

SWEET REVENGE

BY
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Author of "Chattanooga," "Chickamauga," Etc.

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Wait a bit. There are several spears of grass smoldering, a spark on the end of each. I gather them and put the ember ends into the hollow of my hand, where I hold the reserve gunpowder. A flash—a mere bit of flame no bigger than a pea! I nurse it and put more grass with it, shove it all under the wood, and a beautiful bright flame shoots up that gladdens my heart. A joyful shout from the fort sends a pleasant thrill through every fiber in my body.

Ping! A bullet within an inch of my nose. I dart away into the darkness and in another minute am in the forest.

I had scarcely got behind the breastworks when the glare of the burning wood showed me half a dozen men dashing up to the fire, and I knew they would try to scatter it.

"When I count three, fire into the crowd. One, two, three!"

Four bullets fled at the little knot of men below. We could not see who was hit, but all turned and started down the declivity, though one man dropped before he had gone a dozen yards. We lost no time in reloading and had a new charge ready in every piece before seeing any signs of their return.

But Buck, who took more time and made more fuss about his work than all the rest together, had scarcely rammed his charge home and fixed the percussion cap on the nipple when three men made a dash at the fire. Two of them reached it and began to kick vigorously.

I took deliberate aim at one of them and shot him through the head. My gun had scarcely cracked when Helen led drive at the remaining man.

He staggered, but kept on kicking at the fire. I snatched Buck's gun and finished him, dropping him on the burning brands. The third man, who had started forward several times and each time turned back, got out of sight as quickly as possible.

"Look at that!" cried Ginger, pointing to the east.

I turned my head, and there above the horizon was the faintest trace of dawn.

CHAPTER XV. WOMAN'S FLUCK.

AFTER this second defeat we could see the guerrillas gathered in a knot, evidently discussing the situation. They talked so loud that we could often catch a word, and their gesticulations were plain to us all. At last the captain took a white handkerchief from his pocket, fixed it to a stick and, holding it over his head, advanced toward us.

"A flag of truce!" we all exclaimed together.

"He's going to offer us something to eat!" cried Jack. "I knew he wouldn't let us starve!"

I stepped over the breastworks to go and meet the bearer of the flag. Buck called out:

"Tell him I'll take some fried chicken for mine!"

I met the captain at the spot where we had built our fire. His arm was in a sling, and he was very pale. Something told me that he did not relish the work in which he was engaged.

"I've come to tell you," he said, "that if you'll surrender the rest of you people can go."

"What assurance have I that you will keep the terms?"

"The word of a— He stopped. I saw that habit had led him to use an expression common among gentlemen in the south, but the word had stuck in his throat.

"Captain," I said, "you are a better man than the company you keep. Satisfy me that the women, the boy and the negro shall go free, and you are welcome to me."

"The men are divided about the women," he replied, lowering his voice.

"Which party holds the balance of power?"

"It's hard to tell."

"Then we have no assurance that if we surrender you can keep your promise to let them go unharmed?"

"There's no telling. Befo' yo' escape and the killing yo' all have been doing I could have fixed it, but the men are exasperated at the damage yo've done."

"Can't you be blind and let us out to-night?"

"No; I've lost more control of my men within the last few days than all the time I've commanded them. If they saw the slightest move on my part to let yo' slip, they'd shoot me, and yo' would never get out alive either. I can't stand here talking any longer. They'll suspect something. What's yo' answer?"

I turned the matter quickly over in my mind.

"Captain," I said, "I will transmit your proposition. If your terms are accepted, I will go down to your camp, and my friends will follow. If they are not accepted, we will wave to you. In this event you will know that these noble girls, this brave boy, this faithful negro, prefer to take their chances with me."

Both of us turned without another word, and in a few minutes the captain was with his men and I had joined my little half-starved army. I was resolved with eager, questioning looks.

"The men made a proposition," I said. "I will give it to you with the information that goes with it. If we will surrender, he promises that all shall go free except me."

I paused a moment to watch the expression of their faces. I saw at once that they were all bitterly disappointed.

"I feel bound to state further that the captain has informed me that he cannot surely guarantee your safety, though he would if he could. He tells me that the men are divided, and he does not know himself which party is the stronger. You are not sure of safety, but you have a chance, whereas if we are taken by force the chances are all against you. Before giving my



She waved her bonnet to the guerrillas. I wish to get an expression of opinion from each of you separately. Miss Stanforth, shall we accept the proposition or not? Say yes or no."

She curled her lip. "I don't care to consider such a proposition."

"No!" cried little Jack, with a snap in her eye.

"Buck?"

"Reckon I'd rather stay whar I am awhile longer, though, by golly, I'm mighty hungry." He spoke the last words ruefully.

"Ginger?"

"I ain't no traitor man, mars', ef I air black. Ginger hain't gwine t' talk 'bout gibblin nobody up t' save hisself."

"My friends," I said, and I could not repress a tremor in my voice, though God knows I tried, "I cannot accept your sacrifice. The guerrillas, having secured me, will doubtless quarrel about you, and the captain and those who are with him may find an opportunity to let you get away under cover of the night."

"No, no!" cried all. "We'll stand together."

"How were you to reply?" asked Helen.

"If the terms were accepted, we were to go down; if rejected, we were to wave."

Helen took off her check bonnet and, tying it to a carbine, stood up on the rocks and waved it to the guerrillas, who were standing below watching for our signal, while our little command gave a lusty cheer as their exhausted condition would admit.

But the real heroism was yet to come. I had seen evidence that the woman wing of my army was not to be appalled at any proposition, but it was impossible that I could be prepared for what was to follow. I have sometimes wondered if it was not rather an emanation of genius than heroism, but have invariably concluded that it was the genius of heroism.

The first flush of excitement at the rejection of the terms being over, Jack began to show signs of irritation, a condition I attributed to the gnawing pangs of hunger. She shook her fist at the guerrillas, vowing that if she could ever get her papa again he should scour the country till he had captured every one of them, and when captured she would herself take inexpressible pleasure in making targets of them for pistol practice. Then she would call to them for something to eat. They were too far to hear her, and of course her request would not have been granted if they had.

"Captain, good captain, dear captain," she cried, "do let us out of this! That's dear boy!" Then she turned to Miss Stanforth. "Helen, what in the world did we come on such an errand as this for? Why didn't we send the soldiers?"

"Jack," said Helen, "I'm sorry you regret it, I don't. I never regret."

"You're showin' the white feather," said Buck.

Jack's eyes glistened with anger. "The white feather! What do yo' mean, yo' little pest? White feather! I'm not afraid of all the guerrillas in Christendom. They won't hurt me. I'm going down there to ask 'em fo' something to eat. I'll get yo' all off. White feather! I'll show yo'!"

She sprang upon the rampart, but I caught her and dragged her back.

"Let me go!" she screamed.

"Didn't I tell yo' Missy Jack had de biggest temper in de south?" cried Ginger proudly.

"Let her go," said Helen, "and I'll go with her. If those guerrillas who are disposed to protect us can do so, they will succeed as well without you as with you. Indeed, your presence will only tend to irritate them. Come, Jack, we'll try it!"

I stood aghast at such a plan. I forbade it. The girls were determined. I begged, ordered, stormed at them, declaring that for every step they took toward that den of bellhounds I would take two. At last Helen laid her hand on my sleeve and looked me calmly in the eye.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

Map is born to rule, but woman comes along and beats him out of his job.—Chicago News.

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