



The DAY of the DUEL

FOUGHT ON TERROR ISLAND



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"THE Senator has given me his solemn vow that he will never fight again if he can possibly avoid it," said Ellen Harms, adjusting the cushions at her back.

The two young men, who were paddling lastly at the oars, looked up from their silent and absorbed occupation, mutual restraint in each other's presence fading before the interest aroused by the girl's statement.

"I'd as soon believe that he never means to eat again," remarked Jefferson Wall, laughing.

The girl frowned at him. Royce Craig, who sat on the thwart nearest to her, was quick to take his cue from her unmeted seriousness and the disfavor with which she met his rival's impulsive remark.

"If there is any one who can induce him to abandon the practice that person is yourself, Ellen," he said. "The sturdy old fellow has proved his courage on the battlefield and in many a private encounter and you did well to get the promise from him."

Wall became combative on the instant.

"You couldn't expect a man like Senator Jackson to put up with an affront just because you've teased him into such an admission," he said. "He's fought at least nine times and every one honors him for it. If the occasion should arise again he wouldn't hesitate a moment to pick up the gauntlet."

"But he will not," said Ellen, taking the extreme view with the enthusiasm that was part of her nature. "I am his ward and he is my guardian and he cares as much for me as if I were his own daughter. I told him what I thought of his brutal code duello and he acknowledged I was right. I'm not going to have it said that Senator James Jackson is the most notorious duellist in the State of Georgia. It ends right here," and the determined girl planted one little hand in the other with an air of finality.

"Good for you," said Craig, openly admiring. "I'm glad, both for yourself and for the Senator."

This was the point for Wall to drop the discussion. Ellen Harms could hold her own course, as he might have known. But he persisted, partly because Craig had sided with her.

"He can't do it, Ellen," he said decidedly.

The girl was plainly provoked.

"But he has promised."

"The promise was only provisional and it must fall when it interferes with the necessity of honorable re-

tor," continued Wall, a shade pompously. He began to resent Ellen's stand against his own superior judgment. She had never adopted such a tone to him before and it was not to his liking that Craig, whom he had recently distanced in the race, should be the witness to a difference between them. He felt that he had won the right to direct her stand toward matters falling so wholly within the masculine sphere.

"You have never favored me with your opinions on the subject before, Mr. Wall," answered the young woman, coldly.

There was a sharp rebuke in her manner as in her words. The implication was not flattering. Wall caught the angle of a smile on Craig's cheek. His temper slipped another notch. It seemed suddenly that all he had gained during his month as preferred suitor had escaped him.

The Call of Honor.

But still his pride and his irritation overbore his caution and forced him to aggravate an unnecessary situation.

"Whatever you may say you'll see that the Senator will not be lacking at the call of honor. He couldn't ignore it. And I, as a friend of his, wouldn't want him to. And you, down in your heart, would be ashamed if he did."

Wall applied himself to his oar and gave no response to the scornful flash from Ellen. Craig alone was smiling. He nodded encouragingly to the girl. This was better than he could have wished. He had more than half expected the announcement of an engagement that very day. Wall's false tenacity in a trifling discussion gave him hope.

There were several minutes of silence, and then Craig made some personal, casual remark in lowered voice, subtly and neatly completing Wall's exclusion. Ellen took his lead and they carried on an animated conversation until the landing at the Jackson farm was reached. Then Craig who walked abreast the young woman up the path, while the other trailed disconsolately after.

Ellen tried to come to an understanding with herself that evening. She had been sure of her affection for Wall, but what she chose to regard as his brutality and his churlish opposition to her raised a doubt. She felt that she had been too precipitate in her choice. If the man was so utterly lacking in sympathy with her cherished beliefs in such a thing he probably would be in others. With the decision born of a new but intense conviction she attached much importance to her "conversion" of her guardian, and it was indisputable that even while differing from her Wall might have shown more gentleness and tact.

So she argued, and yet gentler thoughts obtruded—fragments of phrases from him that had rung in tune with her ideals; a haunting impression of his face, strong, clearly outlined, with firm, aggressive chin and honest glance; a certain stroll along the river; word of praise for him from many, notably the Senator; her earlier, complete faith in her happiness with such a man. Still, at the end she could not yield the position she had taken. It seemed monstrous that he should set himself against her in such a matter. And thus thinking she cried a little, then took herself to task, and so to sleep.

Senator Jackson held his usual honored place on the veranda of the Palmetto House toward nine o'clock. The young men of the neighborhood, who had made a hero to themselves of the stern veteran and political leader, were gathered on the steps, while the Senator with others of the older men, filled the spacious chairs in privileged ease. There existed a tacit conspiracy among the members of the group that when ordinary topics failed Jackson was to be led by cautious degrees toward reminiscences. He never boasted of his many famous quarrels, and too great an eagerness ever failed of effect. To-night the talk took its course from politics to parties and thence to personal disputes, and the auditors waited upon the statesman's word. He began at an angle that was new to them.

"You speak of satisfaction rendered upon the field, Mr. Wall," he said to the postmaster, in reply to a remark. "It begins to worry me, this loss of brave men that

are needed more urgently for better things. I trust I have shown that no man may question my honor with impunity. But there is a limit, sir. Certainly it is to be regretted that the code has come to have such an importance in our dealings one with another."

Surprise held his features silent a moment. Here was a matter for remark indeed, when Senator Jackson, survivor of so many affairs upon the field, openly joined the ranks of the opponents of duelling.

"Do you mean, Senator, that you would refuse another challenge?" asked the Postmaster, with some trepidation at his own boldness. Jackson hesitated a moment.

My Last Duel.

"I mean that I shall make every effort to avoid a misunderstanding that shall call for the arbitrament of arms," he answered slowly, "and so I have given my promise. In no case shall I seek a quarrel or take the first step. I have reason to believe," he added slowly, "that if I am ever summoned to the field again it will be the last time."

There was that in his tone which stopped a curious question on more than one tongue. Craig, who had communicated Ellen's remarks to several of his friends, smiled superior. Wall could not bring himself to accept the vague suggestion of cowardice that all his training forced him to read in such a speech.

Apparently the subject was closed for the night and the group began to break up, those present hurrying to play a central part in some other circle that "Jim Jackson had said he wouldn't fight no more, 'r as much as said it." Opinion in the community was divided after the incident had been thoroughly discussed. One view was voiced by the Postmaster, at a discreet distance from the Senator and his personal allies.

"Jim'll have another duel on his hands inside of a week, an' that's what he's playin' for. There's

of his lieutenants, his words being perfectly audible to all.

"What's the name of that new assessor just named the other day?" he asked, shifting his tobacco into the other cheek.

"Mason?" suggested the man.

"Mason, that's it," returned Watkins meditatively.

"A particular, greasy skunk."

Every one within hearing held his breath. A babble on the outskirts of the crowd talked on in a shrill voice for a moment and then, noting the oppressive silence, ceased suddenly. Mason, as was well known, was a benchman and a friend to Jackson, and owed his appointment to the Senator's influence.

"A skunk and a herder with skunks," continued Watkins softly, as if wrapped in contemplative reverie.

The bystanders wondered. "Jim" Jackson, the fire-brand, who had made stalwart men eat lead for a sidelong glance in the street, sat quiescent under this direct insult like one who had not heard, or, hearing, feared to answer.

"A skunk that was named by a skunk at the order of a skunk," elaborated Watkins.

The Senator turned a calm but steely eye upon the speaker.

"Do I hear you discussing Mr. Mason, sir," he asked.

"Yes, sir; you do, sir," replied Watkins, waking suddenly to briskness.

"Mr. Mason is a gentleman, and I must protest against such language in reference to him," said Jackson mildly.

Amusement sat upon the faces of the auditors. Had the Senator some deep design in mind or had he, as some had suggested, gone soft in courage. Half a dozen of the younger men who belonged to Jack-

son look well to the consequences. This is the way I choose for our settlement.

"My opponent and I shall proceed to the Mississippi to a point I have in mind. A small island lies almost dead in the middle of the stream. It is perhaps half an acre in extent, wooded and grown thickly with underbrush. Colonel Watkins and myself will start from opposite sides of the river after nightfall, each alone in a skiff and armed with double-barrelled shotgun and hunting knife. Each will remain by his skiff for ten minutes after landing on the island, when he will start into the brush in search of his antagonist. The seconds will not approach the island until daybreak. That is all."

Accustomed as he was to desperate encounters and absolute indifference to the chances of deadly combat between private enemies the studied bloodthirstiness of the conditions named by his principal appalled Wall. But he fully understood the significance of the affair. It was well planned for the result Jackson had intimated. Should the Senator survive no swashbuckler in the country would have the temerity to challenge him again. But it was a red price for peace.

The young man made no comment, as, indeed, he could not, but signified that he would carry out Jackson's wishes. He did not enter the Jackson home, the thought of Ellen being in mind, excusing himself by the remark that he would meet the Watkins emissary at the gate. When the opposing second arrived a few minutes later he proved to be the follower of Watkins who had sat next the Colonel on the veranda. He approached with the usual formal salutations and tendered the defiance of his principal. Wall communicated the startling conditions made by Jackson in a few brief words.

It was plain that the other was unprepared for anything of the kind. He had come with the air of one

were abreast of the little island. Signals were exchanged by pistol shot between the parties when all was in readiness and the principals in the encounter shoved off alone upon the river. It was dark before either had covered half of the intervening distance.

Jackson laid well to his oars, aware that Watkins as the younger man would be likely to reach the island first. When the bow of his skiff thrust in at the foot of the low, undercurrent bluff he disembarked and made fast. Besides the double-barrelled gun and hunting knife he carried a bag of buckshot and a powder horn, as he had arranged. Both barrels of his firearm were heavily loaded before he started. He renewed his priming and stood near the boat studying his watch by the faint, reflected light of the river. As it moved the last second of the ten minutes that had elapsed since he stepped ashore he swung himself up the short ascent by a branch and threw himself, Indian wise, amid the underbrush.

At no place was the island more than a hundred feet wide. It was ridged along the middle, the ground sloping away laterally. A light evening air was stirring and the heavily massed foliage overhead was full of whispering. Jackson crept swiftly after every move. Under the trees the way was less thickly grown than in the open, but the almost unrelieved pall of darkness was a compensating protection. Toward the centre of the island he could make out a narrow, treeless lane which gave an unobstructed opening toward the east. He dug among the soil with his fingers until he had unearthed a stone about the size of his fist. This he threw in the direction of the bank, snapping his gun ready with the same motion. The clatter of the missile on the rocks of the shore might easily have been mistaken for the misstep of a man below the bluff, but there came no answering sound, no shot, no rush of feet. After waiting a moment Jackson sank to his knees again and resumed his blind stalking.

He waited once more at the upstream verge of the woods, keenly observing each clump of grass, each darker shadow until he had assured himself that Watkins was not lying there in ambush. Then he turned and began his return journey. This time he kept further toward the eastern bank, where Watkins had landed. He was beginning to lose patience.

The Terrific Battle.

He had made less than fifty feet on this track when he stopped suddenly, warned by an animal instinct of danger. Slowly he examined each blade of grass about him, raising himself a few inches. His roving glance was arrested by a small tree that stood out beyond the line of woods just ahead of him. In the fork about a man's height from the ground, he could make out a man's figure. Slowly he brought up his gun and took aim. The instant before he fired one of his triggers there came a flash of fire from the tree. He answered savagely with both barrels and then, abandoning all concealment, stumbled, staggered and rolled toward the bluff, receiving Watkins' second charge midway.

The Senator plunged over the bank, bringing up on the narrow beach below. His left arm was almost useless, but with all the haste he could master he set about reloading. Standing on the sand he could reach head and weapon above the bluff. He sighted carefully upon Watkins, who was partly protected by the tree, and fired one barrel. The shot returned the fire instantly and both men, guiding their aim more accurately by the flashes, discharged their reserve shots simultaneously. Jackson reloaded again and shifted his position further down the bank. Here he was more exposed by a slope in the ground, but he also deprived Watkins of part of his defence by taking the new angle. The Colonel was ready this time and fired twice as soon as Jackson showed himself. The Senator thought to take two deliberate shots, but Watkins dropped from the tree and Jackson sent the double charge at random into the shrubbery at its base. Throwing aside his gun he unheeded his knife and rushed forward.

He caught sight of the figure of Watkins, creeping away into the obscurity of the woods and flung himself upon it. The Colonel, turning agilely, just had time to release his own firearm and draw his knife. The next second they were interlocked, each with a hand on the other's throat and the knives at play.

Wall, who had spent the night pacing up and down the western shore of the river, clambered into the second skiff they had towed when the first streaks of dawn showed upon the sky. He had followed the fusillade anxiously, but had learned nothing of the outcome from the reports. Since their cessation he had heard no further sounds. The fact that the Senator had not returned argued ill for the outcome. The young man rowed out into the stream and saw the Watkins' second put off from the opposite shore. They met below the island and Wall was informed that the Colonel had not come back.

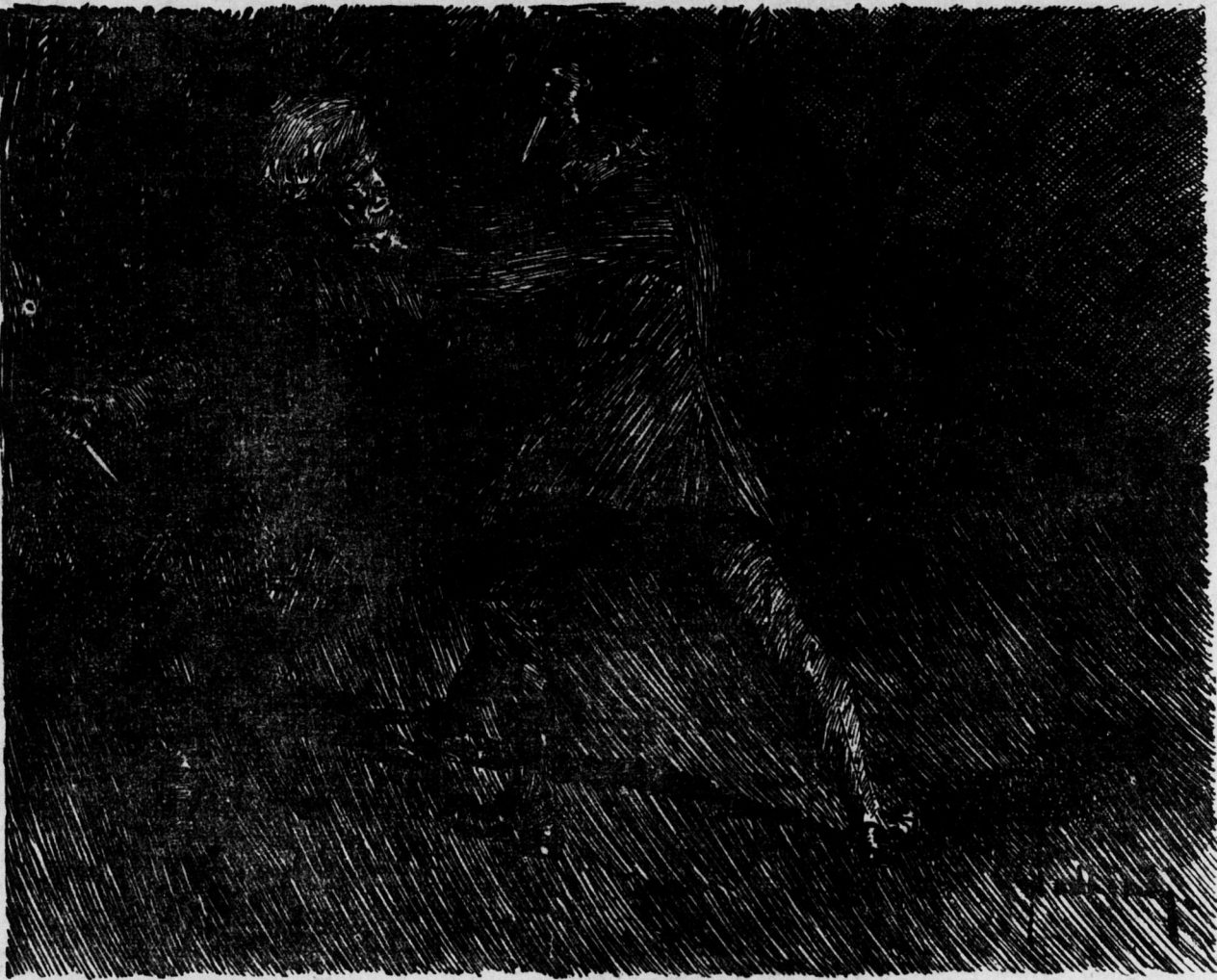
The two seconds then landed on the lower end of the island and began their search. They found the two duellists where they had fallen in the final, desperate struggle. Jackson lay underneath. Across him was Watkins. The clothing of both was ripped to shreds, while bodies and limbs were covered with wounds and gashes.

"They've fought their last duel," said Wall's companion, with a touch of sentiment, bending to lift his principal aside. And then a strange thing happened; the white, streaked face of Senator Jackson showed signs of life. His lips opened slowly and his lips moved. They bent to catch his words.

"I thought folks would see it that way," he said, and fainted again.

Six months later the Senator was about once more in normal health, actively engaged in laying plans for the management of his reunited party organization, from which the death of Watkins had removed the last obstacle. His first public appearance after his convalescence was at the wedding of his ward, Ellen Harms, to Royce Craig. While receiving the congratulations of his friends he was heard to remark that the one thing he regretted was the absence of his late second, Jefferson Wall, who had left the country soon after the duel.

During the remaining years of a long and busy life Senator Jackson was occasionally engaged in political discussions, but it was noticed that his opponents carefully avoided carrying matters to extremes.



THE NEXT SECOND THEY WERE INTERLOCKED, EACH WITH A HAND ON THE OTHER'S THROAT AND THE KNIVES AT PLAY.

Colonel Watkins been runnin' counter to him at the conventions lately and just spollin' for a set-to. Jim's only leadin' him on, encouragin' him like, givin' out the idea in a general way that he's laid down. Oh, he's a clever old fox, he is! Can't you just see Jim Jackson doin' the New Jerusalem business and turnin' the other cheek?"

Whether this was the interpretation put upon the Senator's statement by Royce Craig it certainly was not the one that he advertised during a brief visit to the home town of Watkins, some ten miles distant, which he made on horse early next day. He carefully emphasized the impression existing in some minds to the effect that Jackson would shun another fight, seeking as confidants certain members of the clan of Watkins for that purpose. To the perspicacious young man it appeared desirable that the breach between Wall and Ellen Harms should be kept open, and to his mind nothing would so surely produce that result as a test of the Senator's real stand. He said nothing of his journey upon his return.

During the ensuing week Wall did not visit the Jackson home. For two days he kept away because the incident on the river still rankled. After that he found cause for offence in the fact that he was not invited to a junketing of young folks arranged by Ellen.

The implied predictions of the Postmaster and those who believed with him in Jackson's ulterior motives seemed amply justified when Colonel Richard Watkins, long a political enemy of the Senator, rode up to the Palmetto House one afternoon with several followers and took up a commanding position on the veranda. Their arrival was noised about and there was a large attendance when the Senator sauntered along the street for his usual evening drink. Jackson bowed coolly to Watkins, who returned the salute in kind and ordered refreshment.

The atmosphere about the hotel was charged with trouble. There were a few among those gathered who hazarded unmeaning remarks from time to time in an uneasy attempt to relieve the growing tension, but even these knew that their efforts would be futile. Watkins, a powerful man of middle age, maintained an air of portentous gravity. Jackson, who was his elder by ten years, was equally restrained in his attitude.

Hurling the Defiance.

The group was alert for the first move on either side. Presently Watkins turned with an aside to one

son's local party organization pressed forward angrily. Watkins beamed triumphantly.

"Sir, I shall pay no attention to your protest. Consider that I have repeated all my assertions to the full of their meaning," he retorted.

"Colonel Watkins," said the Senator, without changing his mild tone but rising to his full height, "I gave you an opportunity to withdraw your insulting remarks and now I declare that you are an unequalled liar and scoundrel."

Watkins faced him with a sneer.

"I demand the usual satisfaction for those words," he said. Jackson bowed slightly.

"A friend of mine will wait upon any one you may name at your home within the hour, sir," was the parting phrase of Watkins as he turned and walked into the hotel. Jackson looked about him, his eye falling at length upon Wall, one of those who had come forward to take up the quarrel when it seemed as if he would not.

"Will you do me the honor of acting as second for me, Mr. Wall?" he asked.

There was no possibility for the young man's refusal. Brought up to ideas concerning the code that had become an essential part of him, he could only regard it as a matter for self-congratulation that a distinguished personage like the Senator had selected him to act in an important and delicate capacity. A thought of Ellen flashed to him, but he put it back. This was an affair that, in its stern realism, had nothing in common with fantastic and impossible weakness. He intimated his acceptance and walked by the Senator's side toward the Jackson home.

The Amazing Terms.

"Mr. Wall, I shall make clear to you my purpose in regard to this meeting," said the statesman, when they were removed from the crowd. "As the challenged party I, of course, have the right to name the conditions. You were here of a recent evening when the postmaster questioned me regarding my resolution not to fight again if possible. At that time, you may recall, I declared that if I was called out again it would be my last duel. Some of those who heard saw fear or superstition, possibly cowardice in that phrase. But observe if your judgment does not bear me out."

"Watkins deliberately sought this encounter. I was not desirous of entering into it, although the man has been intolerable for months. I have been induced to see the folly and the futility of combats upon the field of honor. But I could not avoid this. Let the

man expected to find an unwilling adversary, ready to eliminate the likelihood of a fatal outcome as far as possible. And in this, as Wall understood the plans of Watkins, it had been thought to take the Senator at a disadvantage, since the Colonel was a famous shot at long range with rifle or pistol. The young man judged rightly, however, that the challenger could enter no objection and after returning to the hotel for a consultation with his principal the second for Watkins brought an acceptance. It was arranged that the meeting should take place a week later.

In the interval news of the impending event was carefully kept from the Senator's ward. Wall was absent and Craig, for some reason of his own, kept silence, while plying his belated suit assiduously. It was not until the early evening of the date of the duel that he made his final play. Jackson had left the day after the challenge, pleading a business trip. Craig rushed into the house with all the appearance of one who has but just learned of a fearful calamity. Ellen met him in the hall.

Learning of the Duel.

"Have you seen the Senator recently?" was Craig's breathless phrase.

"No," replied the girl, in alarm; "he has been gone a week. Is anything wrong?"

"Then, it's true," gasped the young man, sinking on the stairs. "He's fighting again."

"A duel? Again? With whom?"

"Colonel Watkins. I got wind of it but a moment ago and ran to tell you. I was wrong to do it. It is too late."

She wrung her hands.

"Are you sure? Where are they?"

"Hundreds of miles from here now. At the Mississippi."

"Did any one know of this? Why was I not told before?" asked Ellen in anguish.

"There was rumor of a quarrel," said Craig, "which I made sure you must have heard. But only one person in town besides the Senator knew the particulars."

"And who was that?"

"Jefferson Wall. He's acting as second."

Preparations for one of the most terrible conflicts between two individuals recorded in history were under way at the point indicated by Senator Jackson at the moment when his ward first received word of his intentions. Leaving Watkins and his second on the eastern bank at sundown Jackson and Wall rowed a light skiff to the western side, moving up until they