MY LADY OF THE SOUTH

A Fiftieth Anniversary War Story

By RANDALL PARRISH

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CHAPTER XIV.

COLONEL DONALD.

A MOMENT Colonel Donald appeared to hesitate, then his expression became more natural and he made a weak effort to smile.

"King—King? Oh, certainly, I remember now. Your men came, and I"— He stopped, evidently struggling to recall what had occurred to him after the arrival of the troopers.

"It was a troop of Federal cavalry dispatched to my aid, Colonel Donald. I sent Miss Denslow up the stairs, intending you should thus have an opportunity for escape, and was still parleying with the fellows on the front porch when a squad of concealed Confederates poured a volley into us. They hit a few, but the remainder made the house and drove the others back when they attempted to rush us. We've been defending the house ever since, and I made a search for this secret passage. I found my way into it at last and discovered you lying here apparently dead, with a wound in your throat just as those others had."

He put his hand up to the gash as if just made aware of it.

"I am afraid I cannot help you very much, lieutenant," he said slowly, evidently striving to remember. "I left you with Jean, intending to search this tunnel. I had opened the fireplace and was lighting the lantern when your men came, and I stole back as far as the head of the stairs to learn what was happening. Then Jean came up with your message, and I decided to escape to my own men as quickly as possible. Having no longer any thought of search and knowing the way perfectly, I blew out the light and came down the ladder in the dark. I have made the trip in that manner a dozen times and felt no fear. I must have advanced through the tunnel for a hundred feet or more, one hand touching the wall to keep the direction, when something struck me so unexpectedly that I reeled backward and fell. I have no recollection of seeing anything; only of feeling the blow and realizing I was falling. The next I remember is looking up into your face, wondering where I was."

The man was far too weak and dazed to be questioned at any length; in his present state it would be useless to describe the woman's face we had seen or Miss Jean's effort to hold us prisoners. Here was an explanation of why no attack had thus far been made upon us from the rear; either no one outside knew of this passage, or else Dunn, if he was present and in command, lacked the nerve necessary for directing such an assaulting party. Whichever was the cause, I desired to satisfy myself—I must seal the tunnel, or else (the idea coming to me as an inspiration) lead a sortie through it, and thus take the unconscious besiegers in the rear.

"How far are we from the entrance?" I questioned.

"Not over fifty feet. I should say. You pass out through a trap door into a log storehouse."

"Could you manage to walk that far?"

He held on to O'Brien and the wall, thus succeeding in lifting himself until he stood erect, but his movements were so uncertain that I grasped him also. In this manner we advanced slowly along the passage. Twice we permitted him to lie back on the packed earth floor to rest. He was swaying dizzily when we finally attained the foot of a short ladder leading upward. The trap was closed, yet as I held the lantern higher I could perceive the outlines of the door.

"Is the trap locked?"

His eyes opened slightly, staring deeply at the lantern flame.

"No; all you need do is push against it."

I climbed the few steps of the ladder, leaving the light below, and without great effort lifted the door, turning it silently back until it rested securely against some obstacle. I could perceive little outside the narrow zone of light radiating from below, yet the small room into which my head projected appeared unoccupied. Satisfied as to this, I returned below, considerably puzzled as to how Donald was to be got up the ladder. Water from the canteen applied externally, with the last dregs of the brandy flask as inward stimulant, brought the injured man once again to his feet. I buckled the sling strap of the carbine beneath his arms and led the way, O'Brien boosting sturdily from below, and thus, aided a little by his own efforts, we succeeded in dragging his almost inert body up the short reach of ladder and out upon the floor above. The man fainted as his head fell back upon the planks, and he lay limp and scarcely breathing.

My own exhaustion, complete as it was temporarily, was not lasting. I held the lantern before Donald's face, bending down to make certain he still breathed, and then began searching for the door of the cabin. We were directly to the rear of the house, another small cabin standing between us and the kitchen ell. Some ten or fifteen feet away I made out the black outlines of a well curb with a sweep above it, and beyond that rose the trunk of a large tree. This comprised about all I could distinguish with any certainty. I called to O'Brien in a whisper.

"See if you can fill your canteen there at the well without making a noise," and I pointed toward the vague outline.

I clung watchfully to the doorway until the boy came safely back.

"There was wather in the pail, sor," he explained, letting me feel the wet canteen, "an' there's two or three fellows sittin' there on the back porch."

"Well, you go inside and remain with Colonel Donald. Don't permit him any opportunity to get away or sound an alarm."

I crept cautiously forth, moving slowly backward down the short line of negro cabins, until I attained the edge of a small grove. Under this concealment I circled to the right, purposing to advance through the weeds along the east of the grape arbor. I felt convinced that the force of attacking Confederates would be drawn as close in to the house as the shelter would permit.

I began worming my way in toward the grape arbor, discovering nothing to obstruct progress. The thickness of the vines finally prevented further advance in this direction, and I consequently turned more toward the front of the house, heading directly toward a great tree, at the north end of the arbor. The spreading branches cast so black a shadow that I was almost within arm's length of the trunk before becoming aware that two men were standing there together, their backs toward me. The sound of a voice first awakened me to the peril of the position in which I had unwittingly placed myself.

"Theilen certainly will be here by daylight, and then we shall have enough men to turn the trick. That was his messenger who just left."

"How much of a force will he bring?" It was Calvert Dunn who asked the question.

"He should have a hundred men, with my fellows picked up on the way. He was sent over to Bitter Creek to waylay a Yankee foraging party."

There was a pause; Dunn kicked restlessly at the root of the tree.

"Well, it can't be more than an hour now until daylight," he said at last, "and altogether that will give us about 165, won't it?"

"That or more; my fellows have been dropping in here all night and you brought five with you."

"I didn't expect to fall into this sort of an affair," in a tone of evident disgust. "I merely came over to take back that Yankee prisoner to camp. Did you count the blue bellies?"

"No; but there are about twenty of them, I reckon, and they must have bottled up the colonel or he'd have been out here with us before this. Those fellars can shoot, too, better'n any troopers I ever come up against before." He paused, thinking. "Didn't you say awhile ago, lieutenant, that you knew a way leadin' into the house that would let us take 'em in the ra'ar?"

"Yes, I did, Dodd, but there's no use trying to turn that trick until we get more men. If Theilen reaches here by daylight we'll gobble up that whole

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Yankee outfit easy, but it's better to wait and make a clean job. As things are they can't possibly get away."

"Some of 'em will sure get hurt if they ever try it. Well, I'm goin' round the lines again, lieutenant. Maybe you better wait here, where I can find you easy. Besides, this is about where Theilen will strike for when he comes. He'll follow that path up from the creek most likely."

The guerrilla sauntered off, gun across his shoulder. Dunn remained quiet a moment and then moved slowly round behind the tree trunk. I heard him scratching a match. A window of the house spit flame to the sharp crack of a carbine, the ball tearing along the bark of the tree. My rascals within evidently were awake, and the startled lieutenant dropped the blazing match as though it had burnt his fingers. Another carbine spoke from a window farther to the left, the missile whistling through the air between us. Then everything became silent and black again.

So Dunn intended to resort to the secret passage as soon as he had gathered men enough to safely risk the attempt, and he was the only one in the party who was aware of its existence. Then my work was cut out for me—I must take care of Dunn.

There was brief time in which to arrange the play, with both daylight and Theilen already so close at hand. Theilen! Why, of course, a report of his approach would throw Dunn off his guard, and I might inveigle the fellow far enough back from the lines to make an open attack possible. Here, at least, was the only course which seemed to promise success. I tore off my jacket, turning it inside out to hide the gleam of buttons; ripped off the insignia from the front of my slouch hat and pulled the wide brim low over my eyes. There would be nothing natty about Theilen's irregulars, and the color of my clothes could not be easily guessed at in the gloom. All else was sheer luck and audacity. I was within five feet of the fellow before he even saw me. Before he could draw his weapon, I asked hurriedly:

"Is this Captain Dodd?"

"N-no; I am an officer of Johnston's staff," peering forward in a vain endeavor to decipher my face. "Who are you? What do you want?"

"I have been sent forward by Captain Theilen. He wants to know where he is to bring his men."

The lieutenant stiffened up, the slight faltering of his voice vanished in an effort at command.

"Oh, I see! Well, I am technically in command here, being of the regular service. Where is Theilen?"

"Back yonder on the creek. He's waitin' for orders an' a guide."

"Well, hurry back and bring him up. You know the way, don't you?"

I stared off into the black night, as though it hid a thousand mysteries.

"Well, I don't exactly know," I confessed unwillingly. "I got here all right because the firing from the house sorter guided me, but them weeds is mighty confusin,' an' I reckon it will take me a right smart while to find my way back again. You couldn't go along, could you?"

There was nothing in the request to arouse suspicion, yet he hesitated, apparently at first inclined to refuse, perhaps considering such a service beneath his dignity.

"Maybe if you got me as far the head of that path I might make the rest all right," I suggested doubtfully.

It was plain enough he would prefer remaining where he was, but anxiety to have these welcome re-enforcements hurried forward caused him grudgingly to consent.

"How large a force have you?"

"A few over a hundred, I reckon."

"Well, come on; I'll show you to the path. You could follow that with your eyes blindfolded."

I had forgotten the way myself, or, rather, the night confused me as to the points of compass, yet as he started off to the right I followed, perfectly satisfied so long as every step took us farther away from the immediate vicinity of the house. We had traversed the orchard and were upon the edge of the weed patch when he came to a sharp halt.

"Here's where the path begins leading down to the creek. It's not very straight, but you can't lose it, for the growth is solid on both sides."

"It all looks the same to me," staring beyond him. "Where did you say the entrance was?"

"Right here in front," half angrily. "What is the matter with your eyes? I'll lead you into it, and then, perhaps, you can follow your nose."

He gripped my sleeve, forcing me forward. The next instant I had my leg twined about his. I never had an easier job at taming a man, and be

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fore he got his scattered senses together I pressed a revolver barrel against his temple, threatening instant death if he so much as moved. Whatever other ambitious Lieutenant Calvert Dunn may have possessed, departure from life surely was not included, and I doubt if he winked an eyelash while I stripped him of weapons and tightly buckled his waistbelt about his arms, binding them helplessly against the body.

"Sorry to be compelled to treat you in this manner," I remarked coolly, "but it seems to be your luck to get in my way constantly. Besides, I believe you advocated hanging me only a few hours ago."

He recognized me then, and the sudden gust of anger overcame his prudence, yielding him voice. He burst forth into a volley of oaths.

"Stop that!" the words like bullets, the grip of my hand shutting off his wind. "I hold your life in this one finger and you either obey me or die. How many men are about this house?"

He squirmed under the pressure of the gun barrel, but comprehended the necessity for an immediate answer.

"About sixty."

"All Donald's guerrillas?"

"Except the small squad I brought with me."

"How are they posted?"

"Thirty or so in front of the house, perhaps a dozen at the rear, the others scattered so as to watch the side windows."

"No patrols thrown out to protect the rear?"

"Not so far as I know. There may be a picket on the main road. We had no reason to expect any Yanks from this direction."

There was no occasion to doubt the truth of his replies, and they coincided exactly with my own conception of the situation. These were irregulars and not disciplined soldiers, trained merely as raiders and naturally careless as to guard lines. Besides, they had every reason to suppose the small body of Federal cavalry opposing them were without supports and securely bottled up within the house. All they had to do was to await re-enforcements and then force surrender. The situation was to my liking, but what could I do with Dunn? The only feasible method was to take the lieutenant with me back to the hut, where O'Brien could stand guard over him, while I gathered together our men for a sortie. With this in view I gripped him by the collar.

"Now, Dunn, keep exactly one step ahead of me along the edge of these weeds until you reach the orchard. Yes, I know where we are going, and effort to break away or any noise will put you beyond rescue. Step out lively now, only be quiet about it."

I heard him swearing fiercely under his breath, but he pushed on as I ordered. We slipped within the shelter of the cabin, where O'Brien promptly held us up with leveled carbine.

(To Be Continued.)

Councilman William Weber has filed for the nomination on the republican ticket at the coming primary for the position of county commissioner, to succeed M. L. Friedrich.

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Now-a-days every progressive farmer is buying labor saving machinery. He does not buy these implements because he is lazy or indisposed, but because he knows he can handle his products and do his farm work, not only quicker, but moee economically, than he can without them.

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Referee's Sale!

THOMAS E. PARMELE, Plaintiff,
vs
CHARLES V. BOEDEKER, ET AL., Defendants.
} **NOTICE**

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN, That by virtue of an order entered in the foregoing entitled cause on the 4th day of December 1911, by the District Court of the County of Cass, Nebraska, I the undersigned, sole Referee appointed by said Court, will, on the

9th Day of February, 1912,

at 11 o'clock in the forenoon, at the South door of the Court House in the city of Plattsmouth, in Cass County, Nebraska, offer for sale to the highest bidder, for cash, the South half of the South West Quarter of Section Twenty-Six (26) and the East half of the North West Quarter and the North West Quarter of the North West Quarter of Section Thirty-Five (35), all in Township Twelve (12) North, in Range Eleven (11), East of the 6th P. M., in the County of Cass, Nebraska, excepting the right of way of the Missouri Pacific Railway Company, and known as the Theodore Boedeker farm, lying South of Louisville, in said County, containing 200 acres, less railway right of way.

Dated: Plattsmouth, Neb., January 4, 1912.

BYRON CLARK AND WM. A. ROBERTSON, } Attorneys.

JOHN M. LEYDA, Referee