

# The RED MIST

A TALE OF CIVIL STRIFE  
By RANDALL PARRISH  
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CHAPTER XXIII—Continued.

"Permit me to answer for myself, Lieutenant Harwood." "Noreen Harwood! Why, it takes me off my feet. How comes it you are here?" "My father is dead," she answered simply, the brightness vanishing from her face. "He was killed only a few days ago."

"I regret to learn that, cousin," and he held out his hand. "Who is this man, and why are you here with him?" "He has told you the truth," she answered quietly, her hand still within his. "I have known him from childhood. I—I am his wife."

There was a moment of silence, of hesitation. I heard the soldiers moving about the room, and the murmur of voices speaking cautiously. Then Harwood released her hand, and extended his own to me, his eyes frank and cordial.

"I accept you on faith, comrade," he said pleasantly, "but there is a spare jacket strapped to my saddle yonder more becoming than that blue coat. Saint Christopher! but 'tis a most happy family reunion we're having; I'll want the story presently, but now I must look to my men. 'Tis no easy game we are playing."

"Let me understand that, lieutenant," I exclaimed, as he turned away. "How does it happen you are here, and for what purpose?" "A wild plan of my own, aided and abetted by the commander at Covington. We are of the garrison there," he explained briefly, his glance searching out the dim interior. "The Yankees have a forage train out as far as Hot Springs. I got permission for a dash to cut them off. We took the cut-off, and landed here about daylight. The train should have been along before now, but there is no sign of it."

"You have been in hiding here all day, and seen nothing?" "Oh! we've seen enough," and he laughed. "But nothing we cared to measure swords with. The road yonder appears popular, but, by good luck, no Yankee shows an eagerness to attend church. There was a gang of mountain men along by here maybe two hours ago who rode up to the door, and took a look at the shebang. Whether they were Yank or Reb I didn't know. Anyhow, we were willing enough to see them pass on out of sight. They looked and talked as though they were spoiling for a fight."

"How many?" "Thirty or forty—a right smart crowd. There were only two came up, and rode round the church—a big fellow with a red beard, and a little weazel-faced fox he called Kelly."

"Yes, I know them; they were hunting after us. Did they go on east?" "They did. So has everyone else we've seen today. That's what puzzled us, as to just what might be up. I reckon you must be some popular to create such a furore. Why, an hour after sunup a whole blame company of bluecoats went by, riding like mad, their horses dripping, and a young fellow spurring them on. He'd lost his hat, and they never so much as took a side look at this shebang. They were in some hurry, my friend."

"And neither party has returned?" "Not a sign of them." "What force have you here?" "Twenty-eight enlisted men." "You have pickets out?" "One man each way, a mile down the road, concealed. The tower up there commands the country in both directions."

"And your horses?" "Hidden in the grove yonder." I grasped the situation clearly enough, and also comprehended the reckless nonchalance of the officer. What was his purpose—his present plan? It appeared to me that the conditions warranted a retreat, back along the unfrequented mountain trail by which this daring party of adventurers had come. The troops, as well as the guerrillas, must have discovered by this time that we were not in advance of them. They would return searching every nook and corner in hope of discovering our hiding place. They might even unite their forces, impelled as they were by the same desire, and thus become truly formidable. Personal hatred of me and the wish to regain possession of Noreen, would animate and control both Anse Cowan and the angry, humiliated lieutenant. While neither would likely confess his purpose to the other, yet their mutual interests would naturally suggest an alliance. And there was no war feud between the two which would necessarily prevent their co-operation. In deed, the troopers would gladly welcome any excuse which would bring Cowan's gang of outlaws into closer connection. And the outfit would never pass by this church again without searching its interior. Only eagerness, a haste to overtake us in our attempted flight, had led to their blind riding by before. I turned to Harwood, who was whispering nonsense to Noreen.

"What do you mean to do, lieutenant?" I asked quietly, but with my own mind made up. "Remain here?" He stroked his small mustache.

"I thought we might hang on until midnight, Wyatt, and then, if nothing happened, take the back trail. I don't want to pass another day in this cussed hole. What do you think?" "That the sooner we get away the better," I answered promptly. "Your position here is far more dangerous than you appear to realize. Both those parties traveling east were in search after us; they were led by men who would go to any extreme to effect our capture. I haven't time to tell you the whole story now, but it involves your cousin as well as myself. They rode straight on because they were convinced we were still ahead of them. 'Tis likely they know better now, and will search every ravine and covert on their return. If the forage train is moving this way those cavalrymen are with it in addition to the regular guard, and you will never dare attack with your small force. The only chance you have of bringing your command safely back to Covington, lieutenant, is to get away before your presence here is suspected."

"I suppose that's right," he admitted reluctantly. "But I don't like to turn tail without hitting a blow—it's not the style of the Third Kentucky. We could give a good account of ourselves against those Yankee troopers."

"Possibly; but not against a combination of troopers, wagon guard, and Cowan's gang of guerrillas. They would outnumber you four to one; and they are fighting men."

"You think they will combine?" "If they meet, and there is an explanation—yes. Cowan doesn't care which side he fights on, so he gains his end, and the cavalry commander will welcome any re-enforcements. They might quarrel later over results, but now they possess a common object, and will be like two peas in a pod. Do as you please, Harwood, but I am not under your command, and, if you choose to remain here, we will ride on alone. Will you go with me, Noreen?"

She had not spoken, and in the fast-increasing gloom I could scarcely distinguish her presence. But at my direct question she took a step toward me, and I felt the presence of her hand on my sleeve.

"Yes," she said simply, "whenever you think best. Cousin," she added, glancing across her shoulder at the perplexed officer, "I would like you to come too."

He laughed, wheeling about in sudden decision. "I reckon I might as well," he admitted good-humoredly. "Wharton, have the pickets drawn in, and the men mustered. 'We'll start—Great God! What is that?'"

It was the sound of a scattered volley, the pieces not all of the same caliber, the reports ringing clear. In the instant of silence which followed a voice called down excitedly from the tower:

"There is firing to the east, sir." Harwood swore as he strode across to the nearest window on that side. Except for a faint tinge of light in the west, and a half moon in the southern sky, we were enveloped in darkness, but we all of us heard the sounds of hoofs and the approaching rumble of wagon wheels. Harwood turned and faced inward.

"It's the forage train, boys," he said sharply, "with a bunch of cavalry riding ahead. Get to the windows, but be quiet about it—you know the orders. Wharton, have the men load; come with me, Wyatt, where we can see out in front."

Noreen clung to me as I groped my way through the narrow door into the vestibule.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### The Trap Closes.

The lieutenant's fingers gripped my shoulder. "By the Lord Harry, the fellows make noise enough for an army," he whispered. "I reckon they are all there."

"No doubt of it—how is your ammunition?" "Sixty rounds to a man," he chuckled. "It will cost them something to get through these log walls. Still, we haven't much chance in the end," he added thoughtfully, "for they're bound to get us. Generally I pray for a fight, but now I hope those Yanks will be kind enough to ride by."

"And so do I," I answered soberly, feeling the quick pressure of Noreen's fingers. "There they come, Harwood—see! two horsemen ahead."

They were merely black shadows outlined against the white road, but as they drew somewhat closer the moonlight gave them substance. One was slender, sitting straight in the saddle, but the other slouched awkwardly over his pommel, a larger, more shapeless figure. In the distance down the sharp slope of the hill, appeared the deeper shadow of an advancing column of mounted men. The only sound was the impatient pawing of a horse's hoof and Noreen's whisper in my ear:

"The—the bigger one is Anse Cowan."

"And the other Raymond," I returned in the same low tone. "The two have apparently got together." "It looks mighty odd to me," said a voice suddenly, clearly audible through the night, "that fellow being in Reb uniform. What could he be doing here?"

"A scout, I reckon," grumbled a reply, barely distinguishable. "Just a stray we run into, but it mout be best ter take a look along this yere ridge afore we ride on."

"All right," asserted the other. "I'll wait here until Fox and Moran come up. Let some of your men ride back as far as those woods over yonder; and say, it wouldn't do any harm to take a look inside the church. You didn't stop coming out?"

"Now; we didn't stop for a minute. We thought the way you fellows was a-ridin' yer head a hot trail, an' so we rode like hell ter git in at the death. 'Tain't likely thar's anyone inside the meetin' house, but I reckon we may as well be sure as long as we're here. No damn fool would hide this close ter the pike. That you, Kelly?"

There was a meaningless growl from an advancing group of horsemen, and Anse swore, spurring his horse forward to meet them.

"By God, Kelly; I've had enough of your damned grouch. Either you'll do as I say, or I'll cave the side of your head in, and have done with it. I've had enough, do you hear? I reckon I'm just as interested in overhauling that cuss as you are. Now you obey my orders, an' be quick about it; give me another line of back talk, you Irish bastard, an' I'll blow the whole top of your head off! You're what? Joking! Well, let up on that kind, will you? I'm in no humor for it. Take three or four men, and ride over the ridge, back as far as the rock. The sojers are goin' ter halt yere a minute."

Kelly and his little squad trotted past us, circling the end of the building, the remainder of the group of horsemen, evidently composed of Cowan's gang of cutthroats, scattering along the roadside, with no semblance of military discipline. Raymond touched spur to his horse's flanks, and went trotting back down the road, as though intending to intercept the advancing column, which was not yet visible. Cowan looked after him with a sneer.

"The d—d dandy," he growled to a man just behind, gesturing with one hand. "I don't take orders from nothin' like that. Would you, Jim?" "I should say not," responded the other, spitting into the road. "What ever got us tied up yere with these Yankees, Anse, anyhow? I done thought as how we was fightin' against the blue-bellies a bit ago; an' now we're as thick as two fleas. Did yer git yer price?"

Cowan laughed grimly. "That ain't no occasion for yer ter worry, Jim," he confided, evidently willing the others close about should hear. "We ain't tied up with no Yanks, 'cept fer maybe a few hours. Hell! thar wasn't nothin' else ter do, but be friendly. Thar was thirty of us runnin' kerbump inter that bunch of cavalrymen, with ther wagon train a-comin' a hundred yards away."

"We weren't in no shape fer ter fight about a hundred an' fifty sojers. I reckon, thoy, we'd a had to if that young popinjay had been in command. He ain't got the sense of a



"He Has Told You the Truth," She Answered Quietly.

dried horse. But Cap Fox, he rode out, an' we sorter talked it over. He don't feel yer blame kind toward me since our fracas tother night, but he's a sojer, an' he knows what Ramsay wants. Thet's what I banked on, fer I knew the general had give his orders ter use every means possible ter git us ter help out the Yanks. So I just up an' told ther cap thet we was out huntin' fer ther same feller he was; thet my father had been killed, an' I reckoned the Reb spy did it, an' thet frum now on we was goin' fer ter fight on ther side. I don't reckon as how he believed much o' what I said, but all ther same, he had ter pretend he did, an' let us go 'long without no fightin'. So he done sent us on ahead, an' sent thet young snip along fer ter watch me. Thet's the how it happened."

"I see, an' therrrer we leave them holdin' the bag—Hullo, Anse! look thar—it's Kelly comin' back, an' jinks! he's leadin' two horses."

Anse swung down to the ground, and ran his hands over the animals, fidgeting the equipment.

"Didn't the lieutenant say thet the spy an' the guri got off on therse bitches by the hotel?" "I didn't hear tell."

"Well, I did; anyhow ther wusn' army horses they took. By God! I believe they're hidin' now in thar church. Here, you Kelly," a new, exultant tone in his voice, "scatter your men out around ther whol' buildin'; we've freed our game, I reckon."

The guerrillas came forward on foot, running, and scrambling up the incline, but inclined to keep well back from the silent church. Jim was clattering down the pike, the clang of his horse's hoofs dying away in the distance. Harwood dropped his gripping hand from off my shoulder, and stepped back from before the window.

"Sergeant."

"Here, sir," and Wharton moved slightly in the darkness, so as to signify his whereabouts.

"You attended to the door?" "Yes, sir; we found an old iron bar to fit across; they'll have to crush in the wood to get through."

"Let Johnson and Melvaine join me here; what is the name of that lad I was going to recommend for corporal?" "O'Hare, sir; Jacob O'Hare."

"Put him in command of the south side, and you take the north; place benches to stand on under the windows, but keep your men down until you get the word. There is to be no firing until I give the order. Tell them they have got to fight for their lives. You understand?" "Yes, sir; we'll do that, sir."

"Then get to your stations. Now, Wyatt, you command at the other end; there are two windows and a door. Here, take this gun and belt; I can get another." He stopped, and drew in a quick breath, glancing out once again through the window.

"Friend Cowan—if that be his name—seems to be waiting for the military to come up," he commented mockingly. "Prefers to let the Yanks pull his chestnuts out of the fire. Perhaps he has known you a long while—hey, Wyatt?"

"The acquaintance has been rather brief, but warm." "No doubt; well, I'll help make it warmer presently."

"Fair cousin, I do not know where to hide you in safety. This is going to be a real fight, or I am greatly mistaken, and bullets fly wild through the dark."

"If it is left to me," she said quietly, "I prefer to go with Tom Wyatt." "But you do not understand," I broke in hastily, my pulses throbbing at her unexpected decision. "They may attack—"

"Oh, yes, the lady does, Wyatt," chuckled the lieutenant, his reckless good nature in no wise lost by the desperation of our position. "She is a Harwood, that's all. Hullo! here comes the cavalry! Now, men, to your posts—and stand up to the music."

I caught her hand in mine. "You—you mean that, Noreen?" "Yes; do not refuse. I am not afraid," she implored. "Take me with you."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)



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