

SWEET REVENGE

BY
Captain F. A. MITCHEL,
Author of "Chattanooga," "Chickamauga," Etc.

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With that he belabored the poor horse's flanks with the stump of his whip and sent him galloping onward. There were no springs to the wagon, but we valued our lives too well to draw rein at rut or stone. At one part of the road I feared that if we did not check our pace we would break a wheel and be left with no means to get on save our legs. I cautioned the driver to slacken his pace; but, honing or fancying he heard the clattering of horses' hoofs behind, without a word from me he applied the lash. Now we bounded into the air and now we were tossed together like dice in a box.

"Git oop, ye critter!" cried the blacksmith, mingling Scotch and Tennessee. "Don't ye know ye're gragin' bonny luddies flyin' for their lives?" And down came the butt of the whip. It was harrowing to see a horse forced to give his life to save ours, but our situation was too critical to warrant any slackening of speed. Jack, who of all our force was usually most frightened at danger ahead and would fight it most vigorously when face to face with it, for once acted in reverse at seeing the poor brute making leaps that were killing him.

"Stop beating that horse, you brute," she cried, "or I'll beat you!" And she sprang forward to seize the whip. I caught her in my arms. She looked up into my face and burst into tears. Whether it was wholly sympathy or overstrained nerves I did not know; probably both. At any rate, I protected her from the jolting by keeping her in my arms, while she hid her face so that she could not see the suffering horse.

"Jack," said Buck, "you're nothin' but a baby."

"Shut up, ye little nigger!" she cried. I could not repress a smile at the retort, seeing which, Jack realized the absurdity of it all and broke into a laugh, while the tears continued to run down her cheeks.

"Won't ye let me support ye' against the jolting?" asked Captain Beaumont ruefully.

"Ye?" Do ye suppose I'd let ye' touch me? Ye' shot my best friend."

"Do ye dislike me fo' shooting—a robber?" asked her admirer sadly.

"I hate ye'!"

Beaumont settled down in a corner of the wagon in despondency. After awhile Jack slid down beside him, whereupon he suddenly lighted up and took as much interest in our flight as any one of the party.

We were a wild looking load to the few people who passed us. Whenever we saw a farm wagon coming or going we would about to its driver to get out of the way. They must have supposed our horse to be a runaway, for every one quickly turned aside. There are pictures of that ride which I can see today, so vividly were they stamped on my memory. An old man with his hands on the handle of his plow gaped through iron rimmed spectacles, a woman in a check gown and sunbonnet stopped trimming plants in her garden and stood with the shears in her hand to gaze at us as if we were a party of witches who had lit on the earth from the moon and were making ready to take to the sky again. Negroes, children, country lads, faced the road as we passed and stood wonder stricken till we were out of sight.

Coming to a rise in the ground where we could look to our rear for perhaps a mile, we were terror stricken to see a man shoot around a bend in the road at a gallop. In a moment another followed. We could not see if there were any more, for we passed over the summit. Not far below a milestone told us that it was one mile to Decherd.

"One mile to their two. Can we not do it, driver?" I asked quickly.

The only answer was another "Git oop!" and renewed hammering on the horse's rump. The eyes of all were strained to the rear, watching to see just what chance there was from time to time between life and death, while I examined the carabines, which we had taken care to bring with us, to discover if they were in good condition. At every rise we could see either one or more men coming like the wind. They

blacksmith to lay it on hard, well knowing that between us and our pursuers was only the life of his horse. He was raising his whip when the horse stumbled and fell, pitching most of us out of the wagon, fortunately on soft ground. Getting up and running to the prostrate animal, I found him stone dead.

We were still a quarter of a mile from the town, and the guerrillas would be on us in a jiffy. Calling to the others to help, I turned the wagon across the road and directed all to take position behind it. Distributing the guns, we waited the coming of the advance of our enemies. Three men, pretty near together, catching sight of us, drew rein and waited for their comrades. Others soon came up, and I counted seven men preparing to charge us. I was about to give an order as to the firing when I heard an exclamation from Ginger:

"Bress de Lawd!"

Turning, I saw a troop of cavalry carrying the stars and stripes riding leisurely from the town. I fired a shot to attract their attention. Suddenly they seemed to take in the situation. I heard the sharp word of command and saw them coming at a gallop. Glancing at the guerrillas, I saw them vanishing in the distance.

"Saved!" I cried.

"De bressed Lawd be 'ranked!" shouted Ginger.

"Gol darn it," said Buck, "ef I'd 'a had a shot I'd 'a plunked one of 'em!"

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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We could see either one or more men coming like the wind. They had evidently caught sight of us and were straining every nerve to catch us before we reached Decherd. I told the

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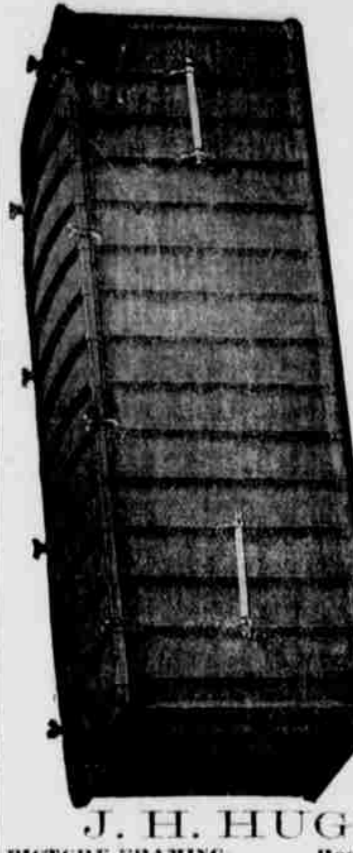
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