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(CONTINUED.)

CHAPTER III

A DEVOTED CONFEDERATE. On the morning of the general advance of the Army of the Cumberland...

It was the day that the Union men attacked these gaps that Miss Baggs passed under Confederate protection...

"No more did you," said the father. "Oh, yes, I did. I began to study them a month before I went away..."

"Air they doin' much talkin' 'bout the war up no'th?" "Well, it isn't at all like it is down hyar..."

"Reckon..." "The father handed the reins to his son, who, considering that he had not driven a horse for a year..."

"How did you leave ma?" asked the daughter. "Waal, y'r maw she war a heap lonesome 'thout y' uns..."

"Is your name Ezekiel Slack?" he asked of the farmer. "Zake Slack, yass, that's my name." "And yours?" to the girl...

"The other name on the pass refers to the boy, I suppose. You have a name, sonny, haven't you?" he asked absently...

"All right. Go ahead." Leaving the picket, they came to an opening in the country which enabled them to get a view of the region lying to the west...

When the sounds ceased, Farmer Slack drove on and soon reached the Confederate picket. The party were sent in charge of a trooper to the headquarters of an officer commanding a body of cavalry on the Confederate extreme left...

The wagon drew up before the house, and the conducting trooper sent in word to the general that a party, who had come in from the Union lines, were waiting outside...

The three travelers entered the house to find a tall man with an iron gray beard reclining in a rocking chair with as much apparent unconcern as if war were simply a pastime.

"You have just come from the enemy's lines, I hear," he said to the farmer. "Yass, sir." "What force did you see in the region through which you passed?"

The farmer explained that he could not answer the question, inasmuch as he had been permitted to pass after taking an oath not to give any information.

"H'm. You are quite right not to answer under the circumstances," observed the general. "Did your daughter take the same oath?"

"Yass, general," said Souri. "Surely they didn't administer an oath to a boy of your age?" he said, turning to Jakey.

"Reckon 't' thought I war too little to swar," said Jakey. He thrust his hands in his pockets, a sure sign that he was stalling himself for a confiot of wits and words.

"I met the children at Galletin," replied Slack. "I driv' 'em from thar through Lebanon and Liberty."

"Sounny," said the general, turning to Jakey, "did you pass any troops on the way?" "Lots."

"Infantry?" "What's that?" "Soldiers who walk and carry guns."

"Didn't see none o' them uns nuth'er." "Then what did you see? That's all the arms of the service I ever heard of, and I am an old soldier."

"Crittter companies." "Oh, I see!" exclaimed the general, remembering the mountain Tennesseans' name for cavalry. "How many soldiers belonging to the 'critttr companies, as you call them, did you see?"

"Waal, I counted 20, 'n that's 's fur as I got at countin in skule." Souri was about to remind her brother that he had proved himself one of the best boys in the school at mental arithmetic, but desisted.

"H'm!" The general thought a moment and beat a reveille with his fingers on the arm of his chair. "What were they doing within the Federal lines just before you left the outposts?"

"Waal, I only noticed one man, 'n he war doin' some'n very partickelex." "What was it?" "He war lookin at the sky through a flat round thing what looked like a big squashed apple."

"Captain, you may pass these people south," and added in an undertone: "Ride over to division headquarters and say that nothing has yet been obtained of the enemy's movements in this vicinity by questioning citizens."

There was a sound of hoofs without, mingled with the rattle of wheels. Looking through an open window, an officer was seen to dismount and hand a woman from a mud covered, paint rubbed buggy. All recognized Miss Elizabeth Baggs.

"What luck?" "I struck their wires within their lines midway between Murfreesboro and MacMinnville at midnight, and no one was near. I threw my wire over the line and made my connections with my instrument. I waited till nearly daylight before any messages of importance came along, though dispatches were passing all the while."

"Let me see it," said the general. Miss Baggs handed him a piece of paper on which was written: MURFREESBORO, Tenn., June 28, 1868.

The general read the dispatch over carefully, and then, looking up at Miss Baggs, remarked: "Balked!"

"Can't it be interpreted, general?" "I fear not without the key. It is doubtless an important dispatch, and I shall send it at once to general headquarters. If they can decipher it, they are welcome to do so. I don't care to try it."

Calling an aid-de-camp, the general bade him carry the message to the army telegraph station, a short distance to the rear, and repeat it to General Bragg. "General," said Miss Baggs in an undertone, "if you will let me have the original or a copy, I will try to decipher it. I may find a clue that will aid me hereafter, though I fear it will be too late to take advantage of information contained in this one."

"Certainly. Lieutenant, return the dispatch I have given you to this lady after it has been repeated." The officer departed. The general turned again to Miss Baggs with a serious look.

"Do you know that you are engaged in a very hazardous service?" "Perfectly." "And do you understand the penalty if caught?"

"Death, I suppose." "There's no telling whether it would be death or a long imprisonment in the case of a woman. A man would hang." Miss Baggs' countenance changed from an expression of indifference to one of those flashes of the superhuman attributes that lurk within the human soul.

"Am I to make anything of my life when thousands of the south's defenders are giving theirs every day? Have I not seen our homes laid desolate? Have I not seen my brothers, my friends, those I have loved, those I have played with as children, cut down by either bullet or disease?"

"For months I have devoted myself to the care of the sick in the hospitals. There I learned to dread a long continuance of this struggle. There I conceived the idea of doing something to win success for our armies by giving them an advantage not possessed by the enemy. I consulted one high in rank. 'How can I give my life to the best advantage?' I asked. 'In the secret service.' 'Point the way.' 'Do you know anything of telegraphy?' 'No, but I can learn.' 'Go and study a month and then come to me.' For a month I studied night and day. I learned to read words from the clicking of the keys as readily as I can read letters. I returned to my adviser. You know the rest."

The general paced the floor with a clouded brow. "I dread a catastrophe," he said, "in the case of one inspired by such noble sentiments. I dread to see a woman exposed to ignominy, perhaps death."

"If that time comes, general, God will give me strength to bear it." The general was silent a moment and then asked abruptly: "Is your brother aware of what you are doing?" "He is."

"And he consents?" "He does not. We are individuals. He is one of the noblest of the south's legitimate defenders, but he is not responsible for my acts, one of its illegitimate machines."

"The pitcher that goes often to the well is at last broken." "Then some one else will spring up to carry on the work." "God grant that the day may be far distant—that it may never come. I can hardly approve of it, though you are working in my cause."

"General," said the woman, her face absorbing lighting as if inspired by some soaring thought, "each side has an organized secret service. What general would dare report to his government that he had acquired information which would enable him to destroy his enemy, but it had been obtained by illegitimate means, and he would not take advantage of it? Yet what general would care to be called a spy himself? We are engaged in a terrible struggle. Before its close any and all means will be used to conquer. Cities will be burned, vast districts will be laid waste. Must I cease to employ the most effective method of all because I am doing illegitimate work? Is my work more

illegitimate than trying to conquer a people fighting for their independence?" The general made no reply for a time. "Yours is a singular family," he said presently. "You are all alike, and yet you differ."

"We are united in the cause; we differ as to the means." The interview was interrupted by the ringing of a dinner bell in the hall. The general called a negro and bade him show Miss Baggs to a room up stairs, to which she retired for a few minutes. The servant brought in her belongings from the buggy, together with the little box. When she came down stairs, the party were waiting for her before going in to dinner. Souri, who had seen her covered by the sun-

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"For love!" bonnet and her eyes screened with glasses, was astonished. She saw a woman three or four years older than herself, the beauty of her head and neck contrasting with the homeliness of her costume. Miss Baggs noticed Souri's surprise, and going up to her took both her hands and kissed her cheek.

"You sweet child," she said feelingly, "you can't get over my appearance when you met me on the road this morning, can you? What a fright must I have seemed to you! I don't care for those Yankee officers, but bless your innocent heart I can't bear to have shocked you."

Souri did not reply in words, but she looked at Miss Baggs admiringly. "Don't think hard of me," the latter went on, drawing Souri aside and motioning the rest to go on into the dining room. "I do only what I believe to be a duty, for you must suspect that I keep a secret. You could not play a part beneath you, child. You are too loving, too innocent, and you wonder how any other woman can."

"I did once." "When?" "Before I went to school." "For your country?" "No."

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