



CHAPTER XIII.

Jackson retreated no farther than Strasburg. Shields advanced no farther than Winchester. Prisoners captured during the first year of the war were not held long. Within 30 days from the battle of Kernstown those members of Captain Wyle's company who had been taken prisoners were exchanged. Like Baxter was among them.

Two days after the battle of Kernstown he reported to his company at Strasburg. It was known that he was captured with the others, and his truthful story of his escape found no believers except Steve Brayton. While the others declared that his escape was all arranged for by his Yankee friends, Steve gave him his hand and said:

"It's gettin' purty hot fur yo' around yere, Kenton, 'cordin' to what I see and hear. If yo' could surround and capture a hull Yankee army and turn it over to us, the boys would think yo' was some game to play. Reckon yo' know what it all starts from?"

"I think I do."

"Can't no two fellows love the same gal without sunthin' bustin' sooner or later. I kin jest shet my eyes and see what the captain is layin' fur. He un's a chine powerful bad to hev yo' killed off or drive out or use up in some way. He wouldn't hev minded if half of us had him wiped out down there if yo' bin one of the dead."

Two or three days after Jackson reached Strasburg Captain Wyle had an interview with him. None of his own company knew it, and what passed could only be inferred from circumstances which developed later on. It was announced that it had been decided to reorganize the guards as a cavalry company, and in the course of a week this change was effected, much to the satisfaction of the men. Just as it was finished Royal Kenton was ordered to report to Jackson again. He found the same stern, low spoken, plain looking man and received the same quiet greeting. The general advised to the loyalty of the guards at Kernstown, and then to Kenton's capture and escape and asked for the details. The latter at once realized that some one who professed to know all about it and who was seeking his injury had reported to the general. He, however, proceeded to give the particulars not only of his escape and his efforts to rejoin his command, but of the charges brought against him by Ike Baxter and the interview with General Shields. This portion of his adventure he had not spoken of to any one on rejoining his company. Jackson seemed to be thinking very seriously as Kenton talked. The facts just related no doubt surprised him and perhaps gave a different turn to affairs. After awhile he said:

"General Banks is pushing up the valley with a large force. I wish you to scout along his front and secure all possible information of value. Can you set out at once?"

"Within half an hour, sir," was Kenton's reply.

"And do you wish a companion?"

"I think I can do better alone, but if you think two might do better than one I shall."

"Do as you think best, but report to the captain of your company that you have been detailed."

As Kenton left headquarters he felt that something was wrong. Just what it was he could not determine, but it seemed as if there were mistrust and suspicion. He had been thoroughly loyal in making his previous observations and reports, but an enemy was at work to discredit him. He was fully satisfied of this as he left camp on his scout. After reporting to Captain Wyle, who treated him with strict military etiquette, he went to his tent to make a few preparations. He had left it when he was making his way out of camp when he was overhauled by Steve Brayton, who said:

"The general is sendin' yo' off on another scout? Yo' think yo' ar' goin' alone, but yo' hain't. I've follered along to tell yo' that the captain has put Reube Parker on yo' track. Yo' know Reube? He hain't bin abusin' yo' with his mouth as much as some others, but he's down on yo' and playin into the hands of the captain. I tell yo' to look out fur him!"

Kenton turned white with anger and started to retrace his steps.

"No, yo' don't," said Steve as he barred the way. "I fast took to yo' on account of yo' sense, and I hope you won't lose it now. That's a game been played, and yo' want come out on top!"

"Is it possible that after what has passed they still continue to look upon me as a traitor?" demanded Kenton in a voice broken with emotion.

"They do, but it's fur an object, yo' see," replied Steve. "It's all on account of the gal. If that was no gal, yo' be the first lieutenant or mebbe captain of the company today. If that was a gal and no war, yo' and Wyle would hev fit a duel over her befo' this. One would hev challenged t'other."

"But, but," stammered Kenton, boiling over to say something and yet not wishing to drag Marian Percy's name into the case.

"It's jest this way," interrupted Steve. "Yo' un's got the inside track, and that's but one way to keep it—play to win. Beat the captain at his own game. Go right along about yo' bizness, but keep an eye out fur Reube. He's put on yo' track to sell yo' out, and he'll do his purtrest to please the captain."

It was true that Banks was moving up the valley. He had an army five times as strong as Jackson's, and he meant to annihilate the latter before reinforcements could reach him. Kenton had set out in good time. It takes an hour to move a regiment of men assigned to a certain place on a march. It takes three hours for a brigade to march and counter-march and file out of its camp onto the highway. Divisions

ordered to move at 7 o'clock a. m., are halting and lingering at noon. An army of 20,000 men with its artillery, baggage trains, ambulances, camp followers and beef cattle is a gigantic sloth. It must open its eyes. It must blink and blink and nap again. It must stretch and yawn and complain. It is as if a huge tortoise was trying to work loose from its shell.

Banks was getting ready for his move. Every report which Kenton received as he neared the front went to assure him of the fact. He was on foot, dodging from forest to forest and from field to field and betraying himself only to a few whom he knew could be trusted. After the first day out he became satisfied that he was being dogged by Reube Parker. The latter must also have been provided with a pass to take him through all Confederate lines, but though he hung to Kenton's trail he did not betray his presence except by accident. Everywhere along Banks' front were evidences that a forward move was on the tapis, and before Kenton's work was finished he had secured a pretty fair estimate of the Federal strength. Banks knew that Confederate scouts and spies would be seeking information, and he was guarding against them as much as possible by covering his front with scouting parties of cavalry.

Just before sundown on the second day of his scouting along the front Kenton came very near crossing a highway upon which a Federal scouting party was quietly riding in hopes to come upon some of those scouts. The rattle of a trooper's saber put him on his guard, and he had just time to sink down in the bushes to escape observation. Not

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She had given Kenton a shot and Wyle a lift, as she thought, and satisfied for the time being she asked if she could be of assistance during the absence of the servants, adding that nearly the entire colored population of the town had fled, and that most of them would probably be picked up by the Federals and sent north. Under the circumstances her offer was eagerly accepted, and she had gained the point she was seeking. While Marian and her mother were nervous and upset over the situation, they had no thought of flight. It was certain that Jackson would retreat up the valley, and that Shields would occupy Winchester, but they were too sensible to fear that the town would be given up to sack. They were preparing to retire when they were aroused by the call of a citizen acquaintance who had made all preparations for flight and felt it his duty to warn them of the perils of the situation. He repeated the story that the town was to be burned and the valley laid waste, and added that news had been received from the front to the effect that the advancing Federals were applying the torch and dealing out death as they advanced. He advised them to lose no time in retreating up the valley. This information added the climax.

In the Alleghany mountains to the west, 50 miles away, was a rough but comfortable house surrounded by a few acres of land which Senator Percy had owned for years before his death and occupied with his family for several weeks in summer. There he had found good shooting and fishing and rest. After receiving the latest news and sitting down to wonder what they should do, mother and daughter remembered the place and its quiet location and soon determined that if flight was necessary it should be in that direction. It was out of the track of the armies, and they would not be disturbed, and they might hope that after a few weeks the Confederates would either regain permanent possession of the valley or that war would be at an end. The faith of the south in its military was sublime, and it never wavered until the last gun was fired at Appomattox.

To decide to act. While the ladies set about packing whatever they might need, Uncle Ben was told to have a vehicle ready for a move at daylight. When Mrs. Baxter was informed of the contemplated move, she promptly volunteered to go along, and her offer was as promptly accepted. It was not only a part of her plan to maintain an espionage on Marian, but to be on hand when opportunity might offer to favor Captain Wyle's cause. Such a flight would bring mistress and servant closer together. There was a grim determination about the woman worthy of a far better cause. She hated Royal Kenton simply because she believed he stood in the way of Ike's advancement. She would be faithful to Captain Wyle simply because it would assist Ike. She had always fretted because Ike had no ambition to climb up. His excuse had always been:

"Don't no infernal hind, but how's a feller goin' to start? Show me a way to climb, and I'll git that or die tryin'!"

The war had opened a way. No matter if Ike was regarded as the poorest soldier in his company and the last one who would deserve promotion, he had made her believe that he was on the road to military glory, and that on his success depended her opportunity to become somebody. She was ambitious even if poor and ignorant. In some way which she could not yet determine Kenton was to disappear, Captain Wyle was to wed Marian, and Ike was to become "a great general and ride around on a critter."

There was no sleep for any of them during the remainder of the night. Uncle Ben got a wagon ready to carry provisions and clothing and a few articles of furniture and the family carriage in which the women were to ride, and as dawn was breaking a start was made up the valley. They had company on the road. Four or five farms below Winchester had been fired to the ground and during the night artillery firing had created a new panic among the residents of the city. Marian had been made anxious by the story told by Mrs. Baxter the evening before—not that she put any faith in the report, because she had become aware that Kenton's position was a painful one, but because she realized that the situation would become still more grave. She worried over his capture and feared he might have been wounded, and she couldn't help but feel that, no matter how brave and loyal he was, he would become a victim of conspiracy and circumstance. She was somewhat consoled, however, when she went to the carriage house in the gray of morning to notify Uncle Ben that all was ready. His life service in the family had given him certain privileges, and on certain occasions he did not hesitate to express his opinions.

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"Everybody's cheerin' and shakin' hands with him, 'cause he un's so brave. He un's killed 10 Yankees with his sword in that fight. General Jackson shook hands with him down at the tavern befo' all the people. Reckon he un's will be made a grand officer fur bein' so brave."

She had given Kenton a shot and Wyle a lift, as she thought, and satisfied for the time being she asked if she could be of assistance during the absence of the servants, adding that nearly the entire colored population of the town had fled, and that most of them would probably be picked up by the Federals and sent north. Under the circumstances her offer was eagerly accepted, and she had gained the point she was seeking. While Marian and her mother were nervous and upset over the situation, they had no thought of flight. It was certain that Jackson would retreat up the valley, and that Shields would occupy Winchester, but they were too sensible to fear that the town would be given up to sack. They were preparing to retire when they were aroused by the call of a citizen acquaintance who had made all preparations for flight and felt it his duty to warn them of the perils of the situation. He repeated the story that the town was to be burned and the valley laid waste, and added that news had been received from the front to the effect that the advancing Federals were applying the torch and dealing out death as they advanced. He advised them to lose no time in retreating up the valley. This information added the climax.

In the Alleghany mountains to the west, 50 miles away, was a rough but comfortable house surrounded by a few acres of land which Senator Percy had owned for years before his death and occupied with his family for several weeks in summer. There he had found good shooting and fishing and rest. After receiving the latest news and sitting down to wonder what they should do, mother and daughter remembered the place and its quiet location and soon determined that if flight was necessary it should be in that direction. It was out of the track of the armies, and they would not be disturbed, and they might hope that after a few weeks the Confederates would either regain permanent possession of the valley or that war would be at an end. The faith of the south in its military was sublime, and it never wavered until the last gun was fired at Appomattox.

To decide to act. While the ladies set about packing whatever they might need, Uncle Ben was told to have a vehicle ready for a move at daylight. When Mrs. Baxter was informed of the contemplated move, she promptly volunteered to go along, and her offer was as promptly accepted. It was not only a part of her plan to maintain an espionage on Marian, but to be on hand when opportunity might offer to favor Captain Wyle's cause. Such a flight would bring mistress and servant closer together. There was a grim determination about the woman worthy of a far better cause. She hated Royal Kenton simply because she believed he stood in the way of Ike's advancement. She would be faithful to Captain Wyle simply because it would assist Ike. She had always fretted because Ike had no ambition to climb up. His excuse had always been:

"Don't no infernal hind, but how's a feller goin' to start? Show me a way to climb, and I'll git that or die tryin'!"

The war had opened a way. No matter if Ike was regarded as the poorest soldier in his company and the last one who would deserve promotion, he had made her believe that he was on the road to military glory, and that on his success depended her opportunity to become somebody. She was ambitious even if poor and ignorant. In some way which she could not yet determine Kenton was to disappear, Captain Wyle was to wed Marian, and Ike was to become "a great general and ride around on a critter."

There was no sleep for any of them during the remainder of the night. Uncle Ben got a wagon ready to carry provisions and clothing and a few articles of furniture and the family carriage in which the women were to ride, and as dawn was breaking a start was made up the valley. They had company on the road. Four or five farms below Winchester had been fired to the ground and during the night artillery firing had created a new panic among the residents of the city. Marian had been made anxious by the story told by Mrs. Baxter the evening before—not that she put any faith in the report, because she had become aware that Kenton's position was a painful one, but because she realized that the situation would become still more grave. She worried over his capture and feared he might have been wounded, and she couldn't help but feel that, no matter how brave and loyal he was, he would become a victim of conspiracy and circumstance. She was somewhat consoled, however, when she went to the carriage house in the gray of morning to notify Uncle Ben that all was ready. His life service in the family had given him certain privileges, and on certain occasions he did not hesitate to express his opinions.

"See yere, Miss Sunshine," he began, "what 'bout dat white woman in de kitchen?"

"She's to go with us," was the reply. "Den let me tell yo' to look out for her. Nose too sharp. Face too sharp. Eyes jest like snake's. Walks aroun' jest like a cat!"

"Why, how can she hurt us?"

"Tollin' lies."

"About what or whom?"

"Look yere," replied the old man, dropping his voice and looking around. "I've gottin' purty ole, but I hain't dun blind or deaf. I knows all 'bout dat Yankee Kenton an' dat Captain Wyle. I knows de boaf wants to marry yo'! Lar now!"

"Why, Uncle Ben!" she reproachfully exclaimed.

"It's jest like I tole yo', leetle Sunshine. Member when dat Ike Baxter dun cum home on a fardelous 'bout six weeks ago?"

"I believe I did hear he was home."

"An' all de time he was home he dun 'bused Marian up hill an' down. What far? What he got to say 'bout his betters? What his wife 'buse Marian fur? Why she mad at him? Yo' know what she lib's?"

"No."

"In dat house jest beyon de cooper shop. Yo' know who I dun say go in dar yesterday?"

"No."

"Dat Captain Wyle! What he want

"Everybody's cheerin' and shakin' hands