

When he returned from his rounds his friend was sleeping, but uneasily, with sudden fits and starts.

"He is surely going to have a fever," Graham muttered. "I'd give half a year's pay if we were safe back in camp." He stood before the fire with folded arms, watching his boyhood's friend, his gigantic shadow stretching away into the obscurity as unwaveringly as those of the tree trunks around him. His lips were compressed. He sought to make his will as inflexible as his form. He would not think of Grace, of danger to her and Hilland; and yet, by some horrible necromancy of the hour and place, the scene in Hilland's dream would rise before him with a vividness that was overawing. In the sighing of the wind he seemed to hear the poor wife's moans.

"Oh," he muttered, "would I could die a thousand deaths to prevent a scene like that!"

When would the interminable night pass? At last he looked at his watch, and saw that the dawn could not be far distant. How still everything had become! The men were in their deepest slumber. Even the wind had died out, and the silence was to his overwrought mind like the hush of expectancy.

This silence was at last broken by a shot on the road leading to the west. Other shots followed in quick succession.

Hilland was on his feet instantly. "We're attacked," he shouted, and was about to spring upon his horse when Graham grasped his hand in both of his as he said, "In the name of Grace Hilland, be prudent."

Then both the men were in the saddle, Hilland dashing towards his own command, and each shouting, "Awake! Mount!"

At the same instant the bugles from headquarters rang through the grove giving the well-known order of "boots and saddles."

In place of the profound stillness of a moment before, there were a thousand discordant sounds—the trampling of feet, jingling of sabres, the clamping of bits by aroused, restive horses, that understood the bugle call as well as the men, hoarse, rapid, orders of officers, above all which, in the distance could be heard Hilland's clarion voice.

Again and again from headquarters the brief, musical strains of the bugle echoed through the gloom, each one giving to the veterans a definite command. Within four minutes there was a line of battle on the western edge of the grove, and a charging column was in the road leading to the west, down which the patrols were galloping at a headlong pace. Pickets were rushing in, firing as they came. To the uninitiated it might have seemed a scene of dire confusion. In fact it was one of perfect order and discipline. Even in the darkness each man knew just what to do and where to go, as he heard the bugle calls, and the stern, brief, supplementary orders of the officers.

Graham found himself on the line of battle at the right of the road, and the sound that followed close upon the sharp gallop of the patrol was ominous indeed. It was the rushing thunderous sound of a heavy body of cavalry,—too heavy, his ear soon foretold him, to promise equal battle.

The experienced colonel recognized the fact at the same moment, and would not leave his men in the road to meet the furious onset. Again, sharp, quick, and decisive as the vocal order had been, the bugle rang out the command for a change of position. Its strains had not ceased when the officers were repeating the order all down the column that had been formed in the road for a charge, and scarcely a moment elapsed before the western pike was clear, and faced by a line of battle a little back among the trees. The Union force would now ask nothing better than that the enemy should charge down that road within point-blank range.

If the Nationals were veterans they were also dealing with veterans who were masters of the situation in their

overwhelming force and their knowledge of the comparative insignificance of their opponents, whose numbers had been quite accurately estimated the day before.

The patrols were already within the Union lines and at their proper places when the Confederate column emerged into the narrow open space before the grove. Its advance had subsided into a sharp trot; but, instead of charging by column or platoon, the enemy deployed to right and left with incredible swiftness. Men dismounted and were in line almost instantly, their gray forms looking phantom-like in the gray dawn that tinged the east.

The vigilant colonel was as prompt as they, and at the first evidence of their tactics the bugle resounded, and the line of battle facing the road which led westward wheeled at a gallop through the open trees and formed at right angles with the road behind the first line of battle. Again there was a bugle call. The men in both lines dismounted instantly, and as their horses were being led to the rear by those designated for the duty, a Union volley was poured into the Confederate line that had scarcely formed, causing many a gap. Then the first Union line retired behind the second, loading as they went, and, with the ready instinct of old fighters, putting trees between themselves and the swiftly advancing foe while forming a third line of battle. From the second Union line a deadly volley blazed in the dim obscurity of the woods. It had no perceptible effect in checking the impetuous onset of the enemy, who merely returned the fire as they advanced.

The veteran colonel, with cool alertness, saw that he was far outnumbered, and that his assailants' tactics were to drive him through the grove into the open fields, where his command would be speedily dispersed and captured. His only chance was to run for it and get the start. Indeed the object of his reconnaissance seemed already accomplished, for the enemy were found to be in force in that direction. Therefore, as he galloped to the rear his bugle sounded "Retreat" long and shrilly.

The dim Union lines under the trees melted away as by magic, and a moment later there was a rush of horses through the underbrush that fringed the eastern side of the grove. But some were shot, some sabred, and others captured before they could mount and extricate themselves. The majority, however, of the Union forces were galloping swiftly away, scattering at first rather than keeping together, in order to distract the pursuit which for a time was sharp and deadly. Not a few succumbed; others would turn on their nearest pursuer in mortal combat, which was soon decided in one way or the other. Graham more than once wheeled and confronted an isolated foe, and the sword bearing the name of the gentle Grace Hilland was bloody indeed.

All the while his eye was ranging the field for Hilland, and with his fleet steed, that could soon have carried him beyond all danger, he diverged to right and left, as far as their headlong retreat permitted, in his vain search for his friend.

Suddenly the bugle from the Confederate side sounded a recall. The enemy halted, fired parting shots, and retired briskly over the field, gathering up the wounded and the prisoners. The Union forces drew together on a distant eminence, from which the bugler of the colonel in command was blowing a lively call to rendezvous.

"Where's Hilland?" cried Graham, dashing up.

The colonel removed a cigar from his mouth and said, "Haven't seen him since I ordered the retreat. Don't worry. He'll be here soon. Hilland is sure to come out all right. It's a way he has. 'Twas a rather rapid change of base, Major Graham. That the enemy should have ceased their pursuit so abruptly puzzles me. Ah, here comes your colonel, and when Hilland puts in an appearance we must hold a brief

council, although I suppose there is nothing left for us but to make our way back to camp and report as speedily as possible. I'd like to come back with a division, and turn the tables on those fellows. I believe we fought a divis—"

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