

My LADY of DOUBT

By RANDALL PARRISH

Author of "Love Under Fire"
"My Lady of the North," etc
Illustrations by HENRY THIEDE

COPYRIGHT A.C.M.F. CLURE & CO. 1911

SYNOPSIS.

Major Lawrence, son of Judge Lawrence of Virginia, whose wife was a Lee, is sent on a perilous mission by Gen. Washington just after the winter at Valley Forge. Disclosed in a British uniform Lawrence arrives within the enemy's lines. The Major attends a great feast and meets the "Lady of the Blended Rose" from the mob. He later meets the girl at a brilliant ball. Trouble is started over a walk, and Lawrence is urged by his partner, Mistress Mortimer (The Lady of the Blended Rose), to make his escape. Lawrence is detected as a spy by Captain Grant of the British Army, who agrees to a duel. The duel is stopped by Grant's friends and the spy makes a dash for liberty, swimming a river following a narrow escape. The Major arrives at the shop of a blacksmith, who is friendly and knows the Lady of the Blended Rose. Captain Grant and rangers search blacksmith shops in vain for the spy. Lawrence joins the minute men. Grant and his train are captured by the minute men. Lawrence is made prisoner by an Indian and two white men, who lock him in a strong cell. Peter advises Lawrence not to attempt to escape as "some one" would send for him. Grant's appearance adds mystery to the combination of circumstances. Lawrence again meets the Lady of the Blended Rose, who informs him that he is in her house, and that she was in command of the party that captured him. The captive is thrust into a dark underground chamber when Captain Grant begins a search of the premises.

CHAPTER XV.—Continued.

The silence and loneliness caused me to become restless. I could not entirely throw off the sense of being buried alive in this dismal hole. I wondered if there was any way of escape, if that secret door was not locked and unlocked only from without. A desire to ascertain led me to take candle in hand, and climb the circular staircase, examining the wall as I passed upward. The interior of the chimney revealed nothing. While I felt convinced there must also be a false fireplace on the first floor, so as to carry out the deception, the dim candle light made no revelation of its position. I could judge very nearly where it should appear, and I sounded the wall thereabout carefully both above and below without result. Nor did any noise reach me to disclose a thinness of partition.

Convinced of the solidity of the wall at this spot, I continued higher until I came to the end of the passage. To my surprise the conditions here were practically the same. Had I not entered at this point I could never have been convinced that there was an opening. From within it defied discovery, for nothing confronted my eyes but mortared stone. I was sealed in helplessly, but for the assistance of friends without; no effort on my part could ever bring release.

Yet I went over the rough surface again before retracing my steps down to the room below. All this must have taken fully an hour of time, and the strain of disappointment left me tired, as though I had done a day's work. I can hardly conceive that I slept, and yet I certainly lost consciousness, for when I awoke myself I was in pitch darkness.

I felt dazed, bewildered, but as my hand felt the edge of the table I comprehended where I was, and what had occurred. Groping about, I found flint and steel, and that last candle, which I forced into the candlestick. The tiny yellow flame was like a message from the gods. How I watched it, every nerve tingling, as it burned lower and lower. Would it last until help came, or was I destined to remain pinned up in the darkness of this ghastly grave? Why, I must have been there for hours—hours. The burning out of the candles proved that. Surely I could

thing, even her, and cursed aloud, hating the echoes of my own voice. It seemed as though those walls, that low roof, were crushing me, as if the close, foul air was suffocating. I recall tearing open the front of my shirt to gain easier breath. I walked about beating with bare hands the rough stone, muttering to myself words without meaning. The candle had burned down until barely an inch remained.

CHAPTER XVI.

The Remains of Tragedy.

It must have been the shock of this realizing suddenly how short a time remained in which I should have light which restored my senses. I know I stared at the dim yellow flicker dully at first, and then with a swift returning consciousness which spurred my brain into activity. In that instant I hated, despised myself, rebelled at my weakness. Faith in Claire Mortimer came back to me in a flood of regret. If she had failed, it was through no fault of hers, and I was no coward to lie there and rot without making a stern fight for life. When I was found, those who came upon my body would know that I died struggling, died as a man should, facing fate with a smile, with hands gripped in the contest. The resolution served—it was a spur to my pride, instantly driving away every haunting shadow of evil. Yet where should I turn? To what end should I devote my energies? It was useless to climb those stairs again. But there must be a way out.

I gripped the old musket as the only instrument at hand, and began testing the walls. Three sides I rapped, receiving the same dead, dull response. I was in the darkest corner now, beyond the stairs, still hopelessly beating the gun barrel against the stone. The dim light revealed no change in the wall formation, the same irregular expanse of rubble set in solid mortar, hardened by a century of exposure to the dry atmosphere. Then to an idle, listless blow there came a hollow, wooden sound, that caused the heart to leap into the throat. I tried again, a foot to the left, confident my ears had played me false, but this time there could be no doubt—there was an opening here back of a wooden barrier.

Half crazed by this good fortune, I caught up the inch of candle, and held it before the wall. The dim light scarcely served as an aid, so ingeniously had the door been painted in resemblance to the mortared stone. I was compelled to sound again, inch by inch, with the gun barrel before I could determine the exact dimensions of the opening. Then I could trace the slight crack where the wood was fitted, nor could I have done this but for the warping of a board. Wild with apprehension lest my light fall before the necessary work could be accomplished, I drew out the single-bladed knife from my pocket, and began widening this crack. Feverishly as I worked, this was slow of accomplishment, yet sliver by sliver the slight aperture grew, until I wedged in the gun barrel, and pried out the plank. The rush of air extinguished the candle, yet I cared nothing, for the air was fresh and pure, promising a clear passage.

God, this was luck! With new courage throbbing through my veins I groped my way back to the table after flint and steel, and relit the candle fragment, shadowing the flame with both palms as I returned to where the plank had been pressed aside. However, I found such precaution unnecessary, as there was no perceptible draft through the passage now the opening was clear for the circulation of air. There had been two planks—thick and of hard wood—composing the entrance to the tunnel, but I found it impossible to dislodge the second, and was compelled to squeeze my way through the narrow twelve-inch opening. This was a difficult task, as I was a man of some weight, but once accomplished I found myself in a contracted passageway, not to exceed three feet in width, and perhaps five from floor to roof. Here it was apparently as well preserved as when first constructed, probably a hundred years or more ago, the side walls faced with stone, the roof supported by roughly hewn oak beams. I was convinced there was no great weight of earth resting upon these, and the tunnel, which I followed without difficulty, or the discovery of any serious obstruction, for fifty feet, inclined steadily upward, until, in my judgment, it must have come within a very few feet of the surface. Here there occurred a sharp turn to the right, and the excavation advanced almost upon a level.

Knowing nothing of the conformations above, or of the location of buildings, I was obliged to press forward blindly, conserving the faint light of the candle, and praying for a free passage. It was an experience so full of nerves, the intense stillness, the bare, gray walls, cold to the touch, the beams grating my head, and the cold, dim light of earth above, that I was scarcely aware of the time passing. I was the first to reach the end of the passage, and I found the flickering remains of a candle and a few minutes' remaining when the tunnel was no more. The wood

noisy, and bits of earth, jarred by my passage, fell upon me in clouds. Altogether it was an experience I was in no desire to repeat, although I was in no actual danger for some distance. Old Mortimer had built his tunnel well, and through all the years it had held safely, except where water had soaked through, rotting the timbers. The candle was sputtering with a final effort to remain alight when I came to the first serious obstruction. I had barely time in which to mark the nature of the obstacle before the flame died in the socket, leaving me in a blackness so profound it was like a weight. For the moment I was practically paralyzed by fear, my muscles limp, my limbs trembling. Yet to endeavor to push forward was no more to be dreaded than to attempt retracing my steps. In one way there was hope; in the other none.

With groping fingers I verified the situation, as that brief glance ere the candle flared had revealed it. A beam had fallen, letting down a mass of earth, but was wedged in such a way as to leave a small opening above the floor, barely sufficient for a man to wiggle through. How far even this slight passage extended, or what worse obstruction lay hidden beyond was all conjecture. It was a mere chance in which I must risk life in hope of saving it—I might become helplessly wedged beneath the timbers, or any movement might precipitate upon me a mass of loosened earth. It was a horrid thought, the death of a burrowing rat; and I dare not let my mind dwell upon the dread possibility. Slowly, barely advancing an inch at a time, I began the venture, my hands blindly groping for the passage, the cold perspiration bathing my body. The farther I penetrated amid the debris, the greater became the terror dominating me, yet to draw back was next to impossible. The opening grew more contracted; I could scarcely force myself forward, digging fingers and toes into the hard earth floor, the obstructing timber scraping my body. It was an awful, heartrending struggle, stretched out flat like a snake in the darkness, the loose earth showering me with each movement. There was more than one support down; I had to double about to find opening; again and again I seemed to be against an unsurpassable barrier; twice I dug through a mass of fallen dirt, once for three solid feet, throwing the loosened earth either side of me, and pushing it back with my feet, thus utterly blocking all chance of retreat. Scarcely was this accomplished when another fall from above came, half burying head and shoulders, and compelling me to do the work over. The air grew foul and sluggish, but I was toiling for life, and dug at the debris madly, reckless of what might fall from above. Better to be crushed than to die of suffocation, and the very desperation with which I strove proved my salvation. For what remained of the roof held, and I struggled through into the firmer gallery beyond, faint from exhaustion, yet as quickly reviving in the fresher air. I had reached the end of the passage before I comprehended the truth. It opened in the side of a gully, coming out between the roots of a great tree.

I was a wreck in body and mind, my face streaked with earth, my hair filled with dirt, my clothing torn and disreputable. Laboring for breath, my fingers raw and bleeding, I lay there, with scarcely enough strength remaining to keep from rolling to the bottom of the ravine. For some moments I was incapable of either thought or action, every ounce of energy having been expended in that last desperate struggle. I lay panting, with eyes closed, hardly realizing that I was indeed alive. Slowly, throbbing with pain, my heart came back into regularity of beat, and my brain into command. My eyes opened, and I shuddered with horror, as I recognized that dismal opening into the side of the hill. Clinging to the tree trunk I attained my feet, still swaying from weakness, and was thus able to glance about over the edge of the bank, and gain some conception of my immediate surroundings.

It was early dawn, the eastern sky that shade of pale gray which precedes the sun, a few, white, fleecy clouds sailing high above, already tinged with red reflection. I must have been in that earth prison since the morning of the previous day; it seemed longer, yet even that expiration of time proved that those who had imprisoned me there had left me to die. God! I couldn't believe that I had not! Clear as the evidence appeared, I yet fought down the thought bitterly, creeping on hands and knees over the edge of the bank, to where I could sit on the grass, and gaze about in the growing light. The house was to the left, an apple orchard between, and a low fence enclosing a garden. I could gain but glimpses of the mansion through the intervening trees, but it was large, imposing, a square, old-fashioned house, painted white, with green shutters. It appeared deserted, and no signs of smoke ascended from the chimney. Apparently not even the servants were yet stirring. However, there was smoke showing from

the right, but I had to move before I could see the cause clearly—the smouldering remains of what must have been a large barn. I advanced in that direction, skirting the orchard, and a row of negro cabins. These were deserted, the doors open, and two of them exhibited evidences of fire. A storehouse had its door battered in, a huge timber, evidently used as a ram, lying across the threshold, and many of the boxes and barrels within had been smashed with axes. The ground all about had been trampled by horses' hoofs, and only a smouldering fragment of the stables remained.

I stared about perplexed, unable to decipher the meaning of such destruction. Surely Grant would never dare such a deed with his unarmed force. Besides Elmhurst was the property of a loyalist, and the colonel of his regiment. Not even the madness of anger would justify so wanton an act. Whatever the mystery I could never hope to solve it loitering there; the house itself would doubtless reveal the story, and I turned in that direction, skirting the fence, yet exercising care, for there might still remain defenders within, behind those green blinds, to mistake me for an enemy. I saw nothing, no sign of life, as I circled through the trees of the orchard, and came out upon the grassy plot facing the front porch. The sun was up now, and I could perceive each detail. There was a smashed window to the right, a green shutter hanging defectively by one hinge; the great front door stood wide open, and the body of a dead man lay across the threshold, a dark stain of blood extending across the porch floor.

CHAPTER XVII.

The Queen's Rangers.

A bullet had struck the hand rail, shattering one of the supports, and the broad steps were scarred and splintered. The man lay face upward, his feet inside the hallway, one side of his head crushed in. He was roughly dressed in woolen shirt and patched smallclothes, and wore gold hoop in his ears, his complexion dark enough

about me into the dismantled room, endeavoring to clear my brain and figure all this out. It was not so difficult to conceive what had occurred, every bit of evidence pointing to a single conclusion. Grant had searched the house for Eric, and discovered no signs of his presence; whatever had subsequently happened between the girl and himself, she had not felt justified in releasing me while he and his men remained. They must have departed soon after dark, well provisioned, upon their long march toward the Delaware, leaving Elmhurst unoccupied except for its mistress and her servants. The fact that neither the lady nor Peter had opened the entrance to the secret staircase would seem to show that the attack on the house must have followed swiftly. It had been a surprise, living those within no chance to seek for refuge. There had been a struggle at the front door; some of the assailants had achieved entrance through the window, and that had practically ended the affair.

But what had become of Peter? Of the girl? Who composed the attacking party? The Indian had been despatched to Valley Forge with my memoranda; probably Peter, the Irishman, and a negro or two were alone left to defend the house. As to the identity of the marauders, I had small doubt; their handiwork was too plainly revealed, and those two dead men remained as evidence. Rough as were British and Hessian forgers, they were seldom guilty of such wanton destruction as this. Besides this was the home of a prominent loyalist, protected from despoliation by high authority. The heinous work must have been accomplished by one or more bands of those "Pine Robbers" who infested Monmouth county, infamous devils, hiding in caves among sand hills, and coming forth to plunder and rob. Pretending to be Tories, their only purpose of organization was pillage. Even in the army the names of their more prominent leaders were known, such as Red Fagin, Debow, West and Carter, and many a tale of horror regarding their depredations had I heard told around the campfire.



The Body of a Dead Man Lay Across the Threshold.

for a mulatto, with hands seared and twisted. Surely the fellow was no soldier; he appeared more to me like one who had followed the sea. I stepped over his body, and glanced the length of the hall. The chandelier was shattered, the glass gleaming underfoot, the stair rail broken into jagged splinters, and a second man, shot through the eye, rested half upright propped against the lower step. He was a sandy-bearded fellow, no better dressed than the one without, but with a belt about him, containing pistol and knife. His yellow teeth protruding gave his ghastly features a fiendish look. Beyond him a pair of legs stuck out from behind the staircase, clad in long cavalry boots, and above them, barely showing, the green cloth of the Queen's Rangers. Then Grant had been here when this attack was made, for he had left some men behind to guard the body out into the hall. I might see the face—it was the man whom I had held in

These came back to memory as I gazed about those lower rooms, dreading my next discovery, half crazed to think that Claire Mortimer might be helpless in their ruthless grasp. Better death a thousand times than such a fate.

I pushed forward into the rooms of the lower floor, more than ever impressed by their original magnificence. Now, however, they were all confusion, furniture broken and flung aside, walls blacked, dishes smashed into fragments. The scene was sickening in its evidence of wanton hate. Yet I found no more bodies, or proof of further resistance. In what must have been Mistress Claire's private apartment I stood with beating heart staring about at the ruin disclosed. The large closet had been swept clean, garments dashed with knives, and left in rags; drawers turned upside down in search after jewels; the very curtains torn from the windows. It was a scene of vandalism of which words hardly alone would be sufficient to convey the horror.

PARCELS POST RATE FINDER

Indispensable to business men...
123 Liberty St. New York City

Kodak Finishing

Cheapest prices on earth by photographic specialists...
244 KING ST., CHARLESTON, S.C. CAROLINA

MONEY IN TRAPPING FURS

We tell you how and why...
P.O. BOX 100, LOUISVILLE, KY.

BOYS AND GIRLS MEN AND WOMEN

Engaged people are seldom as inquisitive as the neighbors think they are.

As a summer tonic there is no medicine that quite compares with OXIDINE. It not only builds up the system, but taken regularly, prevents Malaria. Regular or Tasteless formula at Drugists. Adv.

One-half the women in the world want to get thin; the other half want to get fat.

Burdock Liver Powder. Nature's remedy for biliousness, constipation, indigestion and all stomach diseases. A vegetable preparation, better than calomel and will not salivate. In screw top cans at 25c each. Burwell & Dunn Co., Mrs. Charlotte, N. C. Adv.

Silenced. Dr. Henry Van Dyke, the distinguished clergyman, has a neat way of silencing the censorious. At a luncheon in Princeton a certain bishop was being discussed, and a visitor said: "I don't like the bishop. He is too much of a man of the world to suit me." "Quite so," Dr. Van Dyke retorted quickly; "but which world, this or the next?"

Looking After His Bait. Daniel and Harvey, two old expert fishermen, were "still" fishing for trout in deep water, sitting with their backs together, when Daniel accidentally fell out of the boat and went down. Harvey looked back and missed his companion, who at that moment appeared on the surface, pipe still in his mouth, shaking his whiskers profusely.

Harvey—Gosh, Dan! I jest missed ye! Where ye been?
Dan—Oh, I jes' went down for ter see if me bait was all right.—Judge.



DIFFERENT MEAT. Willie—We had the preacher for dinner yesterday. Tommy—We had roast beef.

STEADY HAND. A Surgeon's Hand Should Be the Finest of All.

"For fifteen years I have suffered from insomnia, indigestion and nervousness as a result of coffee drinking," said a surgeon the other day. (Tea is equally injurious because it contains caffeine, the same drug found in coffee).

"The dyspepsia became so bad that I had to limit myself to one cup of breakfast. Even this caused me to lose my food soon after I ate it. All the attendant symptoms of indigestion, such as heart burn, palpitation, water brash, wakefulness or disturbed sleep, bad taste in the mouth, nervousness, etc., were present to such a degree as to incapacitate me for my practice as a surgeon."

"The result of leaving off coffee and drinking Postum was simply marvelous. The change was wrought forthwith, my hand steadied and my normal condition of health was restored." Name given upon request. Read the famous little book, "The Road to Wellville," in pkgs. "There's a reason." Postum now comes in concentrated, powder form, called Instant Postum. It is prepared by stirring a level teaspoonful in a cup of hot water, adding sugar to taste, and enough cream to bring the color to golden brown. Instant Postum is convenient; there's no waste, and the flavor is always uniform. Sold by grocers—50c per tin or 25c per tin. 100-cup tin, 10c. A copy of the book called "The Road to Wellville" will be sent you free on request. Postum Cereal Co., Ltd., Battle Creek, Mich.



It Seemed as Though Those Walls, That Low Roof Were Crushing Me; as if the Close, Foul Air was Suffocating.

doubt no longer this was a trick, a cowardly, cruel trick! If help had been coming it would have reached me before this. The day must have passed, and much of the night. Grant and his party would have searched away long before this on the road to Philadelphia. What could have happened, then, to prevent Peter of the mob from finding me here? Could they have been forced into accompanying the soldiers? Could they have happened here? Could they deliberately have come to die?

My brain whirled with these questions, as such questions were wont to whirled in my mind when I was alone.