



(CONTINUED)

CHAPTER IV. A GUERRILLA'S HOME.

"A dispatch for you, general." An aid-de-camp entered, followed by a tall, bronzed Confederate cavalryman with very muddy boots and a southern sombrero on his head.

The messenger says that he was instructed to deliver it to no one but yourself. It is from general headquarters. The man stalked in, his accouterments rattling as he did so, and removing his hat handed the general the communication.

The enemy having taken the gaps, I will abandon my present line. Be ready to form rear guard to troops retreating by University. Move south at once.

Here is the second: Enemy's telegram in cipher received. Cannot Miss Baggs secure information of the enemy's intentions as to following this army across the Tennessee?

The general gave the two messages a few minutes' consideration, and then, dismissing the aid who had interpreted them, directed him to inform Miss Baggs that he would like to see her.

When she entered, the general handed her the interpreted copies of the two dispatches. "Here is a more important work for you than any you have yet attempted," he said.

"If you could succeed in both, you would insure us victory in the west, and that would be half the battle to the cause."

"I will undertake it." "You will be exposed to a frightful danger."

"You know, general, that I have devoted my life to this work. I consider that as already sacrificed."

"We move from here at once, as you see by the order just received."

"I will go with you a part of the way and watch an opportunity to slip back behind the Union lines."

With that Miss Baggs went out, and the general began his preparations to cover the retreat of the right of the Confederate army.

No further attention was paid to Farmer Slack and his family. Evidently there was business of greater importance on hand. They went out on to the doorstep, where they stood wondering what was going on about them.

Every one was stirring. An orderly dashed up to the door leading an officer's horse saddled and bridled. An aid ran out of the house, and mounting in hot haste rode away. A man from an upper window called out to him:

"What's up?" "They've secured the gaps."

"Which?" "Liberty and Hoover's. All of 'em."

"Well, what of it?" "What of it? It means retreat." And before the last word was spoken he was out of sight.

In a few minutes a bugle was heard. Its tones had scarcely died away before the camp was alive with men preparing to move.

The farmer determined to get his children into the wagon as soon as possible. He had been given his pass, which, for the present at least, was likely to be of little use, as he would simply follow the army.

"What chicken coop?" "Th' one on wheels." "Oh, the buggy," she said, smiling. "I left that for the Yankees to pick up when they come along."

Farmer Slack only succeeded in getting a few miles on the way before nightfall. Then, coming to a small village, he made up his mind that it would be better to sleep there than attempt to go on through a country being abandoned by one force to be immediately occupied by another.

The woman of the house was depressed. She was not strong, and the continued successive occupation of the country by Union and Confederate troops for more than a year had completely worn her out.

And now another shifting was at hand. At first she had spoken her sentiments freely. They were with the Confederacy, but lately she had come to endeavor to find out the sentiments of strangers before betraying her own.

"Reckon you uns live nigh 'bout hyar, don't y', boy?" "Nigh onter th' Sequach."

"Let me fill that kettle for you," said Souri, seeing the woman about to take up a wooden bucket she was scarcely able to lift. The woman suffered her and went on making inquiries of Jakey.

"Thur mixed over thar'. Some's Union, 'n some's secesh. Which air yer paw?" "Waal, I ben ter skule a year, 'n paw he mought 'a' changed sence I went away."

"Don't say 'mought,' Jakey, dear," said Souri. The woman looked at Jakey inquiringly.

"Y' couldn't 'a' l'arned much at skule ef y' reckon a man's goin ter change sides in this hyar fight. Th' git wusser 'n wusser. Still ef ye'd ben hyar ye'd l'arned that. Reckon y' ben no'th to skule?"

"We have ben north—in Ohio," said Souri as she put the kettle on the stove. It was midnight at the little frame house where slept the Slack family.

Farmer Slack was awakened by a pounding at the front door. Then he heard the woman by whom they were sheltered get up, and going to the door let some one in. The partition was thin, and every word that was said could be plainly heard.

"Lordy, Ben, whar did y' come from?" asked the woman. "Tullahomy."

"Whar y' goin ter?" "Up inter the mountings."

"What fur?" "Ter lay low till the armies move on south. Then we uns 're goin ter hang in the tailens of the Yanks. Thur's better feedin than thur is behind Confederates."

"Oh, Ben, I wish you'd stop this business. Go 'n jine one o' the armies. I don't keer which. Only stop this kind o' work."

"Polly, you know I've ben drivin 't. What have they left us? Nothin but this house. Ef I didn't rake among the refuse that the Yankees leave behind 'em, whar w'd you 'n th' children be?"

"But why air y' leavin now, Ben? What does 't all mean, the men goin south? Hain't th' goin ter fight at Tullyhomy?"

"The gittin outen Tullyhomy this very minute." "How d'ye know?" "I kem from thar this afternoon. The trains were goin outen the place loaded with supplies. What's them things doin thar?"

He pointed to some of the belongings of the Slack family. The farmer could hear the woman caution her husband to speak low, but by that time Slack's ear was at a crack.

"There's a family hyar stayin all night," she whispered. "Any critters?"

"Two, but I don't want y' ter take 'em, Ben. It's onnateral. Thur's a sweet young gal ez helped me git supper, 'n I wouldn't hev nothin happen to her fur the world."

"I won't take thur critters tel after y' git me somep'n ter eat. Come, be lively, my dear. I hev'n't hed a squar' meal in two days."

"Whar's the gang?" "I left 'em a mile t'other side o' th' town. We got ter git inter th' mountings afore th' Federals come along. Whar air the young uns?"

through himself and dropped beside Jakey. "Now for the stable, my son." Going across some vacant lots, they reached the stable and took out both the horses.

"Jake," said the father, "I'm goin to the headquarters of the Federals. I want yer to stay 'n take keer o' yer sister."

"Souri don't need no one ter take keer o' her." The farmer went back into the stable, leaving Jakey to hold the horses, and brought out a saddle and bridle.

"Waal, Jake," he said presently, "she's a gal 'n may need y'." "What yer goin fo'?"

"T' tell 'em the southern men air gittin outen Tullyhomy. 'T may make a lot o' differ ter th' cause."

"Why can't I go 'n do thet?" The farmer made no reply. He went on equipping the horse for a ride, but he was thinking. After all, wouldn't a boy have a better chance to get through than a man? He had great confidence in Jakey's abilities in this direction.

"Jakey," whispered Farmer Slack, for they had been tested long before near the beginning of the war. Then he disliked to leave his daughter without protection in a lawless territory.

"Jake," he asked at last, "do y' think y' o'd do 't?" "Reekon."

"I kin put y' on th' road 't Manchester. Thar or before y' git thar y'll find Yankees. But yer powerful little fo' sich a job." And the farmer looked at his son undecidedly.

"Do y' think I'm a baby ter be rock-ed in a cradle?" "No, Jakey. Yer a 'markable li chap. Thur's not 'nother boy o' y' age livin I'd trust to carry this mess. I reckon I'll let y' try it."

Slack took Jakey up in his arms and sat him on the horse. Then he shortened the stirrups till all the holes in the straps were exhausted, when he cut new ones, making the length a proper one for Jakey's little legs.

"Now, Jake," said his father in a tone that bespoke a desire to put resolution into himself and the boy at the same time, "tell th' Federal general that a guerrilla kem to the house whar we war sleepin and tole his wife that the southern men air gittin outen Tullyhomy. He kem from thar this afternoon. 'N, my boy, ez I often tole y' afore, remember yer a Unioner 'n hain't afraid o' nothin. Thar's th' road."

"Tom, you git."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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