



MY LADY OF THE NORTH

The Love Story of a Gray Jacket

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SYNOPSIS.

The story opens in a Confederate tent at a critical stage of the Civil War. General Lee imparts to Capt. Wayne an important message to Longstreet. Accompanied by Sergt. Craig, an old army scout, Wayne starts on his mission. The two, after a wild ride, find themselves in the hands of the enemy. In the darkness Wayne is taken for a Federal officer who came to keep an appointment, and a young lady on horseback is given in his charge. She is a northern girl, the alluring Edith, but fails. One of the horses succumbs and Craig goes through with the dispatches while Wayne and My Lady of the North are left alone. They seek shelter in a hut and enter it. In this den a huge mastiff dog, Wayne's dog. The girl sees the brute just in time. The owner of the hut, one Jed Bungay, and his wife appear and soon a party of men approach. They are led by Major Brennan, who proves to be Red Justice, but Mrs. Bungay discovers him to be a disguised imposter, who proves to be Maj. Brennan, a Federal officer whom the Union girl recognizes. He orders the arrest of Wayne as a spy. While a search is made for the Southern Federates pass and knows that Craig has delivered the message. He is brought before Sheridan.

CHAPTER XI.—Continued.

"Very well, sir," he said gravely. "Your fate is in your own hands, and will depend very largely upon your replies to my questions. You claim to have been the bearer of despatches, and hence no spy, yet you possess nothing to substantiate your claim. As your regiment is with Lee, I presume you were seeking Longstreet. Were your despatches delivered?"

"I have reason to believe so."

"By yourself?"

"By the sergeant who accompanied me, and who continued the journey after I was detained."

"Is Lee contemplating an immediate movement?"

"General Sheridan," I exclaimed indignantly, "you must surely forget that I am an officer of the Confederate Army. You certainly have no reason to expect that I will so far disregard my obvious duty as to answer such a question."

"Your refusal to explain why you were hiding within our lines is ample reason for my insistence," he said tartly, "and I am not accustomed to treating spies with any great consideration, even when they claim Rebel commissions. You are not the first to seek escape in that way. Was your despatch the cause of the hurried departure of Longstreet's troops eastward?"

This last question was hurled directly at me, and I noticed that every eye in the room was eagerly scanning my face. I had the quick, fiery temper of a boy then, and my cheeks flushed.

"I positively decline to answer one word relative to the despatches intrusted to me," I said deliberately, and my voice shook with sudden rush of anger. "And no officer who did not dishonor the uniform he wore would insult me with the question."

A bombshell exploded. In the room could not have astonished them as did my answer. I realized to the full the probable result, but my spirit was high, and I felt the utter uselessness of prolonging the interview. Sooner or later the same end must come.

Sheridan's face naturally flushed, instantly grew crimson, and a dangerous light flamed into his fierce eyes. For a moment he seemed unable to speak; then he thundered forth:

"You young fool! I can tell you that you will speak before another twenty-four hours, or I'll hang you for a spy if it cost me my command. Major Brennan, take this young popinjay to the Mansion House under guard."

Brennan stepped forward, smiling as if he enjoyed the part assigned to him.

"Come on, you Johnny," he said coarsely, his hand closing heavily on my arm. Then, seeming unable to repress his pleasure at the ending of the interview, and his present sense of power, he bent lower, so that his insolent words should not reach the others, and blushed hotly;

"Stealing women is probably more in your line than this."

"You miserable bound!" I cried madly. "None but a coward would taunt a helpless prisoner. I only hope I may yet be free long enough to write the lie with steel across your heart."

Before he could move Sheridan was upon his feet and between us.

"Back, both of you!" he ordered sharply. "There shall be no brawling here. Major Brennan, you will remain; I would speak with you further regarding this matter. Lieutenant Caton, take charge of the prisoner."

CHAPTER XII.

Under Sentence of Death.

At this late date I doubt greatly if my situation at that time was so desperate as I then conceived it. I question now whether the death sentence would ever have been executed. But then, with the memory of Sheridan's rage and my own hot-headed retort, I fully believed my fate was destined to be that of the condemned spy, unless she who alone might tell the whole truth should voluntarily do so. That circumstances had left me in the power of one whose fierce dis-

like was already evident was beyond question, and I had yielded to his goading to such an extent as to give those in authority every excuse for the exercise of extreme military power. Yet of one thing I was firmly resolved—not thoughts word of mine should ever endanger the reputation of Edith Brennan. Right or wrong, I would go to a death of dishonor before I would speak without her authority. Love and pride conspired to make this decision adamant.

"Come," said Caton, briefly, and I turned and accompanied him without thought of resistance. At the front door he ordered the little squad of waiting soldiers to fall in, and taking me by the arm, led the way down the gravelled path to the road. I was impressed by his seeming carelessness, but as we cleared the gateway he spoke, and his words helped me to comprehend.

Captain Wayne," he said quietly, so that the words could not be overheard, "you do not recognize me, but I was the officer who conducted you to headquarters when you brought the flag in at Wilson Creek. Of course I must perform the duty given me, but I wish you to understand that I wholly believe your word."

He stopped, extended his hand, and I accepted it silently.

"There must be some grave personal reason which seals your lips?" he questioned.

"There is."

"I thought as much. I chanced to overhear the words, or rather a portion of them, which Brennan whispered, and have no doubt if they were explained to the General he would feel more kindly disposed toward you."

It was asked as a question, and I felt obliged to reply.

"I appreciate deeply your desire to aid me, but there are circumstances involving others which compel me for the present to silence. Indeed my possible fate does not so greatly trouble me, only that I possess a strong desire to have freedom long enough to cross swords with this major of yours. The quarrel between us has become bitterly personal, and I hunger for a chance to have it out. Do you know, is he a man who would fight?"

The young fellow stiffened slightly. "We are serving upon the same staff," he said more abruptly, "and while we have never been close friends, yet I cannot honorably take sides against him. He has been out twice within the last three years to my knowledge, and is not devoid either of courage or skill. Possibly, however, the arrival of his wife may make him less a fire-eater."

"His wife?" I stopped so suddenly that he involuntarily tightened his grip upon my arm as though suspicious of an attempt to escape.

"Do you," I asked, gaining some slight control over myself, "refer to the lady who came in with his party last evening?"

"Most certainly; she was presented to all of us at Mrs. Brennan, she has been assigned rooms at his quarters, and she wears a wedding-ring. Far too fine a woman in my judgment for such a master, but then that is not so uncommon a mistake in marriage. Why, come to think about it, you must have met her yourself. Have you reason to suspect this is not their relationship?"

"Not in the least," I hastened to answer, fearful lest my thoughtless exclamation might become the basis for camp gossip. "Indeed I was scarcely in the lady's presence at all coming in, as I was left in charge of the sergeant."

Perhaps he felt that he had already said too much, for we tramped on in silence until we drew near a large, square white building standing directly beside the road.

"This is the old Culverton tavern, known as the Mansion House," he said. "It is a tremendous big building for this country, with as fine a ballroom in it as I have seen since leaving New York. We utilize it for almost every military purpose, and among others some of the strong rooms in the basement are found valuable for the safe-keeping of important prisoners."

We mounted the front steps as he was speaking, passing through a corridor of guards, and in the wide hallway I was turned over to the officer in charge.

"Good-night, Captain," said Caton, kindly extending his hand. "You may rest assured that I shall say all I can in your favor, but it is to be regretted that Brennan has great influence just now at headquarters, and Sheridan is not a man to lightly overlook those harsh words you spoke to him."

I could only thank him most warmly for his interest, realizing fully from his grave manner my desperate situation, and follow my silent conductor down some narrow and steep stairs until we stood upon the cemented floor of the basement. Here a heavy door in the stone division wall was opened; I was pushed forward into the dense darkness within, and the lock clicked dull behind me. So thick was the wall I could not

even distinguish the retreating steps of the jailer.

Tired as I was from the intense strain of the past thirty-six hours, even my anxious thoughts were insufficient to keep me awake. Feeling my way cautiously along the wall, I came at last to a wide wooden bench, and stretching my form at full length upon it, pillowled my head on one arm, and almost instantly was sound asleep.

When I awoke, sore from my hard bed and stiffened by the uncomfortable position in which I lay, it was broad daylight. That the morning was, indeed, well advanced I knew from the single ray of sunlight which streamed in through the grated window high up in the wall opposite me and fell like a bar of gold across the rough stone floor. I was alone. Even in the dark of the previous night I had discovered the sole presence to furniture in the place. The room itself proved to be a large and almost square apartment, probably during the ordinary occupancy of the house a receptacle for wood or garden produce, but now peculiarly well adapted to the safeguarding of prisoners.

The solid stone walls were of sufficient height to afford no chance of reaching the great oak girders that supported the floor above, even had the doing so offered a favorable opening for escape. There were, apparently, but three openings of any kind, the outside window through which the sunlight streamed, protected by thick bars of iron; a second opening, quite narrow, and likewise protected by a heavy metal grating; and the tightly locked door by means of which I had entered. The second, I concluded, after inspecting it closely, was

hand, which I grasped warmly, for I felt how much depended on his friendship, and resolved to ask him some questions which should solve my last remaining doubts.

"Captain Wayne," he began soberly, looking about him, "you are in even worse stress here than I supposed, but I shall see to it that you are furnished with blankets before I leave. Sheridan is hasty himself, and his temper often leads him to rash language. I am sure he bears you no malice for what you said. But Brennan has his ear, and has whispered something to him in confidence—what I have been unable to ascertain—which has convinced him that you are deserving of death under martial law."

"Without trial?"

"The opportunity of furnishing the information desired will be again offered you; but, as near as I can learn, the charge preferred against you is of such a private nature that it is deemed best not to make it matter for camp talk. Whatever it may be, Sheridan evidently feels justified in taking the case out from the usual channels, and in using most drastic measures. I am sorry to bring you such news, especially as I believe the charges are largely concocted in the brain of him who makes them, and have but the thinnest circumstantial evidence to sustain them. Yet Sheridan is thoroughly convinced, and will brook no interference. The discussion of the case has already led to his using extremely harsh words to his chief of staff."

"I am to be shot, then?"

His hand closed warmly over mine. "While there is life there is always hope," he answered. "Surely it must

within a few hours. Greatly as I now value his friendship, it was, nevertheless, a relief to be alone with my thoughts once more.

CHAPTER XIII.

A Strange Way Out.

Caton came in once more about the middle of the afternoon, bringing me some blankets; but he had no news, and his boyish face was a picture of pathos as he wrung my hand goodbye. Sheridan, he said, had gone down the lines, and both Brennan and himself were under orders to follow in another hour. What instructions, if any, had been left regarding my case he could not say, but he feared the worst from the unusual secrecy. Sheridan expected to return to his headquarters that same evening, as the officers of his staff were to give a grand ball.

I felt no inclination to partake of the rude supper left me, and just before dark I was lying upon the bench idly wondering if that was to prove the last vestige of daylight I should ever behold in this world, when, without slightest warning, the heavy iron grating in the wall directly above me fell suddenly, striking the edge of the bench, and clattered noisily to the floor. The fall was so unexpected, and my escape from injury so narrow, that I lay almost stunned, staring up helplessly at the dark hole thus left bare. As I gazed, a face framed itself in this narrow opening, and two wary eyes peered cautiously down at me. There was no mistaking that countenance even in the fast waning light, and I instantly sat up with an exclamation of surprise.

"Jed Bungay, as I live!"

The puzzled face broke into a grin of delight. "Holy smoke, Cap," he ejaculated, with a deep sigh of relief, "is that you, suah? I was so durned skeered I'd made a mess o' it when that thar iron drapped that I near died. What be they a goin' ter dew with ye?"

"I have every reason to believe it is their purpose to shoot me at day-break to-morrow."

"Shoot?—Hell!" He stared at me as if he had just heard his own death sentence pronounced, and his little peaked face looked ghastly in the dim light. "Shoot ye? Good Lord, Cap, what fer? Ye ain't done nothin' as I knows on, 'cept ter scrap a bit with that blasted Yank, an' sure that's no shootin' matter, er else I'd a bin a goner long ago."

"That 'Yank' has seen fit to charge me with being a spy, and as I wif foolish enough to insult General Sheridan last night, my fate is probably sealed."

This somewhat complex statement seemed to be too much for Jed to grasp promptly.

"Gosh, ye don't say!" he muttered. "Then, durn it, I'm in luck, fer all they've got aim is pot-shootin' at a nigger soper up in the mountings; on that ain't much, 'cause I didn't hit ther durned cuss."

Jed was carefully covering every inch of exposed wall with his little shrewd, glinting eyes.

"Ain't much show ter work out o' yere, is that, Cap?" he asked at last reflectively: "leastwise I don't see none, less them than dark corners he's got holes in 'em."

"The wall is entirely solid."

"So I sorter reckoned. But if ye'll crawl through yere inter the boodour, that's a place whar I reckon ther tew of us together mought make a try fer it. It's too durn high up fer me ter git at alone. I reckon, Cap, if ye cud manage ter git out o' yere ter night, an' take some news ter Lee that I've picked up, he'd 'bout make both o' us generals."

"News for Lee?" I exclaimed, staring eagerly at him through the now darkened room. "Do you mean it? What news?"

"Thought maybe that wud wake ye up," he chuckled. "This yere's gospel truth: Sheridan has started his infantry on a half-circle march fer Mincerville. Ther first division left at three o'clock, an' that won't be nary Yank losin' on ther valley by noon tomorrow. An' more," he added rapidly, his eyes dancing wildly with suppressed excitement, "Hancock is a-singin' of his corps west ter meet 'em that, an' I reckon, as how that'll be hell fer marts up ther Shenandoah in less ner a week."

"But how do you know all this?" I questioned incredulously, as the whole scene and its dread possibilities unfolded before my mental vision.

"Ther nigger I held up bed a dispatch fer Heintzelman over on ther left, an' then Maria she sorter pumped a young fulle staff officer fer ther rest o' it," he replied promptly. "Oh, it's a sure go, Cap, an' I reckon as how maybe Lee's whole army hangs on one o' us gittin' out o' yere ter night."

TO BE CONTINUED.

Neighborly, Anyhow.

Maybe it is design or maybe it's just accident. Anyhow, it certainly does look funny to see all the principal taxicab stations bang up against drinking fountains for horses.—New York Mail.

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Womanlike.

Crawford—How did your wife come to buy all those suspenders?

Crabshaw—I think she wanted the pretty boxes they came in.—Judge.

SUDDEN DISCOVERY.

