

THE BATTLE-CRY

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SYNOPSIS.

Juanita Holland, a Philadelphia young woman of wealth, on her journey with her guide, Good Anse Talbott, into the Cumberlands to become a member of the mountain chieftain, faints at the door of Fletcher McNaish, a hunter who is overhauling a cave. While resting there she overhears a talk between the hunter and a man who is a friend of hers, and she is so attracted to him that she attempts to kill him but is slain by the hunters.

CHAPTER VI.

When, just before sunset yesterday afternoon, a verdict of acquittal for Cal Douglas had come from the jury room, the town of Peril had once more held its breath and doors had closed and the streets had cleared of such as wished to remain noncommittal. But Cal Douglas had come from the jury room, the town of Peril had once more held its breath and doors had closed and the streets had cleared of such as wished to remain noncommittal.

As for Cal Douglas, he reserved any enthusiasm his vindication may have brought to his heart until he was back again in the depths of the hills. He and his kinsmen turned their horses by a shorter and steeper trail to the house where the dance was going forward with shuffling and judding and passing of the jug.

When Milt McBrier and his fellows started home an informer or two from the Haves kept them in view, themselves unassuming until they passed through the gap and started down the other side of the ridge into their own domain.

That they were being so watched was known to the McBriers or assumed by them. But a picked squad on fresh mounts was waiting over there in a place where the road ran deep through the forest and laurel, and this squad was equipped with repeating rifles. Milt McBrier himself did not go with them. He had made all his arrangements in advance, and it was not seemly that the chief should take a personal part in an execution which he had decreed.

"Let me hear the news, boys," Old Milt had said with a wave of his hand, and then he had ridden on stolidly toward his own domain.

The house where the dance was being held stood between the knees of two hills.

Near midnight a half-dozen men who had not been obliterated trail fully over an almost obliterated trail

which wound blindly through the hills at the back of the place and

rounded hollow a half-mile from the house. Other horses and mules were hitched all along the country road, but they belonged to the legitimate

As the half-dozen men, whose arrival had been so cautiously accomplished, began slipping down, each holding his own course in the cover of the laurel, there was nothing to indicate that any warning had gone ahead of them.

From the houses with their yellow windows and their open doors came no note of apprehension—no intimation of suspicion. A medley of voices, now and then a laugh, a din of scraping feet, and the whistle and boom of sledges gave out a careless chorus to the night.

Slowly, with an adept craft that hardly broke a twig, underfoot, three hardy braves of the new arrivals

They went crouched low, holding to the shadows with rifles thrust out

ahead and faces almost smiling in their grim forebodings of success. In a few moments they would have before them the doors and windows as lighted targets. Then whoever saw Cal Douglas would crouch forebodingly, and the error of the jury would be rectified. The others would follow with a volley at random for good measure.

It was almost too easy. It seemed a shame to snatch a fall and red robe from a man of such scant effort.

Then, as the foremost figure, crouching in easy range of a window, perceived himself on one knee and poured forth words under his upturned hat-brim, he caught the reports of several rifles that were not the rifles of the McBrier squad, and they came not from the hills in front, but from the laurel at the back. The broke from directly between the carefully picked squad and its horses.

The man who had braced his knee and cocked his rifle gave out a brief, guttural sound as an oath as he killed a man in a hemorrhage of the throat, and pitched forward on his face. After that the figure lay without stirring, its own blood reddening the rifle with trigger-guard pressed against its forehead.

The doors vomited men. There was a trailing and ragged outburst of fire, and many dark figures passed here and there across the laurel. Of the six men who had crept down, three had lain within one hundred yards of the house when the shot came from the side, ready to bring up the horses as close as might prove safe when the moment came for flight. But they, too, found themselves cut off. Had the shot fired on the other side of the ridge, there would have been more deaths than the single one. His colleagues would then have been, like himself, covering their respective victims, covering them confidently themselves executioners. But as it was, they had not quite yet worked themselves into position.

Then the other who fired first knew this, for he had heard the perfectly imitated quaver of "scritch-owls" which was to signify a common readiness. But as he had been looking beyond him, and had seen the figure of Cal Douglas pause at the lighted window. He knew that long. So the others had to fire blindly through the black undergrowth at speeding shadows—and they missed.

The fleeing murder squad melted back into the black timber, and some of them, signaling with the call of frog and owl, came together in temporary safety. They dared not go to their own horses, since they might be discovered in the effort. The road that led into the McBrier country would be watched. If they were to carry away unpunctured skins they must flee the other way—into the line of the moonlight.

It was every man for himself, and they had not paused to count noses. They hurriedly swung themselves into saddles at the rear of the line of hunched counts and galloped pell-mell down the road toward the cabin of Fletcher McNaish.

When the theft of the horses was discovered Anse Hayest sent parties to ride the roads in both directions.

It had seemed to Hayest wiser to withhold his warning from all save those whom he needed to use. To all the rest the affair had come without notice, and the hue and cry which followed the ride-escape was genuine in its excitement.

But in a very few moments the pandemonium fell away and sullenness supplanted the shouting. The mountains behind, where several men were stealthily seeking escape and many others were talking them, lay silent in the moonlight.

Some hundred yards beyond the window a small and ineffectual knot of men gathered around a figure that had hunched forward, a figure that had been the face of a boy of twenty, now a face of a man of thirty.

They should not suffer in such grotesque attitude. The face, with the yellow lantern-light shining on it, was the face of a boy of twenty, now a face of a man of thirty. They should not suffer in such grotesque attitude. The face, with the yellow lantern-light shining on it, was the face of a boy of twenty, now a face of a man of thirty.

He was tall, and under his faded coat his rather lean figure fell into an attitude of well-muscled strength despite his fulness of years.

"Evening, mornin'," said the newcomer. "No, I ain't agoin' ter light. I just heard that Brother Talbott was a-comin' over by air, and I wanted speech with him."

They over got back, a narrative of frustrated effort. They were bitterly angry and proportionately desperate. So, as they clattered along the empty road, meeting no enemy whom they could shoot down in appeasement of their wrath, they satisfied themselves with raising their war cry for the benefit of the sleeping cabin.

A little distance beyond Fletcher McNaish's place lay a cross-trail by which they might find a circuitous way back over the ridge, but it was too steep and broken to ride. They could make better time on foot over the "roughs," so there they abandoned their mounts and plunged into the timber. When the pursuers came up with the discarded horses they realized that the effort in the nighttime would be bootless. Yet, since the heavy flanks and paunching nostrils of the horses testified that they had been only a few minutes late, they took a chance and plunged into the thicket.

There a single defiant shot, sent from a long way up the hillside, was their only challenge. And their volley of reply, fired at the flash, was merely a retort of hatred. But even in the isolation of the hills certain news travels on wings, and the morning would find every cabin dweller wearing a face of grim and sullen realization. The phrase which Fletcher McNaish had whispered to his boy would travel to the headquarters of every fork, and the faces of the women would wear the drawn misery of anxiety for their men.

CHAPTER VII.

It was this newly charged atmosphere that Juanita Holland and her missionary guide rode in the morning mists.

Good Anse Talbott was in many ways an inadequate ally. He was both narrow and illiterate, but he was earnest.

At last the girl rode resolutely up to her cousin's saddle-shirts and said to Brother Talbott, hadn't you better tell me what it all means?"

The missionary lifted a face that was almost haggard.

"Hit means," he said, with no idea of irreverence, "that Satan's got both unbrims—an' God help this country."

Then he sketched for her the history of the feud and deduced conclusions from what they had both seen and heard.

She listened with a sickening heart until he changed the subject and told her that the Widow Everson, with whom she was to stop, had a stable house where she would be comfortable.

At last the girl saw, still a long way off, a fertile little valley, where the scattered houses. There, like a thing, on a high level near which the wall of mountain broke into a broad gateway, she could make out a house. It was not of logs, but of brick, and stood in an inclosure that looked more like the Blue Grass than the mountains.

"Does ye see yon brick house nigh ter gap? That's Bad Anse's place, over that across ter ridge, three mile away by crows-flight, an' a half-day's ride by yer foot, is whar Milt McBrier dwells. Ye kain't see hit from hyar."

It was almost sundown when they reached the house of the Widow Everson, and at sight of the woman standing at the fence to meet them Juanita's heart took strength from the fact that she was not of logs, but of underboards, with gayly painted window and door frames of red, and although two days ago she would have called it mean, she had revised her views sufficiently to regard it now as almost magnificent.

The widow dwelt here with her two sons, and the trio, by virtue of great diplomacy, had succeeded in maintaining a neutrality throughout the strife. The comforts of the place were such as must serve to give contentment where teaming is arduous and the mail carrier comes twice a week, but the soul dwelt there and homely cheer of a sort.

Before they had yet entered the house the girl saw a horseman approaching with an escort of several men who carried rifles balanced across their pommels. They came from the east, and though Juanita did not know who they were, she recognized the central rider, himself unarmed, to be a person of consequence.

He was tall, and under his faded coat his rather lean figure fell into an attitude of well-muscled strength despite his fulness of years.

"Evening, mornin'," said the newcomer. "No, I ain't agoin' ter light. I just heard that Brother Talbott was a-comin' over by air, and I wanted speech with him."

The missionary nodded.

"All right, Milt," he said, and the girl knew, as she had already suspected, that there was a second of her chief enemies.

"I reckon ye all knows whar he's been last night," he heard him say slowly. "Hit war a pity, an' I

ebbside, and had he stretched out his arms, she would have shaken her head wearily on abstract resolves and come into their embrace. But he was not there.

In the quiet conversation of the Widow Everson and her sons Juanita found so much of the amusing that she had to school herself against too great an appreciation of their utterly unintentional humor. Though she was a "fetched-on woman" to be taken on probation, it was only a matter of hours before the family captivated, as people in general had a fashion of doing under the spell of her graciousness and charm. Jerry Everson, whom men accounted surly, for the first time in years brushed his shapely hat and remembered not to "hang it on the floor," and Simon Everson, who hid his misty woods at dawn and brought home squirrels for her first breakfast in his house.

In the forenoon of her first day she left the house and, crossing the shy garden where the weeds were already growing tall and rank enough to hint of future ragged victory, she made her way by a narrow trail that led to the crest of the ridge.

Juanita was steering her course for a patriarchal poplar that sat a straight shaft heavenward at the rim of the crest, opening its verdant arms in great fan unfolded on a mighty parterre. She knew that up there she could look two ways across the divide, and that her battleground would be spread before her.

She looked to the east, and line after line of hills melted into the sky. She looked to the west, and there, too, she rose, phalanx on phalanx, to dissolve in a smoky haze that faded from sunrise to sunset, and so, as far as the locked-in life of their people went, they might.

She stood there a long while, and finally she saw, where for a space the road ran near the brick house, a straggling little cottage. At its front rode a stooped old man in whom, even at that far distance, she thought she recognized the missionary. Behind him came a few horsemen riding in two squads, and between the squads rode "jolt-wagons" drawn by mules.

She knew that the Haves were bringing back to the frontier the enemy's dead, and she shuddered at the cold reality.

It may have been three hours later that Good Anse Talbott rode up to the Widow Everson's. When the girl, who had returned long ago from the crest, came out to meet him at the door she found him talking there with Milt McBrier, who had also ridden up, but from the other direction.

"Anse Hayest 'lows," the preacher began, "that he's done fetched home the body of Little Nash Watt, an' that ther boy was shot ter death a layin' in ther lair a hundred paces from the winder whar Cal Douglas was a standin'."

"I've done already acknowledged that," declared Milt in a voice into which crept a trace of truculent silliness.

The missionary nodded. "I hain't quite through yet, Milt," he went on evenly, and the girl who stood leaning against the door-frame, caught for an instant a sparkle of zeal earnestness in his weary eyes.

"As he willin' ter take yore hand on this truce. He's willin' ter stand pledge that ther Haves keeps faith. But I'm a preacher of the Gospel of God, Milt, and I don't low ter be no go-between without both of yon men does keep faith."

Milt McBrier stiffened resentfully, and his dark brows drew together under his hat brim.

"Does ye doubt that I'll do what I says?" he inquired in a voice too soft for sincerity.

The missionary did not drop his steady and compelling eyes from the gaze direct. It was as if he were reading through the pupils of the other and searching the dark heart.

"I ains ter see that ye both starts out fair, Milt," he said, still quietly. "An' that that and I ains ter admonish ye both on ther terms of this meetin' between ye."

For an instant Milt McBrier's semblance of calm reflectiveness slipped from him and his voice rose rapidly.

Good Anse Talbott shook his head patiently.

"No," he told Anse ther same thing. "I'm stillin' you. Neither Anse ner ther four men that fetches ther body will hev any sort of weapon about 'em when they come ter ther stillin'."

"Ye've got ter give me yore hand that ye're a servant of ther Most High God." For an instant he blazed in the preacher's eyes, and his voice mounted with fervor. "Fer years I've moun't sought ter teach his grace an' his hatred of murder ter ther people of these hyar hills. When yon two men shakes hands on this truce I ains ter be steady 'n' with a rifle-gun in my hands, an' ef I sees anything crooked I'm goin' ter use hit."

The dark giant stood for a time silent, then he gravely nodded his head.

"Them terms ains me," he said briefly.

The two men walked down to the fence and separated there, going in opposite directions.

A few minutes later Juanita, still standing fascinatedly in the doorway, was looking out across the shoulder of the missionary. He presided at the threshold with grave eyes, and even after the several years, there was something of familiar careen in his way his brown hand lay on his rifle.

lock. Then the girl saw a strange and primitive rehabilitation of treaty.

On either side of the little porch stood a group of solemn men, mostly bearded, mostly cloaked, and all armed. In front of those, at the right stood Anse Hayest, his eyes set on the dominant feature of the picture.

Over across from him was the taller and older chieftain of the other clan. They stood there gravely, with courtesy that cloaked their hatred. Out in the road was the "jolt-wagon," and in its deep bed the girl could see the canvas that covered its burden.

As Bad Anse took his place at the front of his escort his gaze met that of Juanita. He did not speak, but for an instant she saw his face harden, his eyes narrow, and his lips set themselves. It was the glance of one who has been lashed across the face and who cannot strike back, but who will not soon forget.

This time the girl's eyes did not drop, and certainly they held no hint of relenting or plea for forgiveness.

But at that moment the head of the Haves turned from her and began speaking.

"I got yore message, Milt," he said casually. "An' I reckon yon got my answer, I've brought back Little Nash."

"I'm obliged ter ye," the McBrier paused, then volunteered: "Ef ther boy had took counsel of me, this thing wouldn't never hev happened."

Bad Anse Hayest stood looking at the other, then he nodded.

"Milt," he earnestly announced at the end of his scrutiny, while the ghost of an ironical smile glinted in his eyes, though it left his lips grave. "I've got several horses an' mules down ther in my barn that we found hitched out in ther timber when Nash an' his friends took to the lair."

Again he paused and studied the faces of the McBrier men before he went on. "One of 'em is yon own roan mare, Milt. One of 'em belongs ter Sam ther, an' one is Bob's char."

He pointed out each man as he spoke. "Ye can get 'em any time ye send down for 'em."

The girl caught her breath and, despite her dislike, acknowledged the cool insolence with which Anse had answered Milt's plea of innocence. Milt replied only with a scowl, so Anse contemptuously continued, as though to himself:

"Hit's right smart play for a feller to go out shootin' in the night-time an' to take a kinsman's horse—with an' takin' his counsel. It might lead to some misanderstandin'."

A baleful glare flashed deep in the eyes of the taller man, and from the benches at his back came an uneasy shuffle of brogans.

But the voice of Good Anse Talbott relieved the tension.

"Stiddy, ther men," he quietly cautioned. "Ye didn't hardly meet ter talk bout horses. I'll lead them nags back myse, Milt."

Then Anse Hayest stepped forward and held out his hand.

"I gives ye my hand, Milt McBrier," he said, "that ther truce goes on."

"An' I gives ye mine," rejoined the other.

After a perfunctory shake the two turned together and went down the

steps. The girl saw both squads lifting the covered burden from the wagon and carrying it around the road, where the other wagon waited. She believed that the wage was ended, but it is doubtful if either of the principals whose hands had joined parted with grave trust in the integrity of the other's intentions. It is certain that one of them at least was already making plans for the future, not at all in accordance with that compact of peace.

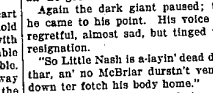
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Hayes for Dear.

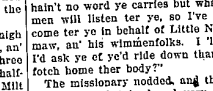
Winters when the snow is deep for long stretches of time deer congregate in yards in the Adirondacks and many of the weaker ones die of starvation. Their skeletons may be found in vast parts of the great wilderness when the snows are gone. This year game protectors have been cutting tons of marsh hay on the beaver meadows in the remote sections of the Adirondack and stacking it in sheltered places to be fed to the deer next winter when the snow is so deep that other food is not obtainable. The conservation commission believes that it will save the lives of hundreds of deer that otherwise would perish. The stacks have been encircled with barbed wire and liberally salted. Deer will trample marsh hay unless it is so crusted.



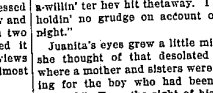
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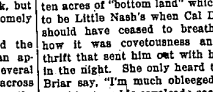
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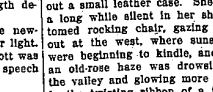
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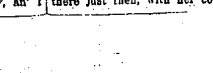
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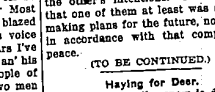
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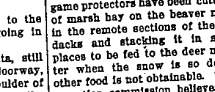
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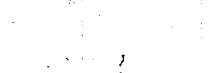
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