

THE NEW CLARION

By... WILL N. HARBEN

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CHAPTER XV. Gathering Clouds.

"I'm innocent, Uncle Abner," Howard declared. "I know nothing at all about it."

"Thank God! An' I believe you," Abner rose, his face beaming with joy, and began to walk excitedly back and forth across the floor.

"So that explains it!" Howard exclaimed. "They all believe it and shrink from me as if I were a loathsome cutthroat tramp."

Abner returned to his chair. "Now, tell me everything," he said gravely.

At this juncture Pole Baker came into the office, a riding switch in his hand, a grim look on his face.

"He didn't do it, Pole!" Abner cried gladly. "They must look some else for the man. He ain't here, by hunk!"

"Thank the Lord!" Pole cried as he looked at Howard and seemed convinced at once. "Somebody else did it. Craig's got enough enemies. But it ain't no soft snuff we are in," he added. "It is awful serious. Circumstantial evidence has hung many a innocent man."

In a low, calm voice Howard went over all that had happened to him after leaving Mary till the present moment. He even mentioned the dream in which he seemed to hear angry voices and the report of a gun. When he finished Pole lashed his leg with his switch impatiently.

"Is that all the alibi you kin establish?" he growled. "I believe you, an' Uncle Ab, because we know you wouldn't lie to us. You couldn't fool us anyway with that clear eye in yore head; but, boys, facts is facts, an' danger is danger. A jury of plain men ain't goin' to swallow a tale about sleepin' on a hilltop an' dreamin' that some other man fired the shot. It is serious, dern serious, an' we'd as well admit it as a starter. The feller that did the job ain't goin' to come forward and stick his neck in the noose; he'll let the accused man take the medicine if he's allowed to; you bet he will!"

An hour later Pole, who had gone out, returned to the office.

"What's wrong?" Abner asked, as he and Howard looked up.

"Enough, the devil knows," Pole returned with a sigh. "The coroner's jury has set on the case. Tom Sugar was called on to testify, an' old man Higgins that repaired Howard's gun. Four or five fellers swore that Howard threatened to do it, and, worse than all, Jake Brown testified that he passed Craig's gate about midnight and saw Howard there, waitin' fer him to git home."

"You didn't say that anybody seed you stop there," Abner put in anxiously.

"A man passed while I was at the gate," Howard replied. "I didn't know who it was, and I didn't think he recognized me. Well, well, out with it, Pole, what was the verdict of the jury? I'm ready for anything now."

"It went agin us," Pole answered gloomily. "As they put it that was strong probability that you done it. We may as well face the music like men. The grand jury will find a bill an' an arrest will be made unless evidence is found beforehand that some one else is the right party."

"Arrest—do you think they would arrest me?" Howard said, his anger rising.

"Neither of his two friends replied. "I see; you think they will," Howard went on. "And, moreover, it may not even be a bailable case, and I may have to lie in that dirty jail till the fall court convenes, and all because a drunken—"

"Don't; the feller's dead!" Abner said reprovingly. "You must keep yore temper, Howard."

That evening when Abner rode up to the barnyard at Trumbley's he saw Mary and Mrs. Tinsley at the gate in front of the house and knew that they were waiting for him. Leaving the older woman, Mary came along the fence and joined him as he was dismounting at the bars.

"I thought I'd warn you," she whispered. "Mrs. Tinsley has not heard of the verdict of the coroner's jury. We've kept that from her, but she knows all the rest. She is fairly desperate. She seems to think she has not heard the worst and is almost distracted. She has done nothing but walk to and fro between her house and ours. Uncle Abner, I don't believe Howard did it. I don't, I don't!"

"I know he didn't," Abner answered. "I am absolutely sure of it."

Through the dusk the old woman advanced till she stood facing Abner. She put an unsteady hand on his saddle. "What's Howard?" she inquired.

"I left 'im in the office gittin' ready to go to his supper," was the prompt response. "Me 'n' 'im worked hard today gittin' out the paper. 'Im here to state, an' of we both don't sleep sound tonight it will be because the mosquitoes know the'r business better'n we do our'n."

"I'm no fool, Abner Daniel," the wo-

man blurted out, a great stare of despair in her eyes. "I know the danger that's boverin' over my child better'n anybody alive. Till today I gloried in the mercy of the Lord. I was grateful for what you did to keep Howard here at home whar I could see 'im now an' then, but this is what even that brief joy has fetched to me. I can't stand it—I can't—I can't!"

Abner's voice was full of clashing currents when he answered, looking down into the storm swept face. "Yore boy is innocent of that crime, Mrs. Tinsley, an' ef God let's 'im suffer fer it I'll turn ag'in all that's holy an' good in the universe. The situation may be a little shaky now, but right will prevail in the end."

"That's all you kin tell me, then?" the woman panted. "You say right will prevail. I don't know. I doubt everything now. Nothin' is fair to me, at least. If they dare—dare to put my boy under lock and key?—But she was unable to speak further. With a dry sob, a high heaving of her breast, she turned and walked away.

The next morning Abner was up with the dawn. Indeed, he had slept little through the night and was feeling the ill effects of it. He saw Pole Baker walking briskly along the road from the village.

"Whar you been so early?" Abner asked.

"I stayed in town," Pole answered. "I sat up with Howard in his room till after midnight."

"I'm glad you kept 'im company," Abner said, plaintively.

"I had to stay," Pole said. "It looks like everybody in town is actually afraid of 'im, an' he's noticed it. Frank Raymond and some other boys

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When Baker was trudging away and Abner was turning toward the house, Mary came from the kitchen, a pan of meal dough in her hands with which she was feeding the ducks and chickens.

"I don't think I slept a wink last night," she said, as she emptied the pan and turned to meet him. "Howard and I have been sech close friends for so long that a calamity like this is almost unbearable. You will want to get to town early, I'm sure, and so I'm going to get your breakfast."

They went into the quiet old kitchen. Seeing a nice strip of bacon on a table Abner cut several slices, and, holding them over the embers on a fork, he broiled them.

"Let me fry you some fresh eggs," she suggested. "The pan is hot, and it won't take a minute."

"Thank you," he said. "You are a good gal, Mary—as good as I ever knowed."

"I only wish I were," she faltered. "Then maybe God would hear my prayers. Uncle Abner?" She hesitated.

"I know what it was," he said. "You needn't tell me, fer I know. At sech a time, little girl, you an' me could only pray for one thing."

"But I've been wonderin'—Mary fixed her eyes on his melting face as she moved a small table forward for his plate and cup and saucer—"I've been wonderin' if there is not some great spiritual law at the bottom of what Jesus kept emphasizing—that only prayers made in perfect faith are answered. And as I kept praying last night I began to wonder if my prayers were not actually hindered by my doubt and fears."

"I catch yore point," Abner had fixed his eyes on her grief swept face. "That's one of the biggest thoughts in the world. I have tuck notice that when I pray fer a thing an' know it is comin' that it always does come, an' ef I doubt at all the whole thing falls flat."

"That's it"—Mary suppressed a sigh—"and all last night, while I was prayin', something seemed to keep saying to me that wrong had to be in the world, and that in consequence my prayers were falling on closed ears. If I could have believed they would be answered perhaps they would have been, but my fears were so overpowering that—"

"Ah, that's a fact, an' a big, big one," Abner broke in, with kindling eyes. "Who knows but that was yore supreme test? I think sech trials have to come to all of us accordin' to divine law. Tharin lies the meaning of 'Thy will be done.' It seems awful unfair to have to bow the head before injustice, as we look at it, but of you or I could rise so high right now as to be able to submit without a murmur even to the worst that might happen in this case we might be nigher to the nature o' God. Another Mary long ago had to stand by an' see her beloved son slowly tortured to death, but look what has come of it—come of it to the whole wide world?—Can we doubt that that mother, livin' now amongst the blessed, is satisfied with all that happened? Why, every soul, Mary, that wings its way heavenward through that influence would fall faintin' with bliss at 'er feet. God's law is right, an' it is more sure to be right at the very time we think it is wrong. I'm shrinkin' back from this here trouble, but even ef it went plain agin me I'd still try to think God knowed better what was right than me. Did I ever tell you about how my best comrade in war-times died?"

"I don't think so," Mary answered.

"Me an' him was nigh the same age," Daniel went on reminiscently, "an' hardships an' trouble in them awful times tied us closer together. We marched side by side, shared our rations o' hardtack an' salt pork an' drank water from the same canteen after his was shot off his back in a skirmish. He was the best, purest minded boy I ever knowed. His beard was just beginnin' to sprout like yaller fuzz on a peach; his eyes was sky blue, an' his hair was reddish gold. He smiled like a gal. He was an only son o' a poor widow, an' she had doted on 'im so much that she wouldn't consent to his goin' to war. But he got in with a gang of schoolmates that was knowin' 'an' slipped off an' enlisted. Knowin' that boy convinced me that thar are some persons that are sensitive enough by nature to know when a thing has happened off at a distance and even be aware beforehand that something important is about to take place. That boy predicted so many things accurately that the soldiers would come to 'im at night an' say 'im ef all was well at their homes an' ef they was goin' to git letters, an' the like. Sometimes he'd make a try at it, an' then agin he'd say he wasn't in trim for it. He used to tell me things that he kept back from the others. For instance, I've seed 'im suddenly point out a comrade as we was marchin' to battle an' heard 'im sigh an' say that he felt sure that particular one would fall before night, an' it come true. Just before the battle at Chickamauga a great change come over 'im. He wasn't as lively as he had always been, encouragin' us with jokes an' pranks an' jolly songs. He looked downcast an' had a far off stare in his eyes. I got uneasy, fer I loved maybe the poor food an' lack o' substantial shoes an' clean clothes had made 'im sick. I tried to cheer 'im up, but he wouldn't

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smile. Purty soon, when the bugle was callin' us to the front to meet the long blue line that we seed across the hills in the'r splendid clean uniforms an' glitterin' guns an' bayonets, he reached out an' ketched my hand. 'Shake, Ab, old boy,' said he, an' he clung to my hand tight, an' I felt it quiverin'.

"What's wrong?" said I.

"Then, lookin' me straight in the face, he said, with a husky quiver in his voice: 'I'm goin' to git shot in this battle, Ab. I know it.'

"I tried to treat it light. I slapped 'im on the back an' told 'im to pluck up, but he stared at me like a person in a dream. He refused to load his gun—said he didn't intend to take human life on the eve of losin' his own. 'Why,' said he as ef he'd never thought of it before, 'I ain't a thing ag'in any o' them men out thar. They are drove just as we are drove by politics an' head men that are well fed an' safely housed in Washington.'

"Two or three others was listenin', an' they had the saddest faces I ever seed on human faces, fer they loved 'im. They 'ud 'a' cried ef they hadn't been ashamed, especially the fellers that had left wives an' little children at home an' had a fear o' death. Right then durin' all that hurry an' turmoil he wanted to talk about a future life, an', above all, he was troubled about leavin' his mother.

"It is yore duty to load an' shoot," said a man who was sorter bitter ag'in the Yanks an' hadn't as much heart as the rest of us.

"I won't do it," the boy answered. "The spirits of the mothers of some o' them men are boverin' over 'em tryin' to protect 'em from harm, an' I'm goin' to join 'em soon. You kin shoot, but I won't. My commandin' officer ain't out thar on a hoss in a cocked hat an' spurrid boots. He is on high, an' he ain't well pleased with this sight, fer his children wear both blue an' gray, an' in this beautiful valley of his creation they are goin' to tear one another like ravenin' wolves."

"When the battle begun, somehow I'd lost my old fightin' spirit. I didn't take careful aim, an' I sort o' hoped the Lord would guide the balls that whizzed from my gun an' not hold me accountable, fer I was wrought up more'n I ever had been. He fell as he said he would. I run to his side.

"Goodby," he said, with a gurgle. "That ball went clean through me. Fer a minute I bent over 'im, too full o' grief to say a word; then he plucked up his strength, an' as he clung feebly to my hand he said: 'Tell my mother that I died all right, Ab, an' that I ask her forgiveness. I know I shall meet her agin.'

"I left 'im dead on the ground, sprawled out like many other boys."

"And you came in time to think even that was right?" Mary sighed. "For I've heard you say all things are right."

"Yes, even that poor boy's death was right," Abner answered. "Divine order is made to appear twisted to us that we may rise in the effort to straighten it out. I'm goin' to fight fer Howard, Mary, with all my might and main. God may show me a way to help 'im, an' ef he does I'll be ready to take advantage of the chance."

To Be Continued.

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ROYAL BAKING POWDER
Absolutely Pure
Made from Cream of Tartar
NO ALUM—NO PHOSPHATE

my first wife, used to make 'em say the'r prayers up to the day she died. They 'ud kneel down on the floor an' say 'em out loud, an' I swear it was as purty a sight as a man would care to see. But Jane comes of hard thinkin' Dutch stock, an' never had any sort o' religion, an', while she is pure good in many ways, she don't seem to believe thar is sech a thing as a God or a hereafter."

When Baker was trudging away and Abner was turning toward the house, Mary came from the kitchen, a pan of meal dough in her hands with which she was feeding the ducks and chickens.

"I don't think I slept a wink last night," she said, as she emptied the pan and turned to meet him. "Howard and I have been sech close friends for so long that a calamity like this is almost unbearable. You will want to get to town early, I'm sure, and so I'm going to get your breakfast."

They went into the quiet old kitchen. Seeing a nice strip of bacon on a table Abner cut several slices, and, holding them over the embers on a fork, he broiled them.

"Let me fry you some fresh eggs," she suggested. "The pan is hot, and it won't take a minute."

"Thank you," he said. "You are a good gal, Mary—as good as I ever knowed."

"I only wish I were," she faltered. "Then maybe God would hear my prayers. Uncle Abner?" She hesitated.

"I know what it was," he said. "You needn't tell me, fer I know. At sech a time, little girl, you an' me could only pray for one thing."

"But I've been wonderin'—Mary fixed her eyes on his melting face as she moved a small table forward for his plate and cup and saucer—"I've been wonderin' if there is not some great spiritual law at the bottom of what Jesus kept emphasizing—that only prayers made in perfect faith are answered. And as I kept praying last night I began to wonder if my prayers were not actually hindered by my doubt and fears."

"I catch yore point," Abner had fixed his eyes on her grief swept face. "That's one of the biggest thoughts in the world. I have tuck notice that when I pray fer a thing an' know it is comin' that it always does come, an' ef I doubt at all the whole thing falls flat."

"That's it"—Mary suppressed a sigh—"and all last night, while I was prayin', something seemed to keep saying to me that wrong had to be in the world, and that in consequence my prayers were falling on closed ears. If I could have believed they would be answered perhaps they would have been, but my fears were so overpowering that—"

"Ah, that's a fact, an' a big, big one," Abner broke in, with kindling eyes. "Who knows but that was yore supreme test? I think sech trials have to come to all of us accordin' to divine law. Tharin lies the meaning of 'Thy will be done.' It seems awful unfair to have to bow the head before injustice, as we look at it, but of you or I could rise so high right now as to be able to submit without a murmur even to the worst that might happen in this case we might be nigher to the nature o' God. Another Mary long ago had to stand by an' see her beloved son slowly tortured to death, but look what has come of it—come of it to the whole wide world?—Can we doubt that that mother, livin' now amongst the blessed, is satisfied with all that happened? Why, every soul, Mary, that wings its way heavenward through that influence would fall faintin' with bliss at 'er feet. God's law is right, an' it is more sure to be right at the very time we think it is wrong. I'm shrinkin' back from this here trouble, but even ef it went plain agin me I'd still try to think God knowed better what was right than me. Did I ever tell you about how my best comrade in war-times died?"

"I don't think so," Mary answered.

"Me an' him was nigh the same age," Daniel went on reminiscently, "an' hardships an' trouble in them awful times tied us closer together. We marched side by side, shared our rations o' hardtack an' salt pork an' drank water from the same canteen after his was shot off his back in a skirmish. He was the best, purest minded boy I ever knowed. His beard was just beginnin' to sprout like yaller fuzz on a peach; his eyes was sky blue, an' his hair was reddish gold. He smiled like a gal. He was an only son o' a poor widow, an' she had doted on 'im so much that she wouldn't consent to his goin' to war. But he got in with a gang of schoolmates that was knowin' 'an' slipped off an' enlisted. Knowin' that boy convinced me that thar are some persons that are sensitive enough by nature to know when a thing has happened off at a distance and even be aware beforehand that something important is about to take place. That boy predicted so many things accurately that the soldiers would come to 'im at night an' say 'im ef all was well at their homes an' ef they was goin' to git letters, an' the like. Sometimes he'd make a try at it, an' then agin he'd say he wasn't in trim for it. He used to tell me things that he kept back from the others. For instance, I've seed 'im suddenly point out a comrade as we was marchin' to battle an' heard 'im sigh an' say that he felt sure that particular one would fall before night, an' it come true. Just before the battle at Chickamauga a great change come over 'im. He wasn't as lively as he had always been, encouragin' us with jokes an' pranks an' jolly songs. He looked downcast an' had a far off stare in his eyes. I got uneasy, fer I loved maybe the poor food an' lack o' substantial shoes an' clean clothes had made 'im sick. I tried to cheer 'im up, but he wouldn't

smile. Purty soon, when the bugle was callin' us to the front to meet the long blue line that we seed across the hills in the'r splendid clean uniforms an' glitterin' guns an' bayonets, he reached out an' ketched my hand. 'Shake, Ab, old boy,' said he, an' he clung to my hand tight, an' I felt it quiverin'.

"What's wrong?" said I.

"Then, lookin' me straight in the face, he said, with a husky quiver in his voice: 'I'm goin' to git shot in this battle, Ab. I know it.'

"I tried to treat it light. I slapped 'im on the back an' told 'im to pluck up, but he stared at me like a person in a dream. He refused to load his gun—said he didn't intend to take human life on the eve of losin' his own. 'Why,' said he as ef he'd never thought of it before, 'I ain't a thing ag'in any o' them men out thar. They are drove just as we are drove by politics an' head men that are well fed an' safely housed in Washington.'

"Two or three others was listenin', an' they had the saddest faces I ever seed on human faces, fer they loved 'im. They 'ud 'a' cried ef they hadn't been ashamed, especially the fellers that had left wives an' little children at home an' had a fear o' death. Right then durin' all that hurry an' turmoil he wanted to talk about a future life, an', above all, he was troubled about leavin' his mother.

"It is yore duty to load an' shoot," said a man who was sorter bitter ag'in the Yanks an' hadn't as much heart as the rest of us.

"I won't do it," the boy answered. "The spirits of the mothers of some o' them men are boverin' over 'em tryin' to protect 'em from harm, an' I'm goin' to join 'em soon. You kin shoot, but I won't. My commandin' officer ain't out thar on a hoss in a cocked hat an' spurrid boots. He is on high, an' he ain't well pleased with this sight, fer his children wear both blue an' gray, an' in this beautiful valley of his creation they are goin' to tear one another like ravenin' wolves."

"When the battle begun, somehow I'd lost my old fightin' spirit. I didn't take careful aim, an' I sort o' hoped the Lord would guide the balls that whizzed from my gun an' not hold me accountable, fer I was wrought up more'n I ever had been. He fell as he said he would. I run to his side.

"Goodby," he said, with a gurgle. "That ball went clean through me. Fer a minute I bent over 'im, too full o' grief to say a word; then he plucked up his strength, an' as he clung feebly to my hand he said: 'Tell my mother that I died all right, Ab, an' that I ask her forgiveness. I know I shall meet her agin.'

"I left 'im dead on the ground, sprawled out like many other boys."

"And you came in time to think even that was right?" Mary sighed. "For I've heard you say all things are right."

"Yes, even that poor boy's death was right," Abner answered. "Divine order is made to appear twisted to us that we may rise in the effort to straighten it out. I'm goin' to fight fer Howard, Mary, with all my might and main. God may show me a way to help 'im, an' ef he does I'll be ready to take advantage of the chance."

To Be Continued.

"Do you think they would arrest me?" Howard said.

dropped in, but they had little to say, an' all but Frank looked as if they believed Howard was lyin'. What's friendship in time o' real trouble? Not with a hill o' beans."

Abner leaned on the bars, sliding his strong thumb nail under a splinter, slowly prying it off and putting it between his tobacco stained and blunted teeth. "I've been bothered about the grand jury," he said. "I wonder ef it will act. Ef an actual arrest is made it will go hard with the poor boy."

"It is sure to come an' early today," Pole replied.

"You think so?" Abner said despondently.

"Not the slightest doubt of it," Pole went on. "In fact, Howard was watched close all last night. The front and back doors of the hotel was guarded by the sheriff and his deputy."

"How do you know that?" Abner asked.

"I seed 'em; so did Howard. We took a little walk, an' they followed us. Howard looked pale, an' I thought the fresh air would do 'im good. As I come away this mornin' I met the sheriff on the back porch. I know 'im well. I legged fer 'im in his election, an' he would do me a favor ef it come his way. He knows how I like Howard, too, an' I stopped an' told 'im I was sure Howard wasn't the mnn, an' both him an' the deputy seemed astonished."

"What do you take me fer?" the sheriff asked. "Didn't I hear Howard threaten to do it? An' wasn't he on the spot half an hour before the shot was fired with a loaded gun in his pocket?"

"That's what they all say," Abner sighed. "His own father come over last night about bedtime to see me. I told 'im Howard was innocent, but it went in at one ear and out at the other."

"Well, I must go home an' git my breakfast," Pole said. "Then I'll meet you in town. Howard tried to git me to wait an' eat at the hotel, but they hadn't made the fire in the kitchen stove when I got up, an' I'm hungry. Besides, I like home cookin' an' coffee that's just right. Thar's another thing that is odd about me, too, Uncle Ab, an' that is that I never feel right ef I start a day without seein' my children. I want to see 'em all in a bunch at the table eatin' 'er fill. Another odd thing about me is that I hate to come home late at night an' find 'em all asleep. I want 'em to be awake, ef it is just fer a minute. It seems like something awful has happened ef they don't crawl over my lap an' bug me an' say good night. I don't know—I reckon I'm a womanish feller. Sally,