

THE PERILOUS VENTURE OF LADY ACKLAND.

By CLINTON ROSS.

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You have asked me again for my story of the Burgoyne affair. Yes, I ought to know about it; for it was indeed the most important affair of my life. Now in this camp—I'll confess—was a girl I once made love to; before the disunion divided us, before her brother was killed in the battle where I, too, was engaged. Kate Essex ever held this against me, as you will see if you follow me. Well, she was with Lady Harriet Ackland, the major's wife, in General Burgoyne's camp. I had been taken prisoner the day before the great battle. I have, as you know, some experience as a surgeon, which enabled me to be of small service in looking after General Burgoyne's wounded. And in all that fight I was busy, prisoner as I was, but enrolled as a British surgeon's assistant. I forgot that we were fighting them, as my friend, Colonel Kenneth, forgot it, when a prisoner at Yorktown. I hardly noticed that General Burgoyne was preparing for a retreat.

But first the general was resolved to give General Fraser, who had died in the night of his wounds, a fitting burial. The regiments were mustered into a melancholy procession at sundown, and the sound of muffled drums mingled with the musketry and artillery along the outposts.

A friendly sergeant put me where I could see it all. The chaplain led, with head uncovered, the prayer book of the Church of England in his left hand, and I saw that the girl I've mentioned, Kate Essex, supporting a lady scarcely older than herself, whom I surmised to be Lady Ackland, I



"THEY HAVE SHOT YOU," SAID KATE.

was startled at sight of her in that dismal surrounding. The scene, grim indeed against the irregular outline of wooded hills, had sadder color from the soldiers, showing in all their appearances the hard, discouraging service of the yesterday; their officers with pale, serious, yet determined faces; many limping or bandaged.

The chaplain paused by the opening. Drums gave their muffled refrain, and all was ready for the service, never more expressively simple. Suddenly rose the comparative stillness was the deafening roar of artillery. A wall tore the upturned earth at the chaplain's feet, casting dirt over his vestments, yet he kept on impassively, as if he were in a church. Several persons fell.

The sergeant, who was still at my side, cried "Damn 'em! They'll not let us bury our general. Damn 'em!"

But suddenly the firing stopped, to be followed by the low booming of a gun at minute intervals, adding to the solemnity of the occasion.

"Do you see, Sergeant White, you are mistaken. General Gates has found that, after all, it's not a movement of our troops!" I said excitedly.

The minute-guns continued as the enemy's tribute. Nor, I think, could anything be fiercer from those who had known this brave man opposed to them, and who appreciated his qualities as commander and gentleman and the sorrow of the soldiery and officers who had served and fought and bled with him.

"Now, sergeant," I whispered again—for it seemed sacrilege to speak too loudly at that place in the silent moments between the guns when we heard only the chaplain's voice—"Will you damn us?"

"I was wrong," said he; "they're men." By the time the box had been lowered it already was dark, and in the retreat to the works I lost sight of Kate Essex and Lady Ackland. I had trembled for them in that rapid firing; for though the girl was prejudiced against me, I felt I could wish her no hurt.

and Lady Ackland he hurried us down the slope to the bank, and I kept my well-behaved Irish girl.

Half way down Lady Ackland let the girl go. "Mr. Sedley," she said, giving me her hand, "you understand Miss Essex's prejudice. It's her brother's memory, whom she lost with us."

"No one better than I; you must know these are loyalist Sedleys, Lady Ackland."

"And I wanted to tell you you have stood fitly in a position that must be as trying to you, Miss Essex's nerves have given way, I think."

"Remember me when distressed over your husband."

"You are helping me reach him, sir," said she, "but I never can thank you enough."

At the foot of the cliffs were two skiffs. General Burgoyne had been unable to spare an escort, I told Brudenell I would take the maid in one while he should row the two ladies.

"I agreed, helping Lady Ackland in, when Kate Essex," she motioned the maid to follow her to the same boat.

"I'll go with this person."

"What do you prefer, I know, to be with us?" said Lady Ackland.

"You put me under," said I, half mockingly. But she thought I was in earnest. "You know you mustn't forget what I think of you."

"I wish I could," said I. "You must not wish you could."

"How can I help it?" "Because you know it's a matter of complete indifference to me."

"Now what can you do when a woman takes your criticism in earnest? Why, I kept pretending."

"But it isn't to me; never can be." "And why shouldn't it be when you know?"

"When I know?" questioned I, half liking the pretense. "That I know that you have a right to your opinion."

"A gracious concession," said I. She added after a moment: "Yes, and I'm glad I have had this chance to prove I'm no bigot even if you be traitor."

She went on after a pause which she seemed to give me chance to frame an answer. "You must have advanced to be a major."

"General Washington knew my father." "Do you remember how I scolded you, when I had just met, for being a dawdler?"

"It was sweet of you to be interested," said I. "I was not interested beyond the impotence I always felt at seeing a clever man wasting opportunities."

"Know that," said I; "not that I'm clever." "I do not know, Mr. Sedley, but that it is strange enough for me to be talking to you in this way."

"I appreciate it in you, Miss Essex," said I, now entirely in earnest. "This terrible battle—no much suffering softens one."

The steady air mingled with the cry of a night hawk. Something splashed out in the river. The firing had stopped.

"At least we understand each other better," said she. "I hope so," said I.

"O, we must," said she, almost humbly. "I had pulled rather slowly, and found on looking about that Brudenell's boat was around a bend of the river. When I commenced more vigorously a musket was fired from the forest, the ball grazing her cheek."

"Into the bottom of the boat," said she. "Down, Miss Essex!"

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everything like this." And I tried to relax myself. But I had not calculated on the loss of blood, for I was forced to yield to faintness. "Don't," said she. "Don't try yet."

"I watched her figure against the sky, the river at her feet, and I could not help it."

termer from the adjoining room, "that I am aware of—excepting a letter Miss Essex left."

"I broke this open, reading: "Dear Mr. Sedley: I have put your papers, sealed and addressed to you, in General Schuyler's hands."

"In these days my constitution was more vigorous than the young men of today have."

"I never remember what my patients rave about," said my doctor, "being glibly, but with a peculiar smile that made me wonder if he had not heard much of my recent experiences."

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