

COMRADES of PERIL

By
Randall Parrish

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CHAPTER XV—Continued.

"Yes, beyond that outcropping of stone; the trail goes down there?"

"Si, señor; but if you ride down, your soldiers, they know."

"They keep guard?"

"Si, señor; just below, out of sight, yet where they can see. When I come out they were under a rock shelf to keep off the snow. Maybe they there yet."

"How many?"

"Five, señor; two white and three Sioux."

He studied the spot carefully through the leveled field glasses, and then swept them inch by inch over the snow-covered plain. He returned them to the case, and cast one more glance into the depths below.

"Very well, men," he said quietly. "We will return to the squadron."

Shaunnessy, with ten men, was given the cutting-out job, the major drawing up his command behind the sand hills in readiness for a swift advance. The sergeant led his little force well to the right of where the outpost was believed to be, and finally dismounted them, leaving two men in charge of the animals, while, with the others, he proceeded forward on foot.

The sand hills approached much closer to the river at this point, and ridges extended out into the plain, affording them considerable protection as they cautiously advanced, seeking every possible bit of shelter. Shaunnessy, using the field glasses loaned him by the major, surveyed the ground carefully before venturing to lead the way, and in this manner, the little party finally crept in behind the crest of land overlooking the valley of the Cottonwood.

It had been the plan to drop silently over the edge of the bank, and work their way along, so as to attack the outlaws from the rear, thus rendering the escape of any impossible. But once there on the ground the slope was found to be far too abrupt for this purpose, and the idea had to be abandoned. The only other procedure was to creep along under the protection of the ridge, trusting to swiftness of attack. The sergeant crept forward, inch by inch, watchful of everything in front. He never glanced back, but his carbine was flung forward, cocked and ready. It was fifty yards to where the gnarled cedar protruded above the bank, but no sign of any movement greeted him until he had nearly reached that point.

Then, suddenly, with no warning of any kind, a red, bloated face showed itself above the edge of the bank. The startled eyes looked directly into the muzzle of the carbine.

"Stop right there, buddy!" said the sergeant sternly. "Now lads, over you go!"

They took the leap recklessly, some rolling down the steep slope, others finding some sort of foothold and rushing fiercely forward. The guard was taken by complete surprise, helpless most of them before they could even reach their feet or grasp their weapons. Shaunnessy backed his prisoner down to where the others stood sullenly, and surveyed the scene.

"Five; that's the whole bunch," he said with satisfaction. "A very good job. Now, Gates, go up there and wig-wag the major."

Ten minutes later the advance files of the squadron topped the edge of the bluff and began to slowly move down the steep trail. Hays expressed his approval.

"Exceedingly well done, sergeant; got the whole outfit, I see. Have your men bring up your horses. The girl tells us we have a free road now into the valley, so we will move right along. Quietly, men, and keep your distance. Unsling carbines! Forward!"

They moved steadily at a walk, the troopers eagerly peering ahead, yet cautiously reining back their mounts. There was scarcely a tinking of accoutrements as the long column of horsemen slowly advanced down the crooked trail toward the snow-covered valley far below. Pancha, riding beside the major, led the way through the curtain to where the Cottonwood plunged over the rock precipice into the deeper gorge beyond. To her uplifted hand of warning the column halted, the Mexican girl leaning over to explain the situation ahead.

"Eet is verra steep grade," she said, "an' a sharp turn at the bottom, where the trail runs under the falls. On the other side is a log horse, and they always keep a guard there, señor."

"And beyond?"

"The valley is open."

He tried to see through the snow squalls, but with little success.

"How heavy is the guard?"

"That I cannot tell, señor. There were but two men there, when I come out. But the log hut is a saloon, and many may be there now. Eet is best to use utmost caution."

"No one is likely to be between this point and that?"

"Not on watch—no; some one might be passing out; they come and go."

"Of course, we run that risk. The falling water makes noise enough to prevent our being heard, yet I think it may be best to use a scouting party. The only way we can trap those fellows into a fight is through a surprise. If they become alarmed they'll scatter and find a way out before we can strike a blow. Isn't that your idea, captain?"

"Yes, sir; we've got to get in behind and cut them off."

"I presume there is a back door to this Hole, somewhere, señorita?"

"Yes, señor; way down yonder, but eet can only be made on foot."

"Then we've got the villains, if we only move secretly enough. Take a dozen men, and come along with me, captain. Dismount them. Señorita, it will be best for you to show us the way."

They disappeared into the curtain of falling snow, and cautiously advanced beneath the veil of overflowing water. The outlines of the log house could be plainly discerned, the storm suddenly ceasing. The door stood open, smoke arose from the chimney, but no one was visible outside. The dull glow of an expiring fire appeared on the ground in front, but no guard was squatted about it. Evidently the fellows had retired to shelter. The major grasped all this in a glance, but what interested him most was the sound of steady firing some distance away.

"They have either all gone inside," he whispered to Pancha, crouching beside him, "out of the storm, or else they are over there where the fighting is. You hear those rifles?"

"Yes, señor."

"You don't suppose some other outfit had got in here ahead of us, do you?" he asked anxiously.

"No, señor," earnestly grasping his arm. "Eet is not that. I know; they fight up the canyon. Listen, eet is over there the sound. They try to capture Señor Shelby; if we go quick we save them; we wait, maybe all be dead. Now we get all in the rocks, so none get away."

"I see." He looked at her keenly; then stepped back to where the men were clustered. "Captain, scatter these lads out about that house there; move quickly, and see that no one gets away. Stiles, run back and have the squadron move forward. Bring up your horses."

The men dashed forward in a half-circle, the major, with Pancha at his shoulder advancing close behind them, his objective the open door. No sooner had they broken cover when the alarm sounded; a muffled voice yelled excitedly; a rifle or two cracked; a soldier running rapidly, plunged forward on his face, and lay still. Then white and red surged crowding through the door, surprised, trapped, crazy to escape. Only one among them dared the venture in face of those leveled carbines. A tall, gaunt white renegade, with red whiskers, and one arm in a sling, his uninjured hand gripping a revolver, leaped from the front step in a reckless endeavor to get out of sight around the corner of the cabin. The major flung up his arm and fired, the fellow whirling about in his stride and stumbling as he fell. He got upon one knee again, and the "45" spat twice viciously before a trooper sent a bullet crashing into his brain. Hays felt the zipp of lead past his face, but stood erect, unharmed.

Behind him Pancha uttered a startled sob and sank slowly onto the snow. He sprang back and caught her, holding her head up on his knee, his eyes staring down into her white, upturned face. She breathed once—that was all; never spoke, never moved, except for the slight tremor of her slender form in his arms. The major laid her softly down, his own face drawn and white with sudden passion, and strode across to where the slain outlaw lay in a huddled heap. An instant he looked down at the brutal face, oblivious to all else.

"D—n you!" he muttered in useless rage. "I wish I'd killed you!"

Then he turned suddenly, the spirit of the soldier in the ascendancy.

"Deploy your men, Captain Giles," he commanded, his voice hard and stern. "Swing them into line. Leave a squad here under a sergeant. Live—ly, boys; that is one of our old lads fighting those devils over yonder.

"Now we're going to strike in, and d—n me, if I care if you never take a prisoner. Good! Give me my horse. All ready? Bugler, sound the charge!"

They swept forward on a walk, then a trot, spreading out onto long, double line, as they swung into the more open valley, riding knee to knee, the men bending forward in their stirrups, with left hand grasping the reins, the right gripping the short carbines. A hundred yards and they were at the gallop, a blue torrent, at the heels of their leader; tearing through weeds and underbrush, spurting recklessly into and over the creek, dashing up the other bank to the very foot of the bluff beyond. It was then the major saw the uselessness of it. He whirled with uplifted saber.

"Fight on foot. Horse-holders to the rear. Come on, lads!" he shouted, his voice pealing above even the thud of hoofs. "Get up there some way, you terriers, and give those red devils h—n!"

They came forward at a run, yelling as they came, and leaped in among the rocks, their carbines beginning to spilt as they clambered upward. Overhead were skurrying figures, and spurts of black smoke, as the Indian rifles made answer.

CHAPTER XVI.
The Rock Platform.

Shelby had no time to think, or to even comprehend clearly what confronted him. There was a second in which he rammed a handful of cartridges into his empty gun; and then they were on him, a dozen Indians swarming up the face of the rock, and clutching for a hold on the parapet. He fired blindly straight into their faces, aware that another revolver cracked close beside his ear, yet with no opportunity to glance about. He saw assailants topple backward, clutching fingers release their hold, rifles flung high in air, and roll down the slope. Savage yells blended into cries of death agony. He felt the clip of a ball in his shoulder and staggered back from the blow; a tomahawk grazed his wrist, and the quick slash of a knife ripped open a leg of his trousers, a red stain discoloring the opening. He had glimpse of fierce, infuriated faces, of waving scalplocks, of naked chests and arms. Fingers clutched at him, and he kicked himself free. Both guns empty, he battered away with the butts, smashing at every face he saw, no desire left but to kill, before he also was dragged down. He knew nothing of Olga, where she was, what she was doing—he only realized that he must stand there, and fight until they got him—she would keep one shot; she had pledged that.

And the devils made it, creeping far out over the gulf, and drawing themselves up beyond reach of his arm. One fell, going down with a howl of terror; a second was struck by a speeding bullet, dead ere he went whirling back into the air—but the third made it, creeping up onto the narrow platform, with others surging behind, knives gripped in their teeth. Shelby hurried his empty pistol into the face of the nearest before the fellow could attain his knees, and grasped a discarded rifle which dangled over the stone coping. With one bound he was at the edge swinging this weapon as a woodsman might an ax, driving the iron stock against every head that appeared. He staggered back, breathless, half blinded by a wound over his eye, aware only that the front of the rock was swept clear, that not a savage was left for him to strike at. She touched him, and he whirled, thinking it another enemy.

"Don't, Tom, don't!" she begged. "Merciful heaven, you are all blood. Look out there! Are those soldiers?"

He held up the flap of skin, and stared where she pointed. Across the white snow covering the valley below, riding stirrup to stirrup in a wild charge, two lines of cavalry were sweeping straight toward the foot of the bluff. He knew what they were at a glance; their lines steady even at a gallop, the spurring officer in front, the glitter of carbines, the silence, left no doubt. No Indians rode like that. He watched them, grasping her tightly to him now, scarcely able to speak. Once only, he gave utterance.

"My God! See those fellows ride!"

"They are soldiers?"

"Yes, yes! Good Lord, lassie, but that looks like old Hays leading 'em. Its the Sixth, the Sixth—a squadron of the Sixth!"

He staggered to his knees, but still held himself up, peering over the coping. She knelt beside him, half supporting him against her shoulder. The charging horsemen swept in out of sight below, but they could hear them crash through the underbrush, and splash their way across the stream. Then there echoed up to them the ringing cheer of white voices, and the dull bang of the carbines.

How they made that ascent it is doubtful if a trooper knows; but they did, creeping from rock to rock, dragging themselves along gullies, hauling their bodies up by sheer strength of arm, springing from point to point—inch by inch, foot by foot, fighting as they advanced, firing at every skulking figure in their front, skirting precipices, leaping across chasms, clinging desperately to every rock or shrub, their carbines spitting viciously, eager only to get at hand's grips with the foe. High above, Shelby and Olga caught glimpses of toiling figures, of leaping jets of flame, of fierce struggling hands to hand, of Indians seeking to escape. Sharp-voiced rifles answered the carbines, and a dead soldier hung dangling over the edge of a rock; another nursed a bleeding arm in the shelter of a cedar. But

the unhurt came on. Some among them had stumbled onto the trail, for soon a squad appeared just below. They stopped and turned over the body of Laud, so as to see the man's face; then tramped forward, paying no heed to the dead Indiana. Shelby recognized the major among them, and arose to his feet with difficulty, supporting himself with one arm about Olga's shoulder. The major was panting from the exertion of the climb, never glancing up until brought to a halt by the rock, its foot littered with the dead bodies of savages.

"Good God! look here," he exclaimed excitedly. "Those devils were paying the price," he choked and coughed. "Whew! that sort of thing winds me. Must be getting old, sergeant, yet, by Jove! I passed the test two weeks ago." He cast his eyes upward, and saw the two standing just above him. "Hullo, Shelby! we are here in time, then. Some good fighting, my boy. Here, a couple of you, give me a lift. I'll never make it alone."

He was hoisted over the stone coping, instantly straightening up and warmly grasping Shelby's outstretched hand.

"Not badly hurt, I judge, lad!"

"No, sir; chipped here and there is all, and have lost some blood."

"Mighty glad of that. By God, you are an honor to the regiment!" He turned about, and stared down the

bluff, his eyes brightening with appreciation. "Talk about your Alpine chamoises; those fellows of mine could give pointers to a mountain goat. Just look at them come up there. By the way, Shelby, we've got a surgeon back there somewhere. If you don't need him yourself, you've got a wounded man here, I understand."

"No, sir; his name was Macklin, and he's dead. He died before the fight began. Who told you?"

"A little Mexican girl; seemed to think a lot of the fellow. Meeting up with her is what brought us in here."

"Pancha—yes; where is she?"

The major removed his hat soberly. "I am sorry to say she got hurt—yonder by the waterfall."

"Hurt! Not killed?"

"Yes, instantly."

Shelby drew a long breath, and his eyes and those of his wife's met.

"She is happier that way, Tom," she said understandingly. "Now she will never know. I dreaded so to tell her."

Hays caught the words, his eyes seeking the speaker's face.

"Who was the man?" he asked shortly. "One of the outfit?"

"Yes; in no way worthy."

"I thought likely; and you, I take it, madam, you are Tom Shelby's wife?"

"Yes," she answered quietly, her clasp tightening on her husband's arm. "I am, and also Colonel Carlyn's daughter. We both belong to the Sixth."

"Carlyn's daughter! Great Scott! do you actually mean that? Do you know they have been hunting you from one end of the border to the other? There was a lawyer in my quarters a week ago questioning me about what had become of Sergeant Calkins. Lord, I didn't know."

"It is true, then, that I am wanted?"

"They've been trying to strike your trail for years, the lawyer told me. Some money down East which was left to your mother; let's see, she was a—a—"

"Churchill."

"That's it. The first thing you bettor do, young woman, is to take a trip to old Virginia."

She smiled, a wistful look in the depths of her eyes, as they sought the face of her husband.

"It is just as Tom says," she answered quietly. "I am very content now."

The firing had ceased, and soldiers crowded the trail below; the play was ended.

[THE END.]

Poesy.

Poesy is a beautiful, dainty, chaste, honorable, discreet, witty, retired, and who keeps herself within the limits of propriety. She is a friend of solitude; fountains entertain her, meadows console her, woods free her from ennui, flowers delight her. In short, she gives pleasure and instruction to all with whom she communicates.—Cervantes.

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IMPROVED UNIFORM INTERNATIONAL SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

(By REV. F. B. FITZWATER, D. D., Teacher of English Bible in the Moody Bible Institute of Chicago.)
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LESSON FOR MARCH 20

JESUS ON THE CROSS.

LESSON TEXT—Matt. 27:33-50.
GOLDEN TEXT—God commendeth His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.—Rom. 5:8.
REFERENCE MATERIAL—Matt. 26:31, 27:32; John 12:24-33; 1 Cor. 1:18-25; 2:1, Gal. 6:14.
PRIMARY TOPIC—Jesus Dying for Us
JUNIOR TOPIC—Jesus Crucified
INTERMEDIATE AND SENIOR TOPIC—The Supreme Sacrifice.
YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULT TOPIC—The Cross and Its Meaning Today.

The grand climax of the six months' lessons is reached in this one. If one miss the significance of the crucifixion, all the preceding lessons are valueless. It is not a matter of learning the lessons taught by a great teacher, or imitating the examples of a great and good man, but of apprehending the atonement made by the world's Redeemer.

I.—The Place of Crucifixion (vv. 33, 34).

They led him away to Golgotha, a hill north of Jerusalem resembling a skull. He was not crucified within the city, for he was to suffer without the gate (Heb. 13:12). At first they compelled him to bear his own cross, but when physical weakness made it necessary that some other should bear it for him, they compelled Simon the Cyrenian to bear it. In order that He might not succumb to death before He was nailed to the cross, the soldiers offered Him a stimulant of vinegar mixed with gall. He refused this, as He would consciously drink the cup of sin to its bitter dregs.

II.—Gambling for the Clothing of the Lord (vv. 35-36).

It was the custom for the soldiers who had charge of the crucifixion to receive the garments of the one crucified. Here we have the fulfillment of Psalm 22:18. "They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture they did cast lots." If they had but eyes to see they could have beheld a robe of righteousness being provided in His death to cover their sinful nakedness.

III.—The Accusation (v. 37).

It was customary to place over the victim of the cross the name and crime of the offender. This superscription was placed over Jesus by Pilate to vex the Jews. He was their King. They had long looked for Him, and now when He had come this is the kind of treatment they gave Him.

IV.—Two Thieves Crucified With Him (v. 38).

This was another fulfillment of Scripture (Isa. 53:12). "He was numbered with the transgressors." In these three crosses we have set forth a spiritual history of the whole world.

V.—The Dying Savior Reviled (vv. 39-44).

This reviling was engaged in by the passersby, the chief priests, scribes and elders, and the thieves who were crucified with him. In their mockery they unwittingly spake great truths.

1. "He saved others, himself he cannot save" (v. 42). This jest was meant to show the absurdity of Jesus' claims, but it demonstrated them and showed the reason for His sufferings. He could not save Himself and others, so He chose to give Himself to save others.

2. "If he be the king of Israel, let him now come down from the cross" (v. 42). His refusal to abandon the cross established His royal claims. The very fact that He did not abandon the cross proves that He was what He claimed to be for it was unto the cross that He came.

3. "He trusted in God, let him deliver him now" (v. 43). His refusal to abandon the cross proved God's full delight and satisfaction in His Son. His obedience unto death was the sacrifice which met God's full approval.

VI.—The Death of Christ (vv. 45-50).

So shocking was this crime that nature threw around the Son of God a shroud that the Godless company could not gaze upon Him. Darkness was upon the land at noon-day. Upon the termination of the darkness He cried with a loud voice. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" This darkness was the outer sign of that which hung over the Lord. He became sin for the world, and the sin hid God's face from Him. God forsook Him; turned from Him who had taken the sinner's place.

When the price was paid He cried out with a loud voice, showing that He still had vitality—that His death was not from exhaustion, but by His sovereign will. He yielded up the ghost, sent His spirit away. He died of His sovereign will. He died like no other man in all the world's history. He did not die of a broken heart.

God Sends Love to You.

"For new and new, and ever new, The golden bud within the blue; And every morning seems to say, 'There's something happy on the way, And God sends love to you!'"

Mothers Mold the Life.

If you would reform the world from its errors and vices, begin by enlisting the mothers.—C. Simmons.

As Good as It Seems.

Nothing is as good as it seems beforehand.—George Elliot.

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Overheard in the Nursery. Small Girl—"I wonder how old Joan is?" Small Boy—"I bet she will never see four again."—London Punch.

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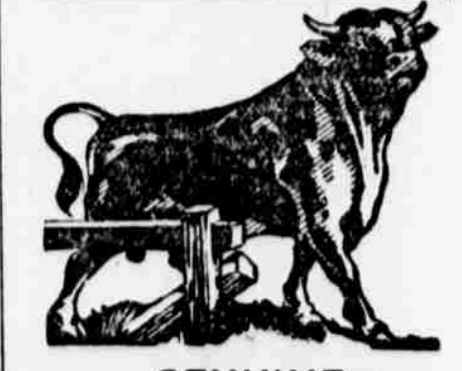
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As Good as It Seems.

Nothing is as good as it seems beforehand.—George Elliot.

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Down the Crooked Trail.