



MY LADY OF THE NORTH

The Love Story of a Gray Jacket

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SYNOPSIS.

The story opens in a Confederate tent at a critical stage of the Civil War. General Imparts to Capt. Wayne an important message to Longstreet. Accompanied by Sgt. Craig, an old army scout, Wayne starts on his mission. The two, after a wild ride, get within the lines of the enemy. In the darkness, Wayne is taken for a Federal officer who came to keep an appointment, and a young lady on horseback is given in his charge. She is a northern girl and attempts to escape but fails. One of the horses succumbs and Craig goes through the dispatches, while Wayne and My Lady of the North are left alone. They seek shelter in a hut and enter it in the dark a huge man attacks Wayne. The girl shoots the brute just in time. The owner of the hut, one Jed Bungay, and his wife appear and soon a party of horsemen approach.

CHAPTER VIII.—Continued.

"Do not permit the darkness to alarm you," I whispered softly, bending down as I spoke until I could feel her quick breathing against my cheek. "Our visitors are not likely to remain longer than will be necessary to get something to eat. They need never suspect our presence, and all we have to do is to wait patiently until they move on. I only wish I could discover something upon which you might sit down."

"Pray do not think me a coward," she answered, "but I have heard of this man Lowrie in the Federal camps, and I would rather die than fall into his hands."

I had heard of him also, and of his outrageous treatment of women. The memory caused me to clasp my hand warmly over hers, and set my teeth hard.

"It may not prove to be Lowrie at all," I said soberly; "but all these gentry are pretty much alike, I fear. However, I promise that you shall never fall alive into the hands of any of their breed."

Before she could answer me other than by a slight nestling closer in the darkness, Bungay whispered: "This yere hole, Cap, leads down ter the right, an' comes out in a sort o' gully 'bout a hundred feet back. That's light 'nough ter see ter walk by 'afer ye turn the corner, 'bout twenty feet or so. You uns kin go on down that if ye'd rather, follerin' ther dogs, but I reckon as how I'll stay right yere an' sorter see how ther ol' woman comes out."

"Where, where was Roderick then?" One blast upon his bugle horn. Were worth a thousand men. If you uns like ter see a durned good fight maybe ye better stay tew—the ol' woman is plisen if she once gits her dander up."

His voice was expressive of great expectations, and I had reason to believe his faith in Maria would be justified. Before any of us, however, had time to change our positions we heard the fellows come stamping roughly into the cabin. The thin slabs which divided us scarcely muffled their loud voices.

"Well, old woman," exclaimed one in voice so gruff as to seem almost assumed, "pretending to be alone, are you, with all those dishes sitting out on the table; just been eaten off, too. Have n't seen no strange party along the road this morning, have ye?"

"Nary a one," said Maria, and I knew from her voice she was standing close beside the fireplace.

"Are you Mrs. Bungay?"

"I reckon I am, if it's any o' yer business."

"Don't git hifty, old woman, or we're liable to give you a lesson in politeness before we leave." The leader dropped the butt of his gun with a crash on the floor. "Where is the little sneak, anyhow?"

"What do you want of him?"

"Want him to go long with us; we're hunting some parties, and need a guide. They tol' us up th' road a bit he knew every inch o' these yere mountings."

There was a pause, as if Maria was endeavoring to decide as to the honesty of the speaker. Her final answer proved the mental survey had not proven satisfactory.

"Wal, I reckon," she said calmly, "as you uns 'll be more likely ter find him down 'bout Connersville."

"Then what's all these yere dirty dishes doing on the table?"

"Hed sum Yankee officers yere; they just rode on down ther trail as you uns cum up."

"Like hell!" ejaculated the fellow with complete loss of temper. "See here, old woman, we're too old birds to be caught with any such chaff. We'll take a look aroun' the old shebang anyhow, and while we're at it you put something on the table for me and my mates to eat."

The voice and manner were rough, but I was impressed with a certain accent creeping into the man's speech bespeaking education. More, in spite of an apparent effort to make it so, his dialect was not that of those mountains.

Even as he uttered these last words, throwing into them a threat more in the tone than the language, I became aware of a thin ray of light penetrating the seemingly solid wall just in front of me, and bending silently forward could dimly distinguish the elliptical head of Bungay as he applied one eye to a small opening he had industriously made between the logs.

Grasping Mrs. Brennan firmly by the hand so that we should not become separated, I crept across the intervening blackness, and reached his side.

"Holy smoke, Cap," the little man muttered in suppressed excitement, as he realized my presence, "it's a goin' ter be 'billin' hot in thar mighty soon. Maria's steam is a risin'!"

He silently made room for me, and bending down so as to bring my eye upon a level with his, I managed to gain some slight glimpse of the scene within the cabin.

Mrs. Bungay stood with her back to the fireplace, an iron skillet firmly gripped in one hand. Her face was red with indignation, and there was a look in her eyes, together with a defiant set to her chin, which promised trouble. In front of her, carelessly resting on the table, his feet dangling in the air, was a sturdy-looking fellow of forty or so, with red, straggling beard covering all the lower half of his face, and a weather-worn black hat pulled so low as almost to conceal his eyes. His attire was nondescript, as though he had patronized the junkshop of both armies. In his belt were thrust a revolver and a knife, while within easy reach of his hand a musket leaned against a chair. Two others of the party, younger men, but even more roughly dressed than their leader, were lounging between him and the door.

Bungay chuckled expectantly.

"O Lord! if they only git the ol' gal just a little more riled," he whispered hoarsely, jumping up and down on one foot in his excitement, "they'll hev ther fight of ther life!"

"Do you know the fellows?" I asked.

"Is that Red Lowrie?"

He shook his head.

"Never laid eyes on any of 'em afore, but ye bet they're no good. Reckon they're a part o' his crowd."

The man who posed as the leader of the party picked up the empty coffee-pot beside him and shook it.

"Come, now, Mrs. Bungay," he commanded, "I tell you we're hungry, so trot out some hoeecake and fill' up this pot, unless you want to reckon with Red Lowrie."

The woman stood facing him, yet never moved. I could see a red spot begin to glow in either cheek. If I had ever doubted it, I knew now that Maria possessed a temper of her own.

"You ain't no Red Lowrie," she retorted.

The fellow laughed easily.

"No more I ain't, old woman, but I reckon we ain't so durn far apart when it comes to getting what we go after. Come, honest now, where is the little white-livered cur that runs this shebang?"

Whatever Maria might venture to call her lord and master in the privacy of home, it evidently did not soothe her spirit to hear him thus spoken of by another.

"If Jed Bungay was hum," she answered fiercely, her eyes fairly blazing, "I reckon you would n't be sprawlin' on that thar table fer long."

"Wouldn't I, now? Well, old hen, we've fooled here with you about as long as I care to. Bill, go over there and put some of that bacon on to fry if she doesn't get out of the way I'll give her something to jump for." And he patted the stock of his gun.

Instinctively I drew my revolver, and pushed its black muzzle into the light under Jed's nose.

"Shall I give him a dose?" I asked eagerly.

"Not yit; O Lord, not yit!" he exclaimed, dancing from one foot to the other in excitement. "Let ther ol' gal hev a show. I reckon she's good fer ther whole three of 'em, jess they shoot."

Bill came up grinning. He evidently anticipated some fun, and as he reached out a grimy hand for the slab of bacon, took occasion to make some remark. What it was I could not hear, but I noted the quick responsive flash in the woman's eyes, and the next instant with a crash she brought the iron skillet down with all her strength on top of the fellow's head. Without even a groan he went plunging down, face foremost, in front of the fire. In another moment she was battling like a wild fury with the other two.

It was a quick, intense struggle. The man near the door chanced to be the first in, and he received a blow from the skillet that most assuredly would have crushed his skull had he not dodged; as it was it landed upon his shoulder and he reeled back sick and helpless. By this time the fellow with the red beard had closed upon her, and wrested the skillet from her hand. Struggling fiercely back and forth across the floor, Maria tripped over the body of the dead dog and fell, but as she did so her fingers grasped the red beard of her antagonist. It yielded to her hand, and bare of face, save for a dark moustache, the man stood there, panting for breath, above her. Then suddenly, almost at my very ear, a voice cried,

"Frank! Frank! I am here!"

CHAPTER IX.

In the Hands of the Enemy. In the first surprise of that unexpected joyful cry ringing at my very

ears all my senses seemed confused, and I stood motionless. Then I heard Bungay utter a smothered oath, and knew he had wheeled about in the darkness. Unable to distinguish the slightest outline of his figure, I was yet impressed with the thought that he was endeavoring to muffle the girl, to prevent her uttering a second cry. Impelled by this intuition I flung out my arm hastily, and by rare good luck it came in contact with his hand.

"None of that, you little cur!" I muttered sternly, unmindful of his efforts to break away. "No hand on her, mind you! Mrs. Brennan, what does this mean?"

She made no attempt to answer, but I could hear her now groping her way through the darkness toward the place of our entrance. Bungay detected the movement also, and made a violent effort to break loose from my grip, that he might hurry after her.

"You lit go o' me," he cried excitedly, "er, by goll, I'll use a knife. She'll give this whole thing away if she ever gits out."

For answer I hurled him backward with all my strength and sprang after the fleeing woman. But I was already too late to stop her, even had that been my intention. With strength yielded her by desperation, she thrust aside the heavy cupboard, and as the light swept in, sprang forward into the rude shed. With another bound, gathering her skirts as she ran, she was up the steps and had burst into the outer room. A moment later I also



With a Crash She Brought the Iron Skillet Down With All Her Strength.

stood in the doorway, gazing upon a scene that made my blood like fire.

The fighting had evidently ceased suddenly with her first cry. Maria stood panting in one corner, the deadly skillet again in her hand, her hair hanging in wisps down her back. Still unconscious from the blow he had received, one fellow lay outstretched on the floor, his head barely missing the hot ashes of the fireplace; while his companion nursed his bruises and scowled from a safe refuge behind the table. The unshaven faces of several others of the gang were peering curiously in through the open door. I know now I saw all this, for the picture of it is upon the retina of memory, but at the moment everything I appeared to perceive or hear occurred in the centre of the room.

The man who had posed as the leader stood there alone facing us, his expression a strange mixture of amazement and delight. He was a powerfully built man, with keen gray eyes deeply set in their sockets. His right hand rested heavily upon the hilt of a cavalry sabre, the scabbard of which was concealed beneath the folds of the long brown coat he wore. As Mrs. Brennan burst through the doorway he stepped eagerly forward, his eyes brightening, and they met with clasped hands.

"Is it possible—Edith?" he cried, as the recognition could scarcely be credited.

"Oh, Frank!" she exclaimed, eagerly, "it seems all too good to be true. How came you here?"

"Hunting after you, my fair lady. Did you suppose you could disappear as mysteriously as you did last night without my being early on the trail? Have these people injured you in any way?" And he glanced about him with a threat in his gesture.

"Oh, no, Frank," hastily; "every one has been most kind. It was a mere mistake. But how strangely you are dressed! how very rough you look!"

He laughed, but still retained his warm clasp of her hands.

"Not the pomp and circumstance of glorious war which you expected, girl?" he asked lightly. "But we have all sorts of conditions to meet down here, and soon learn in Rome to do as the Romans do."

As he finished speaking he perceived me for the first time, and his face changed instantly into cold sternness. I saw him sweep one hasty glance around, as though he suspected that I might not be alone, and his hand fell once more upon his sword hilt, in posture suggestive of readiness for action.

"Who have we here?" he asked, staring at me in amazement. "A Johnny Reb?"

"Whatever I am," I retorted, my gorge rising suddenly at his contemptuous term, and stepping out into the room before him, "I at least wear the uniform of my service and rank, and not the nondescript uniform of a guerrilla."

The scornful words stung him; I noticed the quick flush of anger in his eyes, and was not sorry.

"You are insolent, sir. Moreover, you go too far, for as it chances you are well within our lines, and we will see to what extent honor is consistent with the work of a spy. The uniform of your service, indeed!" he echoed

laid hold upon me, and dragged me off, still fighting madly, although as helpless as a child.

My opponent instantly leaped to his feet and started forward, drawing a revolver as he came. His face was deathly white from passion, and there was a look in his eyes which told me he would be restrained now by no rule of war.

"You cowardly spy!" he cried, and my ears caught the sharp click as he drew back the hammer. "Do you think I will let that blow go unavenged?"

"I assuredly trust not," I answered, gazing up at him from behind the gun muzzles with which I was yet securely pinned to the floor. "But if you are, as I am led to believe, a Federal officer, with some pretensions to being also a gentleman, and not the outlaw your clothes proclaim, you will at least permit me to stand upon my feet and face you as a man. If I am a spy, as you seem inclined to claim, there are army courts to try me; if not, then I am your equal in standing and rank, and have every right of a prisoner of war."

"This has become personal," he roared. "Your blow, as well as your connection with the forcible abduction of this young lady, whose legal protector I am, are not matters to be settled by an army court."

"Then permit me to meet you in any satisfactory way. The murder of a helpless man will scarcely clarify your honor."

I knew from the unrelenting expression upon his face that my plea was likely to prove a perfectly useless one, but before I had ended it Mrs. Brennan stood between us.

"Frank," she said calmly, "you shall not. This man is a Confederate officer; he is no spy, and during all the events of last night he has proven himself a friend rather than an enemy. Only for my sake is he here now."

Ignoring the look upon his face she turned toward me, impetuously waved aside the fellows who yet held me prostrate, and extending her hand lifted me to my feet. For an instant, as if by accident, our eyes met, and a sudden flush swept across her throat and cheeks.

"It is my turn now," she whispered softly, so softly the words did not carry beyond my own ears. Then she stood erect between us, as though in her own drawing room, and gravely presented us to each other, as if she dared either to quarrel longer in her presence.

"Major Brennan, Captain Wayne."

We bowed to each other as men salute on the duelling field. In his eyes I read an unforgiveness, a bitter personal enmity, which I returned with interest, and secretly rejoiced over.

"The lady seems to be in control at present," he said shortly, shoving back the revolver into his belt. "Nevertheless I shall do my military duty, and hold you up as a prisoner. May I inquire your full name and rank?"

"Phillip Wayne, Captain—the Virginia Cavalry, Shirley's Brigade."

"Why are you within our lines?"

"I attempted to pass through them last night with despatches, but was prevented by my desire to be of assistance to this lady."

"Indeed?" He smiled incredulously. "Your tale is quite interesting and rather romantic. I presume you yet carry the papers with you as evidence of its truth?"

"If you refer to the despatches, I do not. I sincerely trust they are already safely deposited in the hands of the one for whom they were intended."

A malignant look crept into Brennan's face, and his jaws set ominously.

"You will have to concoct a far better story than that, my friend, before you face Sheridan," he said insolently, "or you will be very apt to learn how a rope feels. He is not inclined to parley long with such fellows as you. Bin his hands, men, and take him out with you into the road."

The two soldiers grasped me instantly at the word of command. For a single moment I braced myself to resist, but even as I did so my eyes fell upon a slight opening in the wall and I caught a quick glimpse of Bungay's face, his finger to his lips. Even as I gazed in astonishment at this sudden apparition, a lighter touch rested pleadingly on my arm.

"Do not struggle any longer, Captain Wayne," spoke Mrs. Brennan's voice, gently. "I will go to General Sheridan myself, and tell him the entire story."

I bowed to her, and held out my hands to be bound.

"I yield myself your prisoner, madam," I said rationally, and not unconscious that her glance sank before mine. "I even imagine the bonds may prove not altogether unpleasant."

Brennan strode between us hastily, and with quick gesture to his men.

"Bind the fellow," he said sternly. "And mind you, sir, one word more, and they shall buck you as well. It may be valuable for you to remember that I am in command here, however I may seem to yield to the wish of Mrs. Brennan."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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TIED DOWN.
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