

Down East, moved farther from the tent at which their elbows had just been touching. They went to higher ground to listen and judge of the increasing cannonade. Their departure El Abra observed through a puncture in the canvas.

Then going to the side within which Agnes still remained, the Guerilla cut an aperture; and asking her to put forth her hand, said:

"Take this packet of the Lillymere fortunes, fair young lady. Preserve it in secrecy to a proper time. Should the Redbolt officer escape, whom I have just conversed with, as you may have overheard,—I mean escape with his life in the coming battle of to-day, and from this war ultimately, the contents of the packet will make him an English Earl and you his Countess. Have you secure hold of it?"

"Sir, I cannot, must not retain this thing. I overheard the conversation. Had I believed this gentleman was really whom you say he is I should not have come to America to nurse him in misfortune. I thought him nothing but the obscure clerk, Toby Oman, taken by my father from the parish workhouse. No, no, fearful El Abra, I cannot take charge of this packet. He would justly despise and hate me, were I seeming'y so cunning and sordid."

"Escape with me, Mademoiselle. My own men are now watching not far distant. I heard from one, but now, a private signal, voice of a night bird. You'd be carefully protected from rudeness under care of my house-keeper, Rosa Myther, and another lady; protected from danger under my steward and household guards."

"Sir, to me the attempt is impossible. I prefer awaiting here the worst that may befall. The worst seems soon to be mine, death. Had you not declared to my unwilling ear and disappointed heart, this gentleman to be Lillymere, how enlivening might have been my hope? But now, for coming here, in supposition I haunt him as the heir of great fortunes, he can only despise and hate me. He does already hold me in contempt, and depart away without conference. Yet, though despised I must remain, and have him within range of vision, cold and distant vision, valiant young hero. Ah! repeat not the traitorous words. You would have killed him in combat, terrible El Abra. You are deceitful now, or were cruel then."

The Captain, leaving Tass Cass to watch the varying sounds of the night combat, returned to the tent. Said El Abra on seeing him enter:

"Glad you've come, Captain. My time being now short I desire to place in your hands, free and unconditionally, this packet as a gift. Its contents, interpreted by my revered mother whom you'll find at Conway, in Canada, will prove you rightful heir to the rank and fortune now vacant and awaiting you in England."

"El Abra, I decline the gift. I'd be the meanest wretch breathing to accept it, and then order your execution."

"Suppose you take the packet and omit the execution?"

"No, sir; I'm bound in duty to the nation I serve to carry out orders from superior authority."

"Reprisal, Captain; think how inconvenient will be reprisal if executing prisoners of war."

"You are a Guerilla; head of a band of assassins, not a true prisoner of war. Any way I can't make the choice you would entreat. Now, I know you to possess those proofs of my birthright, I cannot concede your life. Did I yield conscience and the world would tell me I sold the service and betrayed the cause of the United States; supremest cause a nation ever drew sword for. its own existence and extinction of man's property in man. Sir, I spurn the rights to title and estate on such terms."

"Yet order my execution, what then? Conscience, the world, and all history written of this event, will tell that Lillymere butchered El Abra, who had preserved for him the proofs of title, yet used them and ascended to his grandeur, when he had slain their faithful custodian."

"El Abra, you wring my soul. But were it wrung into the most exquisite torments conceivable in magical diablerie, you'd not seduce me from a true man's sense of honour, and the cause I serve."

"Think you, Lillymere, I've nothing to offer sufficient to induce the omission of the order to have me hanged dead at five this a. m.?"

"The order is given."

"Or to induce your revocation of the order?"

"El Abra, I've already refused acceptance of proofs which might confer on me the great estates and title of one of England's oldest Earldoms. And the proofs of my birthright are to go to the grave with you, buried from out of sight for ever underneath your body."

"Yet, Lillymere, eminent as the English fortunes may be which you in this manner spurn, it is in my power to present or withhold from your eye a priceless allurement; for you immeasurably more precious than even the great estates and title of Earl. If I engage to give you that precious priceless

thing before the hour of morn by measure of good riding, will you consent to leave this service? It is but to ride for the highest reward earth may ever offer to mortal!"

"To ride with you?"

"Yes, ride along with me."

"Ah! You would invite me to secret arts of magic. I read the design in your glowing eyes, El Abra."

"Secrets of magic you might have also. But the rich allurement offered to ride with me is to you inexpressibly more than the whole sum of title, fortune, and knowledge of the powers of magic combined."

"And lies within your personal option to confer?"

"And lies within my option to confer."

"And the proffered inducement, inestimably more to me than title, fortune, knowledge of the powers of magic, is something of life, and concerning functions of this present life?"

"Yes, Lillymere. Consent to leave this service, and I conduct you in not many hours to her who gave you life."

"To ——— to ——— Heaven! What mean you, El Abra?"

"I'd conduct you to her who gave you life — your mother!"

"Avaunt, fiend, avaunt! Lying El Abra! I've a mind to allow the impatient Redbolts to hang you this side of twenty minutes."

"Better come with me, Lillymere, and behold with your eyes that gracious loving mother in presence face to face, whom you don't remember to have at any time seen except in dreams."

"How came you by this daring profanity, fearfully wicked El Abra?"

"Lady Mortimer brought intelligence of this gracious mother's preservation, whom you dreamt, or feared, or believed to have been murdered. She told that, distracted by the loss of her babe, Lady De Lacy Lillymere, your mother, became a Wandering Shepherdess searching through rural England, Wales, Ireland, Scotland, for a lost lamb."

Seeing the listener accepting the words into his inner being in rapt amazement, El Abra, to prolong wonder, or pleasure, or pain, spoke in slowly measured sentences:

"Carrying on her bosom a lamb, and always in search of another. Followed by a select half-dozen of grown sheep, once the lambs she had carried. The family of fleecy creatures wearing garlands of flowers. Two of them, blind from old age, led by ribbons. The shepherdess riding at times on a pony, but oftener going on foot. Carrying the long-shafted crook of the sheep-fold. Attended by two or more Scottish colley dogs, protecting the little flock. Children assembling round her receiving gifts, and gathering to her hand wild-flowers, of which she wove them chaplets and garlands. The rudest of children loving and gentle at sight of her. The dreariest roads, night or day, safe to her. The boisterous and lawless man or woman respectful and sedate in presence of the Wandering Shepherdess."

"Oh, El Abra! Supreme magician! Magnetic charmer of the eye; torturer of the soul! Why hear I this for the first time?"

The Guerilla heeded not the interruption, but continued in the same measured tone, gazing with unwinking orbs on the Redbolt hero, now fascinated:

"Making garments for the poor, paid assistants working in the villages in her absence. Bestowing gifts in plenty from her inherited Ogleburn dowry. Singing hymns in presence of the setting sun in a voice of glorious compass, ravishing sweetness. Invoking the gorgeous west to warm the grave of her boy. To give life to the heart, light to the eyes of the babe, her son, her joy. The long lost Lillymere boy. The babe she bore, the loved, the lost, her hope, her joy, her boy!"

"You madden me, El Abra. If Lady Mortimer told that to any, she withheld it from me; except hinting as possible that the pure and blessed being who gave me birth might yet be found alive. Wicked El Abra, why profanely invent this story of my unknown parent to make wreck of me in this transcendent crisis in the fortunes of the great nation I serve?"

"I invite you, Captain, by this recital of the beautiful and true, to that mother; who, after searching nook and corner of Great Britain, Ireland, the Channel Islands, and Isle of Man for her lost lamb—you, Lillymere — has come a Wandering Shepherdess to America. A lamb in arms. A lamb still looked for. Two aged blind sheep bleating at her side; led in ribbons; the Scottish colleys protecting. I left her with Rosa Myther, once her companion maid, now her companion in adventure."

"Be the story true or false that such a lady lives; that once she was mother to a babe lost; I the product of the loss and of time; and that she, mother to this sport of misfortune — me — has arrived in America, and you have seen her; she is — El Abra, I read by intuitions of nature more subtle than magnetic magic — she is the incarnation of moral purity and truth. Were I traitor to a duty involving my personal honour, as you would have it, such a mother when she found me, would recoil from a viper which had usurped the similitude of her son."

"In large phrase, Captain, you have said:

"This transcendent crisis in the fortunes of the great nation you serve! Is it not a still more transcendent crisis in the fortunes of the cause I serve?"

"The magnitude of your rebellion, El Abra, confers on my position at this outpost, a supreme importance."

"Why estimate this post as so very important? Is it because you happen to command it?"

"Truly have you spoken, sir. It is because I happen to command it. Every post is important where I am. In the ranks of the infantry as a private, I felt myself a unit filling a place, which, if unfaithfully filled, might induce disaster to the army. My veteran tutor, Eyden Kensbrig, in his 'Canada, a Battle-Field,' taught that philosophy. Educating the military conscience within me in light of what this tutor has taught, personal conduct drew observant eyes to the private in the ranks, as one who might fitly be a corporal. As corporal, the weight of the army's safety still devolved on me. For which fidelity to duty I was advanced to be captain of the Redbolt Cavalry, two weeks ago; the appointment confirmed by telegraph to-day. The responsibility of command is not the less that I am so unfortunate as to hold El Abra a prisoner."

To which the prisoner rejoined:

"Some feeling indicated there; with a glimmer of approaching good sense. You are a devotee to duty, Captain. Commendable, I admit. Being English, I presume you keep Wellington ever in your eye."

"El Abra, if I be the person you allege, my father was a gallant Colonel of Cavalry, Sir Eustace DeLacy Lillymere; a devotee to duty, educated in the military philosophy of the illustrious Wellington. The great Field Marshal, who, studying to avoid blunders in strategy, was not the less alert to derive instruction from mistake, or accidental mishap. My instructor, Eyden Kensbrig, cites from Wellington in this invocation to the common sense of his country —"

El Abra, lifting a hand to admonish silence, seemed listening anxiously for a sound outside the tent. After half a minute he said:

"Go on, please. It is your ten o'clock relief, I suppose, changing sentries. Five hours still to live. Thought I heard a nearer cannonade, and shells falling."

The Guerilla dissembled. He thought his ear detected a private signal. The Captain of Redbolts resumed:

"Says the military instructor whom I follow in this brochure—one of a series—'Canada a Battle Field,' page 43: 'Listen to the voice of Wellington; the mighty dead speaking in history through the Despatches, and Napier's 'Peninsular War;' that for want of some trusses of fodder for mules, the mules were lost, and the siege train, then waited for at Burgos, did not arrive. And after five ineffectual attempts to carry Burgos by assault, October and November, 1812, Wellington failed for want of the siege train, and was compelled to retreat with a partially disorganized army two hundred miles.'"

"The application, Captain? I may infer what it implies in the feeding of your cavalry horses or mine. But to what is it directed in Canada?"

"The veteran means that the new generation which reads no deeper than the journals of the day, content to remain uninstructed by history, attribute present difficulties in the States to military incapacity. Whereas they are common to all countries and armies in the earlier campaigns of war. He continues: 'Read in Wellington's Despatches how fraudulent contractors furnished useless entrenching tools (as in Spain 1810-12, so in the Crimea 1854-55). How Wellington wrote to the Secretary of State for War that shoes for the troops wore out in a few days; the army barefooted at end of a week from arrival of the last shoes from England. The fraud reducing his plans of campaign and the indomitable courage of his troops to a nullity. And yet,' says my instructor, page 43:

"Writers in the Provinces, unread in history, rail at the United States; aggravating them against Canada by asserting suspension of cash payments to be American repudiation, though Great Britain suspended cash payments from 1797 to 1820. Asserting every misadventure in the war; dishonesty in army and navy contractors as peculiar to the American people. We know from sad experience that, as in Spain under Wellington, so in the Crimea; some thousands of men, finest troops ever in the field, perished in the inclement winter through fraudulent sample bales of flannels imposed on the inspecting officers in London."

"Making an enemy," says my tutor, "while yet no adequate defensive preparation is made to guard the frontier."

"That amuses me hugely," cried El Abra; "sorry you can't accompany me to Canada, Captain. Glad to learn they are unprepared. Glad to learn the British Provincials exasperate their neighbours. I have work to do on that side the frontier. Come, Lillymere; accept a high command in the Emissaries of Mystery, other side of the lakes."

"You may forget, Sir, being deluded through reliance on magic, that the time of the day-break execution draws nigh. But should you

escape the hour and the doom appointed this night, and get to Canada to operate at head of the Emissaries of Mystery, you'll discover to your cost that the British Provincials are not unprepared for vagrant guerillas. They have vigilant look-out men all along the frontier. Though not at present martially organized, they are a people by every instinct of nature and position heroic. They'll defend to the death. Hark! There is a cannonade nearer than before."

Going outside the tent, and perceiving the sentries apparently vigilant, the Captain directed two to stand near the entrance, with the interior and El Abra under their eye. And lest they might have occasion to shoot him, and so endanger the lady prisoner's life in the compartment of the tent beyond, he would himself conduct her to the Provost Guard for safety. Where also she would avoid witnessing by eye or ear the Guerilla's execution if hanged. Where also she would have the society of her companion, Isa Antry, who was to have been conducted to the Redbolt Camp, but for some reason unknown did not come.

Soon the lady and Captain were both mounted for this journey of three miles. They and an escort had gone but a short distance, when the Redbolt trumpet sounded 'boot and saddle.' Tass Cass in command had discovered scouts prowling near.

"It is to prepare for the execution of that lawless Guerilla—lying El Abra," said the Captain to Agnes. "I would his execution did not devolve upon us. I wish an order might be had where I now go to spare his life."

"Have you not power to save him, dear Toby? I mean—pardon, Sir, I meant to say Captain Lillymere."

"I am Captain Simon Lud, Madam, until some better authority than El Abra informs me of the fitting name. You may have overheard, Miss Schoolar, in your division of the tent, what the Guerilla told, as if from Lady Mortimer, of a pretended mother imagined for me."

"Captain Lud, I was beside her ladyship two years ago, when the story of the wandering shepherdess was told by Mrs. Bella Burly, of Saark Toll Bar, Gretna Green. Lady Mary deemed it best to come in search of you—I suppose you—or, if not you, the lost boy of the house of Lillymere, before seeking an interview with the shepherdess. For which reason I also omitted seeing Lady Lillymere, your mother. That is—beg pardon, Toby, some young gentleman's mother."

"Not my mother, you then thought?"

"I became faint with thought of another trouble; was apprehensive of a compulsory marriage. I did not suppose Toby was Lady Lillymere's son: I did not wish to think; but it shot at me, into me; wouldn't go away."

"What wouldn't go away, Miss Schoolar?"

"The thought: which was ever coming through me, that Toby Oman, once our clerk, might not have been Toby."

"Would it please you now, Miss Schoolar, to discover that the Toby of your father's office was not Toby?"

"At present, sir, he is Captain Simon Lud; a gallant and brave gentleman, but I'd rather he were Toby."

"Why, madam?"

"That I might be of humble service to him?"

"Be of service to Captain Simon Lud. You were some hours ago."

"Captain Lud is too proud."

"Would you watch my personal safety, Miss Schoolar, were I DeLacy Lillymere?"

"I'd not dare presume. I'd not have come to this field of war, had I been assured you were what they say you are."

"Miss Schoolar, on the day I first beheld you crossing at the Horse Guards, when my hand touched the otherwise unapproachable gloved fingers, to save you from stumbling in front of a fast coming carriage. I accused myself of presumption. Saying in my heart, the young lady would despise me did she know the tips of her glove thrilled to my brain. Saying in my heart I ought to be despised; yet, going down the street with the bag of law briefs I carried so proudly, that I trode on air. I did not then know you to be Miss Schoolar."

"But I knew you to be Toby; and thanked you in the afternoon; turning out of the Lady's Mile, when riding, to thank you, Toby; don't you remember?"

"I do remember, and never forgot. But it was the poor clerk, Toby, you thanked."

"It was my father's poor clerk, Toby, I came to watch and serve in this war."

"With the vision of DeLacy Lillymere, behind the poor clerk?"

"It is cruel to insinuate that. Toby would not have done so."

"Think you he was more generous than Captain Simon Lud?"

"Heroic deeds make a man haughty and cruel. A lady has neither power nor privilege to be haughty or cruel, if she make but a step of condescension towards him. Alas! I have made four thousand miles of humiliation."

"Perhaps Captain Lud may, in time, have a truer perception of Miss Schoolar's motives, in travelling thus far."