



The DAY of the DUEL

FOR THE WOMAN'S NAME

(A TRUE STORY)



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"M R. DICKINSON, sir, I would not willingly engage in hostile relations with you, for that I know you are being urged by my enemies rather than by personal opposition. But I am in honor bound to ask you if, in truth, you have said anything in any way reflecting upon Mrs. Jackson?"

The young lawyer leaned back languidly as he returned his questioner's direct glance. One who did not know Charles Dickinson might have thought to smile at him as some pretty butterfly of fashion. He was strikingly handsome, almost womanish in his beauty, and daintily clad. But all who came in contact with Charles Dickinson were exceedingly careful of their behavior. He was known far and wide as the best shot in Tennessee, if not in the country. There was a veiled insolence in his manner that did not go with his words when he made reply.

"General Jackson, never, to my knowledge, have I said anything concerning your wife which might cause offence. It is my fault, sir, that I am something reckless and loose mouthed when I have passed a convivial evening. At such times my remarks are beyond my control, and I cannot subsequently tell what I may have said."

"Well, sir," returned the elder man, sternly. "What then? What of the possibility you infer?"

"Without yielding my self-respect, General, I should be heartily sorry if I learned I had made an unmeaning slip. If I were shown to be guilty I should most respectfully apologize."

"I can ask no more, sir," said Jackson, bowing. "I wish you good-day."

"A very good-day to you, General," said the other, with curling lip.

Andrew Jackson, then nearly forty years old, was too expert a player in the game of politics not to know that behind the growing enmity of this expert marksman lay the designs of some closer and craftier adversary. It was not the first time that he had heard of Dickinson in connection with slurs upon the one person he would be sure to fight for. He had been member of Congress, United States Senator and Judge of the Supreme Court of Tennessee. But a short time before he had been elected major general of the State militia, an office scarcely below that of Governor, as a mark of favor with the people. He was a dominant figure.

Aggressive in every move, "refusing compromises and going for a clean victory or a clean defeat in every case," he had created antagonism rather than encountered it throughout his career. Rising now to a power that would make him invincible, he had reached the point where he must be checked, if he were to be checked at all. Certain elements among those who had reason to hate him were resolved that the only effective means of removing him from the field lay quite outside party trickery or intrigue. The only way was to uproot him bodily. Three men, all well known in Nashville, who were chiefly interested in bringing about that result met with some show of secrecy in the rear room of a tavern on the evening following the Dickinson incident.

"I thought you had your young man primed to it, Judge," was the opening remark of the session. The speaker was of military appearance, tall figure and sinister expression, to which a long scar on his right cheek contributed in no small part. The one at whom he flung his words in a tone of reproach was an obese, flabby man, with smooth face and soft, thick hands. He spread these hands out protestingly.

He Is Mystified.

"And so I had, Captain," he returned. "I have played upon him two months or more, according to our agreement. But he fails me at the pinch. I am all at sea over it. He had no reason to love Jackson and most carefully I fomented his ambition and his pride that he might see his chief obstacle. With what discretion I had to use I tried to make him ready for defiance. I cannot explain it."

"But you said it was a sure way," said the Captain, irritably, throwing himself into a chair.

"Why, so we all thought it was. It is well known that he keeps this wife of his a sacred thing that none may speak of, scarce look upon. We might have tried any other method and he would have laughed. But his wife—let any one hint that there was an irregularity in the marriage and he becomes a fiend."

"What's the matter with Dickinson, then?"

"How can I tell! The boy is only twenty-five and he has fought six duels. He need fear no one. To meet him on the field is like confronting the clammy hand of death. I have seen him snuff a candle at fifteen paces ten times out of ten. As for Jackson, he has fought, rough and tumble and other ways. But he never had the name of a quick shot or a sure one."

"Then we're back where we started from," said the Captain, with some temper. "If there's any one we can find besides Dickinson for this thing I'm in favor of trying him. I'd do it myself, only my nerves are not what they used to be. This young cub is hopeless, that's plain."

"Do you suppose, after all, that Jackson frightened him?"

"Either that or he's developed some queer qualms of conscience all of a sudden."

"Then I'm for trying a new plan altogether. We'll never be able to find anybody as good as Dickinson for that one," said the Judge, decidedly. "We can't afford to waste time like this."

"The plan's all right. It's another man we want," said the Captain.

"You're both wrong." It was the third member of the conference, speaking for the first time since they had entered the room. He was small and thin, dressed in plain but fashionable clothes, a man who had the appearance of a successful lawyer, not remarkable in any way save for the quiet power of



JACKSON REMAINED IN HIS PLACE, WATCHING HIS OPPONENT CLOSELY.

his voice. "The rart was neither with the plan nor with Dickinson. If you want to know, specifically, why there wasn't a challenge on the spot it was because I had fixed matters to block just that outcome."

The others looked at him in wonderment. The Judge recovered first.

"And may I ask what induced you to interfere, Mr. K.?" he asked, with a trace of sharpness.

"Certainly. It was common sense, that's all. Suppose Dickinson had flared up and they had fought. The whole State would have known that Jackson was protecting his wife's name and sentiment would have been with him. If we're going to get rid of the man once for all we must destroy his popularity. I had a little talk with Dickinson and convinced him that he had a bad case for himself."

The Insult Recognized.

"Then what have we been planning and working for all this time if not that identical situation?" snapped the Captain.

"When you strip it bare that is what we're planning and working for, an insult and a challenge," returned Mr. K., calmly. "But I take it you gentlemen know little of the art of confusing the issue. We get Dickinson to spread remarks about Mrs. Jackson because that's the only thing that will bring the General into the open. But we can't meet him on that ground. It's too apparent, too barefaced. No. We get Dickinson to back down. Then, after a time, we have him repeat the offence and take care that Jackson hears of it. If necessary, he must back down again. Meanwhile, we carefully circulate contradictory tales, putting Jackson in a bad light, making him appear in the wrong as the result of his quarrelsome, hot-headed temperament. When his suspicions of Dickinson are aroused to a point where they can't be calmed he will challenge. Well and good. By that time we will have every one against him."

"That's good sense," nodded the Judge. "Can you compass it on those lines?"

"Easily. If you will aid me intelligently," returned Mr. K. "We can handle Dickinson as we want to now." After some further discussion the gathering broke up.

Within three weeks another story, vague as to details, came to the ears of Jackson concerning Dickinson's rambling tongue. Confident though he was that the young lawyer served merely as a pawn, he could see no way of meeting the move peaceably. His eyes were open, but he had no choice other than to enter the trap. His one weakness had been fairly found and fairly gauged. When it was a question of protecting the name of Rachel Jackson caution, restraint and political insight counted for nothing.

Fifteen years before one of the rarest, strongest passions of history had come to flower with the marriage of Andrew Jackson and Rachel Robards. Unwittingly, in full belief that her worthless husband, Lewis Robards, had obtained a divorce, they married several months before the decree had in fact been granted. Upon learning the facts they had repeated the ceremony. This was the incident which malice had remembered and nursed as the one weapon capable of wounding a great heart.

The loves of poetry are not more tender, deep or enduring than the love Andrew Jackson bore the woman who was his wife. The flame of it never wavered. To the rugged, iron-willed soldier and statesman she was ever his "dear saint," enshrined in an affection which a man of lesser nature could not have known. He was better able to support any conceivable personal calumny, any blow that fell alone upon him, than that a breath should turn roughly against her.

Since his second wedding, quite simply and without bravado, he had kept a certain set of duelling pistols oiled and ready for the man who should read an ill meaning into the error over the divorce. None had yet dared to appear as the author of slurring comments. Even Dickinson had denied his share. But Jackson knew that the time had come to fight. There was no escape. The rumors, the nods and winks would not cease until he had called out the one who had revived the dead slander. He had positive proof that Dickinson, drunk and sober, had said things that could not be passed over. It made no difference that, with his keen understanding, he could feel the secret forces at work behind the young lawyer and identify their purpose. They meant to pit him against a man whose shot was death. They meant to bring it about in a roundabout way so that he could not pin down the offence and have clear justification. All this he knew and accepted.

Dickinson the Puppet.

He waited only long enough to determine to his own satisfaction who were really responsible. Three figures among the ranks of his enemies he finally settled upon—three men for whom, as he felt sure, Dickinson was puppet. It was nearly a year after the first whisper of evil had been traced to the lawyer that he sent his challenge in May, 1806. It was well known that trouble hung about the two men, but Jackson's opponents had been active and clever. The common view of the matter was that the General, so much the older and therefore so much more to blame, had shown himself irascible, unreasonable and ill-governed in seeking the quarrel.

Dickinson accepted the challenge instantly and proceeded, as was his privilege, to name the terms. General Thomas Overton, a rough old Revolutionary soldier, acted as Jackson's second and returned from the interview with the dandy duellist in a great state of mind.

"Here is the very top of duellists," shouted the indignant warrior to his principal. "It seems that you must wait a week upon him while his beribboned lordship procures an arm properly adjusted to the killing of you."

"Why, what did he say? I desired to meet him instantly!" exclaimed Jackson.

"Oh, he was much astonished that you should make such unseemly haste in the matter. As for him, twisting his hand and setting it on his hip like some figure, he must have a pistol especially made for the occasion."

"Well, well, Overton. Let him have his time. If I were as expert with the pistol as himself I might be particular. As it is, any pistol suits. What else?"

"You are to stand eight paces apart and to fire at any time after the word is given."

"I see him there," nodded Jackson. "No man has a chance of firing before him. He counts upon killing me before I can raise my weapon."

"So I thought of it," answered Overton, anxiously. "Are you quick enough upon the trigger to compete with him for the first shot?"

"No. The only result would be to confuse my aim."

"Then listen to my advice. Let him have his shot, stand his fire without returning it. If he misses or only wounds you, you will have a fair chance at him. I see no other way for you to win."

"The plan is good," answered Jackson, and there his preliminary worry over the meeting ended.

Dickinson and several of his close friends, young blades about town, set merrily forth on the morning of May 29 for the duelling ground, at Harrison's Mills, on Red River, Logan county, Kentucky, a good day's ride distant. It was a junketing, a pleasant outing, spiced with the interest that would centre about the

killing of the obnoxious General Jackson. They galloped on with many a lightsome jest, and the young lawyer amused the party from time to time with exhibitions of his skill. He had his new duelling pistol, a graceful weapon of proved accuracy, with which he hit an indicated mark time and again along the road.

The Four Bullets.

After leaving the city Dickinson learned that he was preceding Jackson. He stopped at the first wayside tavern, marked off eight paces from a tree and fired at it four times at the word of command. It was found that the four bullets were imbedded in the trunk within a space that could be covered by a silver dollar. Dickinson called the innkeeper's attention to the exploit.

"When General Jackson rides this way," he said, "just show him that."

A short distance further on the party passed a farmhouse. A cucumber was hanging by a string from a branch near the door. Without dismounting Dickinson severed the string with one shot and shouted to the farmer to tell General Jackson what had happened.

"I'll have the fellow so frightened he'll need a crutch to face me with," was the duellist's laughing comment amidst the applause of his followers.

Jackson, coming along the road with Overton, a surgeon and two friends an hour later, was shown the proofs of his adversary's marvellous ability. He noted, them unmoved. Throughout the journey he rode apart with his second and the two soberly discussed the approaching encounter. They agreed that their original plan was the best, though dangerous in the extreme. It would take extraordinary control of nerve to accept the fire of so deadly an opponent. But Overton knew that his principal could summon that control if any man might.

The two parties stopped for the night at inns about a mile apart. Jackson was in good spirits during the evening meal and discoursed upon politics with his friends. He slept well and next morning made an early start. On the way to the rendezvous the business of the day was mentioned only once. One of those who were with him asked the General how he felt about the meeting.

"I have no doubt I shall wing him," was the answer. Yet all except Overton were assured that he was going to certain death.

After a brisk ride through the forest they came to a point where it was necessary to cross a river. No ferryman being in sight, Jackson spurred his horse into the current and swam him across. The others followed, and in a few moments they came to the small, clear space in the woods where the duel was to take place. Jackson, with his second and surgeon, dismounted, tethered their horses and approached the opposing group, already on the ground.

Dickinson's second won the toss for position, while Overton acquired the right to give the word. The old warrior regarded this as no trifling advantage and had already determined in his own mind that he would put it to good use if it fell to his lot. Eight paces were marked off with particular care, the weapons were loaded and the two men took their places.

The sun was glancing its sharp shafts here and there among the trunks of the poplars. It was a clear, cool morning. Dickinson had taken great pains with his toilet and stood erect, debonaire, smiling, his handsome face tinted with pink, his garments well brushed and fitting him without a wrinkle. Jackson wore a loose frock coat carelessly buttoned over his chest. He did not smile, but his long, powerful face, always resolute, showed firm purpose and complete

hold of every faculty. Each man, following the agreement, pressed one foot against the peg marking his position and kept his pistol pointed downward. Dickinson looked his opponent over and then turned to his second casually.

"Do you mark the third button of his coat on the left side? I shall hit him there."

"Are you ready?" asked Overton, quietly.

"I am ready," said Dickinson.

"Ready," repeated Jackson.

"Fere!" roared Overton, with thunderous voice, dropping into his back country accent under the excitement of the moment. Knowing that his principal would not follow the word, he sought to make it as sudden and startling as possible.

Instantly, with such dexterity and ease that the eyes of the watchers could scarce see the movement, Dickinson whipped up his pistol to a level and fired. A puff of dust flew from the breast of Jackson's coat at the side of the button Dickinson had indicated. The General did not wince. He raised his left arm with doubled fist and pressed it tightly against his side. Dickinson stared at him a moment, then paled and fell back in amazement.

"Great God, have I missed him?" he cried.

Overton's pistol was out of his belt in a flash and covering Dickinson.

"Back to your place, sir. Back to your place. My principal has not had his shot."

His Own Wound Concealed.

Dickinson recovered himself, glanced once more at Jackson and stepped back to the peg. He pressed one foot against the mark and stood with his side toward his opponent, his head turned away so that he might not see the other's move.

Jackson waited calmly. When Dickinson had taken his position he raised his pistol slowly and took careful, deliberate aim. There was a tense pause. Jackson pulled the trigger, but no report followed. The hammer had stopped at half cock. Without using his left hand, which was still pressed against his breast, Jackson recoiled and took aim once more, showing no haste or the sign of irritation. Again he pulled the trigger. The pistol spoke this time and Dickinson, with a gasp, staggered back. His second and surgeon rushed forward and caught him in their arms as he was about to fall. They seated him gently on the ground, with his back against a bush, and began to strip off his clothes. It was found that the bullet had passed through his body below the lowest ribs.

Jackson remained in his place, watching his opponent closely. Overton, who had stepped forward to see the extent of the injury, took him by the arm.

"He won't want anything more of you, General," said the gruff old soldier, and led his principal from the field. They walked toward the spot where they had left the horses tied. Jackson's surgeon, who was at his left, suddenly noticed that blood was running down into his boots and stopped with a cry.

"Are you hit, General?" he asked.

"Oh, I believe he has pinked me a little. But say nothing about it to them," answered Jackson, indicating the other group. Further on, among the trees, the surgeon made an examination and found that Dickinson's bullet had grazed the breastbone, breaking two ribs. In spite of his wound Jackson was able to mount and ride to his inn.

During the afternoon he sent word to the neighboring tavern, inquiring after Dickinson's condition, offering the services of his own surgeon or those of any member of his party. Word was returned that his recent antagonist was in need of no further aid. Later Jackson sent a bottle of wine to Dickinson. Another messenger despatched in the evening came back with the news that Dickinson had died at nine o'clock. Throughout all these friendly negotiations Jackson was careful that no word of his own hurt should reach the other party.

"Dickinson considered himself the best shot in the world," was his explanation. "He was certain he would kill me at the first fire and I don't want him to have the gratification of even knowing he has touched me."

Jackson rode back to Nashville the following day. It was while on that journey that he turned to his second with this remark:

"Overton, I believe I should have lived long enough to kill him if he had shot me through the brain."

"I don't doubt it for a moment, General." They went on in silence together for some minutes. Then Jackson spoke again, more grimly this time:

"Overton, there are certain men in Nashville who had a greater claim to stand opposite me than that misguided young man. I shall find a way to settle scores with them yet, Overton."

"Yes, General," said Overton.

POETRY AND PARENTS.

"YOU never can tell whether poetry is loaded or not," said a Columbia professor, descending upon the Muse, "and what a poet writes in the moments of his fine frenzy rolling may be susceptible of changes which would make him curse the pen did he but know whence it pointed. Now, listen to this couplet:—

"Help us to save free conscience from the paw Of hireling wolves whose gospel is their maw."

"It sounds like some kind of a family poem, doesn't it, with paw and maw coming in to make the rhyme? Do you imagine the poet when he wrote the lines ever thought of the parents represented in such a homely way, and how the meaning of the whole thing could be changed by changing the meaning of the end words of the two lines? Was he a beginner? Oh, no, he was not a beginner. He had written several very classy things. He was John Milton. You remember he wrote 'Paradise Lost' and two or three other pieces of considerable merit, though he never quite got into the 'six best sellers' list, and these two lines I have quoted close his sonnet to Lord Protector Cromwell, written in 1652."

"The Arbitrament of Arms," Next Week.

