

# SWEET REVENGE

BY  
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"I'll relieve you presently, Glinger," I said. "Hold out as long as you can." We came to a depression, in the center of which ran a mountain stream. The descent and the ascent on the opposite side were both rocky and covered with a thick growth of low timber and difficult to pass. I glanced hastily to the right and to the left, but seeing no better passage, plunged down the declivity. Buck was now sticking to me like a leech, Helen was still behind, while a hundred yards back Glinger staggered along with Jack. I waited a moment for him to come up and then led the way into the ravine, intending to take his burden from him when we had passed the stream. Once at the creek, we waded across. In the middle Glinger stumbled and dumped his burden into the water.

The effect on Jack was marvelous. The cold water brought a reaction which, if not pleasing, was at least beneficial. She flew into a towering passion at Glinger for dropping her and when I attempted to take her up, gave me a box on the ear that made it tingle. Drizzling, she dashed up the rise in the ground, storming as she went, and gained the summit before the rest. Pushing through a level wooded space, we soon came to the road. A bugle ahead sounded the order to trot. Scarcely had its echoes died away when from the direction of the outlaws' deserted camp came a shrill whistle.

"The guerrillas!" I cried. "It is now a race between life and death."

## CHAPTER XVII. FLIGHT.

I WAS at a loss to know what I brought a body of cavalry up into the Cumberland mountains. I learned afterward that they had come from Shelbyville and were on their way to attack Bridgeport, where the Memphis and Charleston railroad crosses the Tennessee, with a view to burning the bridge. At Tracy City they had heard of a Confederate force moving on their flank to cut them off and retraced their steps. Buck and Jaqueline had really heard them going southward early in the afternoon. The bugle calls we all heard so distinctly were sounded on their way back.

"Where did you leave your horses?" I asked quickly of Helen as we hurried on.

"In a clump of trees near the road. There it is now." She pointed to a thicket.

Great was my anxiety as I ran to the place designated to know if the horses were still there. I was doomed to disappointment; they were gone. There was no time for repining over the loss. I must think out the problem of our immediate action, and that instantly. Two courses were open to us—we might follow the cavalry northward, or we could strike out toward the south. Each plan had its advantages. If we followed the cavalry, we might succeed in coming up with them, in which event we should be safe, but as they were mounted and we were not there was little hope of our overtaking them. Besides, the guerrillas would expect us to follow that course. If we pushed south, we must abandon all hope of falling in with the troopers, but would doubtless mislead the guerrillas and gain considerable time. We would also be moving toward the homes of the others of the party. I struck out southward.

"What are you going that way for?" cried Jack.

"It's the way to go."

"Well, go ahead; I'm going after the soldiers."

She turned and started northward. I seized her and, taking her in my arms, carried her along with the rest, she raining a shower of blows from her little fist upon my head. We pressed on without a word, till Jack, either tired of the situation or becoming sensible of the absurdity of her action, promised that if I would put her down she would go with us peacefully. I set her on the ground in a very disgruntled condition.

"I wish Captain Ringold were here," she muttered angrily. "He'd make you pay for that."

The road was so winding that I did not fear any one behind could see us from a distance, while, should we leave it, our progress would be very slow. I chose to take the risk of being seen and put as great a distance as possible between us and the outlaws while they supposed they were on our track in the direction of the cavalry, for I felt sure they would expect us to take that course. We had not gone far before we met a lean countryman on horseback. In a few words I told him of our situation and begged him if he met the guerrillas to mislead them. When he learned of our starving condition, he pulled a small black bottle containing whisky out of his saddle-bag. I forced every member of the party to drink and, tossing the empty bottle to the countryman, hurried on. I knew that the stimulant would avail us but a little while, then would only make matters worse. Helen walked on, showing no effect whatever from the potation. Jack danced along as if she were at a picnic party, while Buck suddenly became brave as a lion.

"Don't you think, Mr. Brandystone," he said, with difficulty getting breath enough to articulate while walking so

fast, "we'd better stop an fight 'em?"

"I think you'd better stop talking and save your breath for walking."

"Reckon we better stop," said Glinger, "an thank de Lawd fo' lettin us out o' dat trap an pray fo' dem r'illas t' git los' in de wilderness."

"We can do that while we're walking," said Helen, "and not lose any time."

"Spee' de pra'r's on de knees is no' efficacious," replied Glinger, "but mebbe we don't need 'em like we did a spell ago."

Still there was no sound in our rear. Helen asked if I did not think that keeping the road was pretty risky. I told her that I would soon give the word to take to the woods. Coming to a point where there was a turn, leaving a straight piece of road back of us, I told the rest to go on while I waited and watched. I stood casting glances back till my army reached another turn in advance, then, pressing forward, caught up with them. In this way I kept them in the road and maintained a rear watch at the same time for nearly half an hour. Then the strength of the party, which had thus far been supplied by excitement, suddenly began to droop, and I, feeling that I had used all the energy there was in them, led the way off the road into the heart of the forest. We had scarcely got into the woods when we heard a clattering of hoofs on the road. Whether they were made by the guerrillas' horses or not I did not know, but I felt sure they were. We waited till they were out of hearing, then every one sank down on the ground.

"Now, Glinger," I said, "it is a good time to give thanks."

Getting on his knees, Glinger poured out the thanks of the party in words that came as smoothly and plentifully as the waters of a running stream. I, being of that persuasion which has for its motto, "Trust in God, but keep your powder dry," and, seeing that Glinger was disposed to prolong his thanksgiving indefinitely, got up and started to find a convenient place to hide. I soon struck a little pocket formed by the coming together of several declivities and surrounded by thickets. A little tunnel passed through it, and, stooping down, I quenched a thirst that was burning me. Returning to the party, I led them to the retreat I had found for them, then left them to go in search of provisions.

It was now quite dark. I walked half a mile, when I saw the lights of Tracy City. Going to the town and selecting a house standing apart from the rest, I marched boldly up to it and knocked at the door. It was opened by a girl, the only occupant of the place, a wild-eyed creature in dingy calico, unshod, her square-cut locks tucked behind her ears. She appeared to be in a chronic state of fright and evidently thought me one of those men who were going about taking advantage of the absence of restraint induced by war to help themselves to whatever they wanted. I asked her for some food and a few cooking utensils, and when I paid her for them she was struck dumb with amazement. I returned to camp with provisions, matches, a skillet and a coffee-pot.

Glinger and Buck had gathered a little wood for the fire. At the inner extremity of the pocket we occupied was a low ledge of overhanging rock. It projected but a few feet and was about the height of little Buck from the ground. I hesitated for some time whether it would not be dangerous to light a fire and thus guide our enemies to where we were, but at last concluded to place the wood under the ledge and cover the front with boughs. Driving three stakes into the ground, I placed the wood under them and lighted it. Then, filling my coffee-pot with water from the stream and putting in my coffee, a very pleasant odor soon greeted our nostrils.

But all were too famished to wait for a cooked supper. Seizing upon some corn pone I had brought, the others devoured it eagerly. I restraining my appetite long enough to put some bacon into the skillet. One article of food after another was devoured as it was got ready, and our coffee without milk came in at the end like the last course at a dinner.

As soon as we had finished our supper we put out the fire, laid boughs where it had been and covered them with dry leaves, making a bed for the two girls and Buck. Glinger was to bivouac wherever he liked, while I pro-

ceeded to watch. Leaving the others to get to bed, I took a carbine and walked toward the road.

There was a light step behind me, and, turning, I saw Helen coming.

"Go back," I said, "and take your rest. You need all you can get."

"I wish to take half your watch."

"You shall do no such thing."

"I am strong. The supper has revived me."

"I am," I said quietly, at the same

time taking her hand, "I am in command. As a good soldier it is your duty to obey."

I led her back to the camp. As we passed hand in hand over the dead leaves and crackling twigs my heart was filled even in our peril with a supreme happiness, yet a happiness marred by the gulf between us. I longed to tell her that I loved her—for her bravery, her strength of character, her devotion, for herself—but I could not without confessing myself an enemy to all she held dear.

When we reached the camp, we stood face to face in the moonlight. It seemed as impossible to restrain the words I would utter as it was impossible to utter them. I dropped her hand and walked away to resume my watch.

From an eminence I turned and looked back. She was still standing in the moonlight. I knew that she was disappointed that I had withheld an expression of my love. What could I do? Turning again, I passed in among the trees.

All through that long night I walked with a soft tread, hearkening to the slightest sound, straining my ears whenever a breeze rustled the branches of the trees or starting when I heard some far-coated creature prowling in search of food. Yet during my watch one picture was ever present before me. All night I saw Helen standing in the moonlight, all night I brooded over the barrier that separated us. At dawn I felt that I must get some rest or I would not be able to lead the party farther. Going to the little camp and awakening Glinger, I led him out to where I had been watching and told him to keep moving back and forth a short distance from the road and in case of danger raise the alarm. Then, returning to camp, I threw myself on the ground and fell asleep.

## CHAPTER XVIII. RETAKEN.

I WAS awakened by the kick of a heavy boot and, opening my eyes, looked into the face of Tom Jaycox. The expression of fiendish joy that shone through anxious caution froze the very marrow of my bones. The muzzle of his revolver was within a few inches of my forehead, and his look told me that a word of alarm or a motion for self defense would be a signal for a bullet to go crashing through my brain.

"Get up," he whispered.

"I stood on my feet."

"Move on."

It was the dawn of a beautiful spring morning. The perfume of young verdure, the twitter of birds, an occasional cock crow in the distance, gave me the thought that it is delightful to live. But they threw over me as well a contrasting gloom, for it seemed certain that this fair scene was the last of those pictures drawn by the divinely artistic hand of the Creator that I should ever look upon. My companions were all wrapt in a heavy slumber, induced by a long period of unrest. I had a mute farewell to each as I passed, breathing a blessing on little Buck, whose arms were clasped about his sister, his young face and figure relaxed; on Jaqueline, her white face resting in a profusion of tumbled black hair; on Helen, her features strong even in sleep. There was a line between the lids of Helen's eyes, but I thought little of that, for it is not unusual for people to show this line when sleeping. I thanked God that my presence would no longer be a menace to these dear ones who had suffered so much for me.

Jaycox marched me out of the camp toward the road, across it and into a wood on the other side, where his horse was picketed to a tree. He was constantly looking about and listening, and I inferred this was for others of the gang, who had doubtless separated in order to cover more ground in their search for us. Finally the brute stood still and, pointing his revolver straight at me, fired two shots in rapid succession, the bullets slinging close to my ears. He did not intend to kill me, though he was indifferent whether he did or not. He wished to serve a double purpose of signaling the band and intimidating me. Two similar shots were fired far to the north, and then my captor started off with me in that direction.

Entering the road, we proceeded, Jaycox, some ten yards behind me, amusing himself by firing occasional shots at me, evidently trying to see how near he could come to me without hitting me. One of his bullets grazed my ear, and I felt blood trickling on my collar, good evidence that he had missed his imaginary mark on the wrong side. He was doubtless firing for his double purpose of letting his companions know of his whereabouts and of torturing me. His signals and those of my other enemies were drawing nearer and nearer together. I did not doubt that the guerrillas would prevent any further opportunity for escape by murdering me at once, though they might delay long enough to force me to sign for a ransom which would have no effect in saving me. I lost all care whether Jaycox hit me or whether I was spared for a more horrible death by the gang. At last I was face to face with the inevitable.

I was trudging on mechanically, my eyes bent on the ground, Jaycox close behind swearing and shooting at me, when suddenly a shot rang out from behind us both. I turned and saw Jaycox tumble from the saddle. Running to where he lay, I bent over him and knew at once that I looked into the face of a dying man. He gave me one malignant look, a shiver passed over him, and his eyes were set in death. I looked up and saw Helen standing in the road a short distance back with a carbine in her hands. There was something in the expression of her face, holding as she did the weapon, a light smoke curling from its muzzle, that brought vividly before me my gan-

ny with his smoking pistol on the night of the massacre. A signal shot came from around the trees so near that we knew the rest of the band would soon be upon us. Quick as thought I sprang into the saddle left vacant by Jaycox and spurred toward Helen, she darting into the wood. I following and, after penetrating far enough, both hiding behind a rock covered with brush.

A horseman came dashing down the road, pulled up beside Jaycox's body, looked around anxiously as though fearing an ambush, then hurried back whence he came.

With one impulse Helen and I sprang into each other's arms. Oh, the rapture of that embrace! I essayed to speak to her, to utter even a word, an



With his hand on his heart he bowed profoundly.

exclamation expressive of what I felt. I could only draw her cheek down against mine and mutely hold it there. Then I showered kisses on her lips, her cheeks, her forehead, her eyes. For the moment I forgot all but the reverence, the gratitude, the burning passion, that thrilled me—a passion such as comes but once, if ever, in a lifetime.

Suddenly there came to Helen a remembrance of our danger.

"Mount! Quick! All depends on putting space between you and those who will kill you the moment they get their hands on you again!"

"And leave you? Not I!"

"Oh, my God! Are you going to act that way again?"

"You have killed Jaycox and released me a second time. Do you suppose they will overlook that?"

"She became frantic at my opposition.

"You fool! You ingrate! To throw away your life when I have twice saved it!"

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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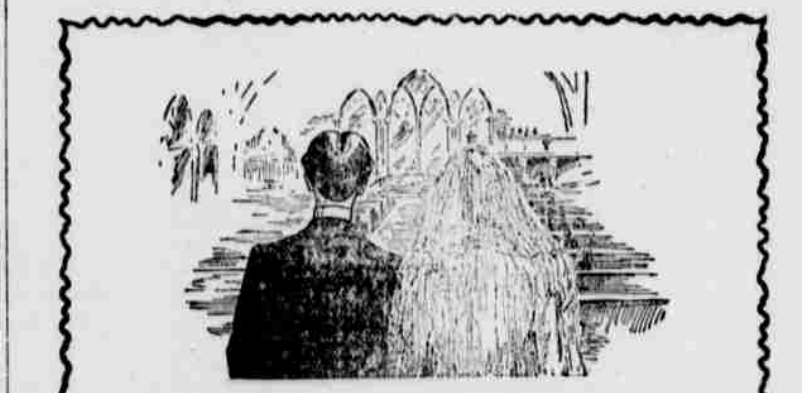
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