

COMRADES of PERIL

By
Randall Parrish

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CHAPTER XV.—Continued.

"Yes, beyond that outcropping of stone; the trail goes down there?"

"SI, senior; but if you ride down, your soldiers, they know."

"They keep guard?"

"SI, senior; just below, out of sight, yet where they can see. When I come out they were under a rock shelf to keep off the snow. Maybe they there yet."

"How many?"

"Five, senior; two white and three Sioux."

He studied the spot carefully through the leveled field glasses, and then swept them inch by inch over the snow-covered plain. He returned them to the case, and cast one more glance into the depths below.

"Very well, men," he said quietly. "We will return to the squadron."

Shanessy, with ten men, was given the cutting-out job, the major drawing up his command behind the sand hills in readiness for a swift advance.

The sergeant led his little force well to the right of where the outpost was believed to be, and finally dismounted, leaving two men in charge of the animals, while, with the others, he proceeded forward on foot. The sand hills approached much closer to the river at this point, and ridges extended out into the plain, affording them considerable protection as they cautiously advanced, seeking every possible bit of shelter. Shanessy, using the field glasses loaned him by the major, surveyed the ground carefully before venturing to lead the way, and, in this manner, the little party finally crept in behind the crest of land overlooking the valley of the Cottonwood.

It had been the plan to drop silently over the edge of the bank, and work their way along, so as to attack the outlaws from the rear, thus rendering the escape of any impossible. But once there on the ground the slope was found to be far too abrupt for this purpose, and the idea had to be abandoned. The only other procedure was to creep along under the protection of the ridge, trusting to swiftness of attack. The sergeant, however, was much more watchful of everything in front. He never glanced back, but his carbine was flung forward, cocked and ready. It was fifty yards to where the gnarled cedar protruded above the bank, but no sign of any movement greeted him until he had nearly reached that point. Then, suddenly, with no warning of any kind, a red, bloated face showed itself above the edge of the bank. The sergeant's eyes looked directly into the muzzle of the carbine.

"Stop right there, buddy!" said the sergeant sternly. "Now lads, over you go!"

They took the leap recklessly, some the steep drop alone, others finding some sort of foothold and rushing fiercely forward. The guard was taken by complete surprise, helpless most of them before they could even reach their feet or grasp their weapons. Shanessy backed his prisoner down to where the others stood sullenly, and surveyed the scene.

"Five; that's the whole bunch," he said with satisfaction. "A very good job. Now, Gates, go up there and wigwag the major."

Ten minutes later the advance files of the squadron topped the edge of the bluff and began to slowly move down the steep trail. Hays expressed his approval.

"Excellent! Well done, sergeant; got the whole outfit, I see. Have your men bring up your horses. The girls tell us we have a free road now into the valley, so we may as well start along. Quietly, men, and keep your distance. Dismount carbines! Forward!"

They moved steadily at a walk, the troopers eagerly peering ahead, yet cautiously retreating back on their mounts. There was scarcely a tinkling of accoutrements as the long column of horsemen slowly advanced down the crooked trail toward the snow-covered valley far below. Pancha, riding beside the major, led the way through the curtain to where the Cottonwood plunged over the rock precipice into the deeper gorge beyond. To her uplifted hand of warning the column halted. The major stepped forward to explain the situation ahead.

"Set in vera steep grade," she said. "An sharp turn at the bottom, where the trail runs under the falls. On the other side is a log house, and they always keep a guard there, senior."

"And beyond?"

"The valley is open."

He tried to see through the snow squalls, but with little success.

"How heavy is the guard?"

"That I cannot tell, senior. There were but two men there, when I come out. But the log hut is a saloon, and many may be there now. Bet is best to use utmost caution."

"No one is likely to be out there, and that?"

"Not on watch—no, some one might be passing out; they come and go."

"Of course, we run that risk. The falling water makes noise enough to prevent our being heard, yet if they may be beat to use a scouting party. The only way we can trap those fellows into a fight is through a surprise. If they become alarmed they'll scatter and find a way out before we can strike. Blow, then, that your idea, captain?"

"Yes, sir; we've got to get in behind and cut them off."

"I presume there is a back door to this hole, somewhere, senior?"

"Yes, senior; way down yonder, but set can only be made on foot."

"Then we've got the villains. If we only move secretly enough. Take a dozen men, and come along with me, captain. Dismount them. Senorita, if we'll be best for you to show us the way."

They disappeared into the curtain of falling snow, and cautiously advanced beneath the veil of overhanging water. The outlines of the hills could be plainly discerned, the storm suddenly ceasing. The door stood open, smoke arose from the chimney, but no one was visible outside. The dull glow of an inspiring fire appeared on the ground in front, but no guard was squatted about it. Evidently the fellows had retired to shelter. The major grasped all this in a glance, but what interested him most was the sound of steady firing some distance away.

"They have either all gone inside," he whispered to Pancha, crouching beside him, "out of the storm, or else they are over there where the fighting is. You hear those rifles?"

"Yes, senior."

"You don't suppose some other outfit had got in here ahead of us, do you?" he asked anxiously.

"No, senior."

"Get it not that. I know; they light up the canyon. Listen, set is over here the sound. They try to capture Senior Shelby; if we go quick we save them; we wait, maybe all be dead. Now we get all in the rocks, so none get away."

"I see." He looked at her keenly; then stepped back to where the men were clustered. "Captain, scatter these lads out about that house, after the snow quickly, and see that no one gets away. Stiles, run back and have the squadron move forward. Bring up your horses."

The men dashed forward in a half-circle, the major, with Pancha at his shoulder advancing close behind them, his objective the open door. No sooner had they broken cover than the alarm sounded: a muffled voice yelled excitedly: a rifle or two cracked; a snarl came from the darkness, and a hand on his face, and lay still. Then white and red surged crowding through the door, surprised, trampled, crazy to escape. Only one among them dared the venture in face of those leveled carbines. A tall, gaunt white renegade, with red whiskers, and one arm in a sling, his unadorned hand gripping a revolver, leaped from the front step in a reckless endeavor to get out of sight around the corner of the cabin. The major thing up his arm and fired, the thing whirling about in his stride and stumbling as he fell. He got upon one knee again, and he "45" spoke twice viciously before a trooper sent a bullet crashing into his brain. Hays felt the tip of lead pierce his face, but stood erect, unharmed. Behind him Pancha uttered a startled cry, and sank slowly into the snow. The sergeant backed and caught her, holding her head up on his knee, his eyes fixed on hers.

"Don't, Tom, don't," she begged. "Merciful heaven; you are all blood. Look out there! A whole squadron!"

He held up the flap of skin, and stared where she pointed. Across the white snow, covering the valley below, riding stirrup to stirrup in a wild charge, two lines of cavalry were sweeping straight toward the foot of the bluff. He knew what they were at a glance; their lines cloudy even at a gallop, the spurting of hoofs in front, the glitter of carbines, the silence, left no doubt. No Indians rode like that. He watched them, grasping her tightly to him, not scarcely able to speak. Once only, he gave utterance.

"My God! See those fellows ride!"

"They are soldiers!"

"Yes, yes. Good Lord, hesie, but that looks like old Hays leading 'em!"

"The Sixth; the Sixth—a squadron of the Sixth!"

He staggered to his knees, but still held himself up, peering over the coping. She knelt beside him, half supporting him against her shoulder. The charging horsemen swept in out of sight below, but they could hear them crash through the underbrush, and splash their way across the stream. Then there echoed up to them the ringing cheer of white voices, and the dull bang of the carbines.

How they made that ascent it was doubtful if a trooper knows; but they did, creeping from rock to rock, dragging themselves along gullies, hauling their bodies up by sheer strength of arm, springing from point to point—inch by inch, foot by foot, fighting as they advanced, flung at every snarl, leaping in their front, striking, preying, leaping across chasms, clinging desperately to every rock or shrub, their carbines spitting viciously, eager only to get at land's grips with the foe. Hays, Shelby, and Olga caught glimpses of, toiling figures, of leaping jets of flame, of fierce struggles hand to hand, of Indians seeking to escape. Sharp voices uttered: "Bring the carbine, I'd a dead soldier hanging down, over the edge of a rock; another, a bleeding arm in the shelter of a cedar. But

Now we're going to strike in, and—n—m, if I care if you never take a prisoner. Good! Give me my horse. All ready! Bugler, sound the charge!"

They started on a walk, then a trot, spreading out onto long, double line, as they swung into the more open valley, riding knee to knee, the men bending forward in their stirrups, with their hands grasping the reins, the right gripping the short carbines. A hundred yards and they were at the gallop, a blue torrent, at the heels of their leader: tearing through the underbrush, spurting recklessly into and over the creek, dishing up the other bank to the very foot of the bluff beyond. It was then the major saw the uselessness of it. He whirled with uplifted sub.

"Right on foot! Horseholders to the rear. Come on, lads!" he shouted, his voice pealing above even the thud of hoofs. "Get up there some way, you terriers, and give those red devils hell!"

They came forward at a run, yelling as they came, and leaped in among the rocks, their carbines beginning to spit as they clambered upward. Overhead were skurrying figures, and spirits of black smoke, as the Indian riders made answer.

CHAPTER XVI.

The Rock Platform.

Shelby had no time to think, or to even comprehend clearly what confronted him. There was a second in which he rammed a handful of cartridges into his empty gun; and then they were on him, a dozen Indians swarming up the face of the rock, and clutching for a hold on the parapet. He fired blindly at night into their faces, aware that another revolver cracked close beside his ear, yet with no opportunity to give another shot. He saw assailants' pale bodies, clashing fingers, his hold, rifles flung high in air, and roll down the slope. Savage yells blended into cries of death agony. He felt the clip of a ball in his shoulder and staggered back from the blow; a tomahawk grazed his wrist, and the quick slash of a knife ripped open a leg of his trousers. Red stain, discolored the opening. He had glimpse of there, infuriated faces, of waving scalplocks, of naked chests and arms. Fingers clutched at him, and he kicked himself free. Both guns empty, he battered away with the butt, smothering at every face he saw, no desire left but to kill, before he also was dragged down. He knew nothing of Olga, where she was, why, it was doing—only he realized that he must get out there, and fight till they cut him; she would keep the spot; she had pledged that.

And the devils made it, creeping far out over the cliff, and drawing themselves away round the top of the bluff. One fell, going down with a howl of terror; a second was struck by a speeding bullet, dead ere he went whirling back into the air—but the third made it, crawling forward on his narrow platform, with others surging behind, knives gripped in their teeth. Shelby buried his empty pistol into the face of the one next before the fellow could attack his knees and grasped a discarded rifle, clutching it over the stone coping. With one bound he was at the edge swinging this weapon as a woodsman might an axe, driving the iron stock against every head that appeared. He carried back to earth, half blinded by a wound over his eye, aware only that the front of the rock was swept clear, that not a savage was left for him to strike at. She touched him, and he whirled, thinking it another enemy.

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the unhurt came on. Some among them had stumbled onto the trail, for soon a squad appeared just below. They stopped and turned over the body of Land, so as to see the man's face; then tramped off vand, paying no heed to the dead in laus. Shelby recognized the major at first, and, anise to his feet with lightning, supporting himself with a arm about Olga's shoulder. The major was panting from the exertion of the climb, never glancing up until brought to a halt by the rock, his face filled with the dead bodies of savages.

"Good God! look here," he exclaimed excitedly. "Those devils were paying the price!" he choked and coughed. "What! that sort of thing would make me getting old, sergeant, yet, by Jove! I passed the test two weeks ago." He cast his eyes upward, and saw the two standing just above him.

"Hullo, Shelby, we are here in time, then. Some good fighting, my boy. There, a couple of you, give me a lift. I'll never make it alone."

He was hoisted over the stone coping, instantly straightening up and warmly grasping Shelby's outstretched hand.

"Not badly hurt, I judge, lad?"

"No, sir; clipped here and there is all, and have lost some blood."

"Mighty glad of that. By God, you are an hero to the rescue!" He turned about, and stared down the

bluff, his eyes brightening with appreciation. "Talk about everlast Alpinist clings; those fellows of mine could give pointers to a mountain goat. Just look at them come up there. By the way, Shelby, we've got a surgeon back somewhere. If you don't need him yourself, you've got a wounded man here, I understand."

"No, sir; his name was Mackin, and he's dead. He died before the fight began. Who told you?"

"A little Mexican girl; seemed to think a lot of the fellow. Meeting up with her is what brought us in here."

"Pancha—yes; where is she?"

"The major removed his hat hurriedly. 'I am sorry to say she got hurt—yonder by the waterfall.'"

"Hurt! Not killed?"

"Yes, instantly."

Shelby drew a long breath, and his eyes and those of his wife met.

"She is happier that way, Tom," she said understandingly. "Now she will never know. I dreamed so to tell her."

Hays caught the words, his eyes seeking the speaker's face.

"Who was the man?" he asked shortly. "One of the outfit?"

"Yes; in no way wrong."

"I thought likely; and you, I take it, madam, you are Tom Shelby's wife?"

"Yes," she answered quietly, her clasp tightening on her husband's arm. "I am, and also Colonel Carlyn's daughter. We both belong to the Sixth."

"Carlyn's daughter! Great Scott! Do you actually mean that? Do you know they have been hunting you from one end of the border to the other? There was a hunter in my squad like a week ago. He was looking for you, and had become of Sergeant Catkins. Lord, I didn't know."

"It is true, then, that I am wanted?"

"They were trying to send your trail for you. The hunter told me money down East which was left to your mother; let's see, she was a—"

"Churchill."

"That's it. The first thing you better do, young woman, is to take a trip to old Virginia."

She smiled, a wistful look in the depths of her eyes, as they sought the face of her husband.

"It is just as Tom says," she answered quietly. "I am very content now."

"The firing had ceased, and soldiers crowded the trail below; the play was ended."

[THE END.]

Poesy.

Poesy is a beautiful damsel, chaste, haughty, discreet, witty, retired, and who keeps herself within the limits of propriety. She is a friend of solitude; conversation, external, her meadows; fountain, her woods; from autumn, flowers delight her; in short, she gives pleasure and instruction to all with whom she commensal cates.—Cervantes.

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"What makes you think so?"

"I understand she wouldn't even leave them to get married."

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Mrs. Fred Stollaker, 100 W. Larch St., Lansing, Mich., says: "My back was lame and my kidneys were weak. The pains in my back and kidneys were severe. I had severe pains in the top of my head and was tired and had no ambition. I used two boxes of Doan's Kidney Pills. They cured me and I felt like a different person."

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Great British Soldier Somewhat Out of His Element When It Came to Chaplains.

But at That, Old Gentleman Had Equipped Coffin for the Dressing of the River.

Here is a Lord Kitchener story, told by the anonymous author of "The Miracles of Downing Street." Kitchener was a soldier and absorbed in his profession. Details outside of his ruling passion annoyed him.

During the early days of the war Lloyd George went to him at the war office and asked the appointment of denominational chaplains for the various sectors of the army.

Kitchener had no interest in chaplains. He regarded them as a negligible factor in the fighting machine. He opposed the appointments. Lloyd George insisted, especially with respect to Presbyterianism. Kitchener finally yielded and picked up his pen.

"Very well," he said, "you shall have a Presbyterian." Then a faint smile lighted his serious face. "Let me see, Presbyterian—how do you spell that?"

No Room for the Incompetent.

Much of the work done in this world has to be undone. Incompetency is the greatest drawback to progress. Incompetents are the most costly members of society, and always will be. That's why there is always a premium on brains and skill, which combine to produce efficiency.—Exchange.

Wedding Ring Finger.

When a woman may be shoe wedding rings, the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer says: "The priest taking the ring, shall deliver it to the man to put on the fourth finger of the woman's left hand."

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Down the Crooked Trail.

starting down into her white, upturned face. She breathed once—that was all; never spoke, never moved, except for the slight tremor of her slender form in his arms. The major laid her softly down, his own face drawn and white with sudden passion, and strode across to where the slain outlaw lay in a huddled heap. An instant he looked down at the brutal face, obliquely to all else.

"D—n you," he muttered in useless rage. "I wish I'd killed you."

Then he turned suddenly, the spirit of the soldier in the ascendancy.

"Deploy your men, Captain Giles," he commanded, his voice loud and clear. "Bring the carbine, I'd a dead soldier hanging down, over the edge of a rock; another, a bleeding arm in the shelter of a cedar. But

fighting those devils over yonder.