son-in-law of William Rishel of this city, had an experience with a highwayman Monday evening which he does not care to have repeated.

The Omaha Daily News gives the following account of the affair:

"J. N. White, a conductor living at 2403 Harney street, was accosted early Monday evening by a strange man, who ordered him to throw up his hands, and then took a shot at him. White was sitting in his car at the end of the line when a man tapped on the window pane. White turned around and saw a revolver pointed at him and heard the man without say, 'Hands up.' Before White could comply with the bandit's request, the latter shot at him through the window, the bullet narrowly missing him."

Mr. White phoned to his father-in-law yesterday that the bullet grazed his hand. White formerly resided in this city and bartered with Charles Martin for a time.

Married by Judge Beeson.

From Wednesday's Daily.

Marriage license was issued yesterday afternoon by Judge Beeson for Charles Allen Whiting and Mrs. Bertha Backus, both of Omaha. Judge Beeson was called on to perform the ceremony, which he did in his most pleasant style. Mr. and Mrs. Whiting departed on the M. P. for their home in Omaha last evening. When the spring breaks up they expect to move to a farm in Seward county. The happy couple took with them one of the judge's most handsome marriage certificates.

At T. J. Sokol Hall.

From Wednesday's Daily.

The last dance before Lent occurred last evening at the T. J. Sokol hall and was a very enjoyable event. Out of thirty-five invitations sent out, thirty-four couples were present. The music was furnished by the M. W. A. orchestra and consisted in some of the finest selections this popular musical organization can produce. Refreshments were served. The festivities began at 8 o'clock and ceased promptly at midnight.

Through Sleepers to California

Through sleepers are now operated to California via Denver, Scenic Colorado and Salt Lake City.

TO LOS ANGELES VIA SALT LAKE ROUTE: Every day through Tourist Sleepers. Daylight ride through Scenic Colorado with half day stop-over in Salt Lake.

TO LOS ANGELES VIA SOUTHERN PACIFIC: Every day through Tourist Sleeper service with personally conducted through sleepers to Los Angeles Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays. Daylight ride through Scenic Colorado and Salt Lake.

TO SAN FRANCISCO VIA WESTERN PACIFIC: Through Tourist Sleepers every Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, via Denver, Scenic Colorado, Salt Lake and Feather River Canyon.

TO LOS ANGELES VIA SANTA FE ROUTE: Personally conducted through Tourist Sleepers every Tuesday via Denver, Santa Fe route.

THROUGH STANDARD SLEEPERS TO SAN FRANCISCO: Every day through Standard Sleepers via Denver, Salt Lake and Southern Pacific. Daylight ride through Scenic Colorado.

Let me tell you about our through sleeping cars to California, also to all Northwest territory via Billings, Mont.



R. W. CLEMENT, Agent.

L. W. WAKELY, General Passenger Agent, Omaha, Neb.