

SWEET REVENGE

BY
Captain F. A. MITCHEL,
Author of "Chattanooga," "Chickamauga," Etc.
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Major Brandestane, I want you to let me have my way in this matter. You owe it to me. When you were wounded, I took you in and succored you. Since we have been in this place I have obeyed your every order. Jack has flashed unknowingly, unintentionally, a stroke of genius. Jack is a genius. She has hit on our only chance. She fascinated the guerrillas once, and she'll do it again. She will split them in halves and set one half against the other. But she will need me. Give me that revolver."

All this was lost on me. I swore they should not go. I planted myself between them and the rampart. Helen stepped to one side of me. Jack darted to the other. Ginger put his hand on my arm.

"Don't stop Missy Jack, mars," Missy Jack can do anything wild men folks. He turned my face to the cliff. "Look dat a-way, an yo' won't see hit."

When I broke from the old man, Helen and Jack were beyond the rampart.

I have seen lifeboat men pull out in a tempestuous sea, breasting a howling wind and madly tossing billows; I have seen men march out to battle with almost a certainty of death or mutilation, but I have never looked upon any sight with the mingled terror and admiration that thrilled me as I beheld these two girls, without other weapon than woman's loveliness, descend the rocky slope toward the guerrilla camp. They moved hand in hand, as I have seen graceful ships sail side by side. Helen was the taller and the more commanding, but both walked erect. Helen buoyed by a native courage, Jaqueline confident in the possession of a gift, a genius for bending men to her will.

They had scarcely left us when the guerrillas caught sight of them and stood looking up in stupid wonder. Ginger, Buck and I were staring down upon them, Ginger's eyes starting out of his head, Buck leaning excitedly over the rampart, I clutching my carbine. On went the girls, between the flanking rocks, out upon a gentle swell, through a slight depression, over stones, weeds, brambles, till at last they came within 50 yards of the guerrilla camp. Then came a cheer from the bandits—I knew not whether of triumph or welcome—and the girls entered the camp.

What they said, what was said to them, I could not hear. I could only see. Captain Ringold raised his hat and stood with it in his hand. He was evidently speaking, for the men gathered around, and all seemed to be intent on him and the girls. Then I saw Helen step a little to the front, and all faces were turned to her. Occasionally she made a gesture, now turning to her little fortress, now pointing the finger of scorn at the guerrillas, as though to shame them or to influence whatever of manliness there might be in them. She was making them a long speech. At least, it seemed so to me, who could see, but not hear. At last there was a cheer. The conference was ended.

Then the little actress, Jaqueline, was evidently using her art. She would whisk up to one of the men, stand before him in a favorite position of hers, bent slightly forward, and shake her finger in his face. All the men stood watching her. Occasionally there came a burst of laughter, a yell of applause, a clapping of hands, and I knew that Jack was carrying her audience.

Then I could see the figures below beginning to busy themselves about preparations for supper. Helen and Jack took hold as they had done once before, the men permitting them to do the work.

Buck, beside me, chuckled. "What is it, Buck?"

"That consarned Jack's goin' roun' thar with the skillet in one han' an' a chawin' somp'n she's got in the other. Wish I was thar."

When supper was served, each man vied with the others to provide for their guests. Jack was seated on the ground, her back resting against a tree, a plate in her lap, a tin cup at her side, evidently making a hearty supper, keeping the men running back and forth from the fire, filling her plate or her cup at every trip.

After supper we could see that the conference was resumed between Helen and the guerrillas. She was evi-

dently arguing with them to effect a purpose. The captain had a good deal to say, but all were taking part in the debate. Then the girls started for our fort. One of the men approached the captain and shook a fist in his face. The captain knocked him down. Another started after the retreating party, but was intercepted. A general fight ensued, some of the men placing themselves between the others and the girls, who were now coming up the hill, quickening their pace at every step. Coeking my carbine, I ran down to join the girls, meeting them midway

between the fort and the guerrilla camp. First Jack came dashing past me, wild with terror, her cheeks blanched, her eyes staring. Helen came on more slowly, turning occasionally with hot cheeks and flashing eye. Below, among the guerrillas, was a babel—swearing, howling and shouting—the protecting party being the stronger and keeping the others at bay. I put my arm behind Helen and hurried her up the steep slope. When we got to the fort, Jack was already there, crouching behind the rampart, her head appearing above it, her eyes as big as saucers.

"Goody gracious, what a fool I was to go down there! Wouldn't do it again for anything."

Helen gave me a hurried account of the visit. On entering the camp the captain had complimented them upon their bravery, both in the fights that had occurred and in coming out unarmed, assuring them, looking ominously at some of the more cutthroat of his men, that if any man uttered them the slightest indignity he would shoot him on the spot. Helen had replied that, whatever they were, she believed they were brave and above injuring a woman. Then she held up to them the magnitude of their crimes and bade them go and enlist in the Confederate army. She succeeded in getting an offer of a free conduct to all save me. This they persistently refused. After much urging the captain agreed that we should be let alone till the next morning, a promise on which I placed no reliance. Helen begged to be permitted to carry me provisions. This was also refused.

"I did all I could," she said ruefully, "but I couldn't move over the captain. They wouldn't give me a morsel of food."

"Oh, Helen," said Jack, "I'm tired of hearing yo' whine!" And, taking off her sunbonnet, out rolled a liberal supply of corn pone and salt pork.

"You little thief!" cried Helen and threw her arms around her cousin. A second time my life had been saved, at least temporarily, by Jaqueline.

CHAPTER XVII. A BUGLE CALL.

THE night passed without an attack. I prepared a fire as before, but it was not needed. Day dawned, and we could see that the guerrillas had made themselves more comfortable, having constructed a rude hut of boughs for shelter, showing conclusively that they intended to wait patiently for the starving process to do its work.

During the day the remnant of the provisions Jack had pilfered was consumed and the command was sullen, wreny night. All except myself were so worn that they evinced little care for watching. They were getting numb, a condition which comes at last over one hunted for his life. As for me, my position was harrowing. My devoted friends who had made the attempt to rescue me were starving, and to crown all, Helen Stanforth, who had instigated the attempt, had planned it and had led the others into it, was deceived as to my true character. I brooded over the situation till I was well nigh insane.

Then I made a resolve—a resolve that might free the others, but would end in my death. I would go down to the guerrillas and give myself up. It was possible that my case having been disposed of, Captain Ringold and his adherents would be able to protect the girls, and, Buck and Ginger being of no moment to the band, all might go in peace.

But there was an obstacle in the way that I knew would not be easily overcome—the opposition of all my friends. It was hard for me to go down to my death. How could I bring myself to do so with all these beloved ones endeavoring to prevent me! There was one way by which I might render them less averse to the plan. By proclaiming the military mission which had taken me to Alabama I might render myself an object of hatred and contempt. Despite the pain this confession would cost me, I resolved to make it.

At the moment I took my resolution I looked up at Helen, who was always my first object of thought before any important move. She was leaning over the battlement looking down upon the guerrillas. In her face was a strength, an honesty such as I had never seen before on that of any woman. My resolve dwindled before that heroic countenance. I could not turn her sublime faith in me to detestation.

However, my purpose to end the struggle by my own surrender was unchanged. Rising, I called out in a tone which at once attracted attention and denoted that I had something of importance to say.

"Dear friends!"
All looked at me inquiringly.
"I am going down there to give myself up. Then you can go free."
Helen's gaze bespoke not only her astonishment, but dismay.

"What yo' going to do that fo'?" asked Jack quickly.
"Because I owe it to you all to do so."

"I'm going with yo'," said Buck.
"You will do no such thing. You must stand by your sister and cousin."

"What do yo' want to leave us in the

turn to?" said Jack impatiently.

This impudent motive brought a fresh addition to my distress. Even with a perfect understanding between me and the others my burden was hard enough to bear. Jack's taunt well nigh turned the scale. Bending to the cliff, I buried my face in my hands. A soft hand was laid on mine. Helen was endeavoring to uncover my face. I turned and met her gaze—strong, tender, sympathetic.

"Your life is not yours to surrender. You must wait till it is forced from you."

"I would be unworthy of your further devotion should I accept any further sacrifice, especially since it can be of no avail."

"By giving up now you would turn all our efforts to nothing. We shall have made a failure that will remain an eternal brand."

"It will be light compared with my self condemnation when I see you die with me."

By this time Jack had seized my other hand with both of hers.

"Yo' can't go. Yo' musn't think of it. What would we do without yo'?"

"Cease trying to make a coward of me," I cried, "or I shall go mad!"

"Goody gracious, what a fool I was to go down there! Wouldn't do it again for anything."

"Stop!" cried Helen imperatively. "I own your life to dispose of as I will—I and Jack. Had it not been for me you would have bled to death when you received your wound. Had it not been for Jack you would have already been murdered by the guerrillas."

"Yes, and I am not so base as to pull my benefactors down with me. Stand aside."

"Hark!"
Jack spoke the word in her quick way, positing her head on one side to listen. She had heard a low whistle. In another moment it was repeated, seeming to come from below, where we had built our bonfire. A figure was advancing through the gloom, holding aloft a white handkerchief. I jumped from the rampart and ran down to meet this "flag," which I soon saw was borne by Captain Ringold.

"What do you want?"
"Don't let your women come into our camp again. Jaycox is back, and he and Halliday have got the upper hand. I'm powerless."

"Will your men let the women go if I give myself up?"
"No; stay with them to the last."

"One word more."
"There's no time. I have stolen away, and if I am missed and it's known where I have been I'll be a dead man."

He was gone before the last word was spoken. I returned to the fortress. "What is it?" cried Jack expectantly.

"He has lost the power to protect you. He advises me to stay with you to the last."

"Will you?"
"Yes," I replied, with a sigh.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Helen.

Another night of horror; a rising sun, flooding the face of the rocks and our wan faces with a ruddy glow. A more wretched lot of beings could not be found among castaways at sea. We had not slept during the night, for whatever of rest had come to any of us had been rather stupor than sleep. Our cheeks were sunken; our eyes, deep in their sockets, were turned toward the red orb of day, which to our fevered imaginations seemed to be advancing to strike the final blow.

A great change had come over us during the night. Jack alternated between bursts of passion and a devil may care spirit, sprinkled with humorous sallies between tears and smiles, which served to lighten momentarily the gloom for the others, but only rendered me more wretched; Buck craved food more than all the rest and after a few vain efforts to appear unconcerned took on a ghastly look that cut me to the heart; Ginger spent a great deal of his time in prayer; Helen seemed calm, yet I noticed a strange look in her eye. Up to this terrible morning she had been the mainstay of the party. Under the strain that smoldering fire which burned within her flared ominously. Turning to me, she asked harshly:

"Are you a Confederate or are you a Yankee?"
"What matters it now?"
"I came to save you, understanding you to be a Confederate."

"Would you abandon me now if you knew me to be a Union man?"

She turned away, and I saw that she was weeping. I put my arm about her and drew her head down on my breast. There she wept long and silently.

Whether she was unconscious of what she did or whether her sufferings made her careless I do not know, but as I felt her heart beating against mine I was conscious of the birth of a new love.

As the sun rose higher it beat down upon us with all the enervating heat of an unseasonable day. The water dripping back of us alone sustained and refreshed us. One by one we would go to the cliff and, standing under the cooling drops, receive them in our mouths. We envied the birds the food they bore to their nests and the freedom of those soaring far above in the limitless ocean of air. Why could we not be given wings to fly from our rocky prison? The wrecked are prone to dwell on hallucinations. So to us came sounds denoting the approach of rescuers. One would hear the tramp of armed men. Another would see the white covers of a wagon train. All day we were tortured by these fancies till at last I ceased to pay any attention to them.

"I hear horses' hoofs," said Buck.
"Oh, no, you don't, Buck," I said, laying my hand on his head.
"I tell yo' I do."

"Listen," said Helen.
We all listened, but so far as I was concerned there was no unusual sound.

"I hear them, too," said Jack.
It was singular that these two should

agree. I looked anxiously at Helen. My hearing was not especially acute. If Helen had heard, I might have thought there was something to hear. She listened a long while, but no sound came to her.

"It's gone," said Buck.
"So it is," said Jack. "I heard it; I know I did."

I turned away. It was plain to me that they had been tortured by another hallucination. Neither Buck nor Jack heard anything more, and the incident was soon forgotten, at least by Helen and by me, who had heard nothing.

We all relapsed into that dreadful waiting—waiting for the time when the fear of death would be overcome by the pang of starvation. Helen suddenly looked at me, that dangerous light which I had seen before in her eyes.

"Your enemy?" she asked.
"What enemy?"
"The one you came to Alabama to kill."

"I shall never kill him now."
"Do you mean that you abandon your revenge?" She spoke contemptuously.

"With death staring me, starting you and the others in the face—you who have wrecked yourselves in a vain attempt to save me—my private griefs sink to nothingness."

"You must be revenged." She spoke as if it were she and not I who was to be the avenger.

"I remember. You were to help me." "I will help you."
"There is no need. We are doomed."
"We shall live, and you will meet him."

"And then?"
"You will kill him."
"My poor girl, think no more of that. Let us fix our minds on gentler things; let us hope for some escape from this dreadful fate."

She sat down on the bare rock, I beside her. We both looked out upon the setting sun, tinting the mountains with ominous blood stains, like those I had seen on the evening I reached the guerrilla band. Jack was sitting holding her knees, rocking back and forth; Buck was lying on his back with his eyes shut; Ginger had finished a prayer and was rising from his knees. Suddenly the whole command started up as if touched by a current of vitality. There rang out on the still mountain air the clear tones of a bugle.

There was no hallucination about this sound. Each note cut the air with scintillating sharpness. To our ears, whetted as they were for some tidings of relief, it was like trumpet tones from heaven. It echoed and re-echoed through the mountains, each echo fainter than the last, dying softly in the far distance.

Shading my eyes with my hand, peering down toward the road, I saw through a small opening in the trees files of cavalry passing by fours. They were too far for me to distinguish whether they wore the blue or the gray, but it made no difference, either side would be welcome. Seizing a carbine, I pointed it at the sky and fired.

The bugle and my shot produced a magical effect on the guerrillas. Without waiting to gather anything but



Ginger gathered her limp body in his arms and carried her on.

their arms, every man of them darted away into the woods. They knew well what would be their fate could we open communication with the cavalry.

"Not a moment is to be lost," I cried to my command. "That bugle call was an order to halt. We must catch the soldiers before they start again."

Gathering the guns and putting half a dozen cartridges that remained in my pocket, we all left the fort that had served us so well and started down the declivity. Without the inspiration of those bugle notes we could scarcely have crawled away. Now we not only walked, but walked rapidly. Once past the flanking rocks we turned to the left, skirted the base of the hill and made straight for the road. I led, and so great was my anxiety to get the others forward that I was constantly getting ahead of them. I saw that Buck was lagging, and I started back to help him when Helen stooped, took him up in her arms and threw him over her shoulder. He kicked so vigorously at this indignity that Helen put him down, and, his fury lending him strength, he at once took the lead beside me. We hurried on, now and again looking back to make sure that we were not followed, climbing over rocks, through ravines, around projecting points, I directing the course toward the spot where I had seen the passing troopers. We had traversed half the distance when there came another bugle call. It was the order "Forward!"

I could not repress an exclamation of chagrin. I knew the guerrillas heard all we heard, and this last bugle order would probably arrest their flight and bring them back after us.

"Come!" I cried. "We are still in peril."

I dashed on for a short distance, then turned and cast a glance behind me. Helen was marching firmly. Jack was staggering. As I looked she pitched forward and fell. Before I could reach her Ginger had picked her up and, gathering her limp body in his arms, her head resting on his shoulder, carried her on. The burden, so precious to the faithful old slave, seemed to give him fresh courage, and he pushed on, though with tottering steps.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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