

horses and dim figures of men spurring and lashing, swept down the road from the westward. The next instant a single gun of a field battery, with its detail of cavalry, had crashed through the frail fence and was wheeling to unlimber in the very doorway. Rick lifted a loose plank in the floor and would have made Madeleine take refuge in the cellar.

"Quick!" he commanded: "they're going to open on our men down yonder from the top of the cliff." But she shook her head, and gathering the trembling child closer in her arms crouched with him at the window.

In the door-yard order had sprung out of chaos as if by magic. The gun, uncoupled from its limber, was run out on the flat rock and its muzzle depressed. There was a flash and a roar; and a grimy artilleryman ran back out of the smoke for a fresh charge. Rick held his breath, and the wine of battle sang in his veins. Without ammunition the gun would be harmless; and the caisson, with the four steaming horses still in the traces, stood in the door-yard, unguarded.

He saw with a soldier's eye what one daring man might do, and if he hesitated more than was meet, it was for fear of the possible consequences to those he would leave behind. Madeleine set him free with a passionate entreaty.

"The back door!" she gasped; "it's the last chance—while they're shooting! Oh, Rick, won't you go?"

He kissed her twice, thrice, and darted out as the shock of a second explosion jarred the window-panes. She meant to take shelter in the cellar when he was gone, but the fascination of terror held her at the window. She counted the seconds: the blue-coated men in the door-yard were busily serving the gun. Surely Rick had had time to make good his escape—

She looked again and could scarcely believe her eyes. Out of the reck of smoke drifting lazily up the road came the figure of the young cavalry officer. His sabre was out, and he was charging the men at the gun as if he had a regiment behind him. For the moment she thought he was mad; then she saw the shrewd method in it. Whatever befell, the men in blue were not to connect him with the farm-house or its inmates.

What did befall came in the twinkling of an eye. At the first shouted "Halt!" the charging figure swerved aside, dashed through the gap in the fence and sprang astride the saddle horse in the limber team. There was a rush to stop him, and a spattering volley of pistol shots; but he bent low on the horse's neck and set his spurs deep, with a yell to the team and a quick gathering up of the jerk-line.

For a palpitant instant Madeleine thought he would escape. The four great horses with the limber were straining to the race, and the road was gained at the first bound. Then she saw the blue-coated cavalry deploy and surround him, and her heart refused to do its office. For in the thick of it Rick had stiffened himself in the saddle, and with a sudden twitch of the jerk-rein had sent the galloping horses over the cliff. This she saw before unconsciousness, kindly Nature's anodyne for tortured souls, came to keep the sharp anguish of it from slaying her.

When the shells from the Federal battery beyond the river had fired the Calvert homestead, other eyes than those of the lovers had watched the destruction of the fine old mansion with regretful absorption. At a loophole in a crevice cave a short distance beyond the spring stood a man wrinkled and grizzled by years of trouble, but with the undimmed eye and erect bearing of one whose chastenings have been for conscience's sake. It was John Vance, the refugee.

"Pore Rick!" he mused. "He's a-payin' toler'ble high for turnin' his back on the old flag." And then: "I don't know as I'd ort to say that neither. 'T wouldn't make no kind o' difference to them fellers that's poppin' away at it if the big house belonged to Meddy—as it ort to."

The black smoke-cloud hid the knoll, and great tongues of flame shot up out of it like gigantic spear-points. The stern old partisan unconsciously echoed Rick's words.

"Hit's gone, and Rick's ruint; same as the rest of us. He set a heap o' store by that old house, like he ort to—bein' a Calvert. Dad burn his han'some pictur', I wisht he warn't a Calvert! Him and Meddy are goin' to match it off one o' these days, spite o' me. She ain't lettin' on to me, but lawzee! I know. She's her mammy right over ag'in; all soft and gentle and easy-like, but she's a-goin' to marry the man she loves 'r bust her heart about it."

He tramped a turn in the narrow crevice, coming back to the loophole presently to watch the conflagration.

"That's about what she'll do; and the man's Rick Calvert. Dad burn it all, I believe I could drop the old quarrel if he hadn't done so much for me and Meddy and the little Buddy.

But to have him a-askin' me for her, and me knowin' 'at he's earned the right to; that ther's what galls. If I could only make out to even hit up, somehow. Hello!—what-all might that be?"

It was the din of the field-piece and its detail, shaking the earth with the purr of spinning wheels and the thunder of hoof-beats in the race for position; and a little later Vance heard the bellowing of the gun near at hand. Whereupon he clambered out of his covert to a perch in the top of a giant oak and saw not only the swift serving of the piece in his own door-yard but Rick's brilliant dash for glory and its tragic ending.

"Lord o' love!" he ejaculated: "if that ther' boy warn't a Calvert, I'd give my old head to be the daddy of him—I would so, if he air a rebel and a-fightin' on the wrong side! Plum over the rock, hawses and all, a-sittin' as straight in his saddle as if he was ridin' to his weddin'! But, Lordy! Lordy! hit'll break Meddy's heart plum in two! Now what-all air them blue-coats a-doin'?' Goin' down after him, I reckon. 'T ain't no use boys; nobody ain't goin' to bury him but me—and Meddy."

The refugee was clambering down from his perch in tremulous haste, but he paused midway at the sight of half a dozen of the cavalymen issuing from the head of the spring path with Rick in the midst; Rick, hatless, bloody and battered, but alive and a prisoner. Five minutes later the detachment clattered past in withdrawal, and John Vance had a glimpse of Rick mounted behind one of the horsemen. His handsome face was marred with blood and dust, but he seemed not to be seriously wounded, and there was a light in his eye which promised more trouble for his captors if they gave him a chance.

Vance had been minded to go home to his children, but he changed his plan on the spur of the moment.

"I was a-wishin' for my chance, and here it air," he said. "That ther' fool boy's a-goin' to get into more troublement; and the blue-coats air my friends and none o' his'n. I'll thees mo-e-y along after 'em and see if I caint make out to even hit up 'twixt us, somehow."

Now it chanced that on that memorable September day the headquarters of the right wing of the Federal advance were in the saddle. Wherefore the sun had gone down behind the Cumberland in a hazy glory of purple and gold before the mountaineer found the general in command. His search had led him in a wide circle over the plateau, and when he was finally directed to the temporary headquarters, he was made to know that he would have saved time by going home at the outset. The general and his staff were at supper in his own house, and thither he bent his steps, not without anxiety for the safety of his daughter, alone and unprotected in the midst of an army.

In the meantime Rick had been carving out his own destiny. When his capture had been formally reported he was sent to the rear, mounted upon a led horse and guarded by a single cavalryman. Before the twain had gone a mile Rick's anxiety for Madeleine nerved him to do a desperate thing. At the first favorable turn in the road he flung himself upon the guard, clubbed the man from his saddle with the butt of his own carbine, and by dint of hard riding made good his escape.

Making a wide détour, he managed to outflank the advancing army, approaching the farm-house on the bluff from the eastward. He had spared neither himself nor the horse, but he was too late. The farm-house was fairly in the midst of the moving regiments.

Rick's hope died, but the necessity was all the more urgent. Abandoning the horse, he tore the stripes from his trousers, robbed a scarecrow in the field of an old hat and a tattered coat, and so made his way through the Federal lines toward his goal. In the very door-yard he was captured, questioned, recognized; and, being found in disguise after having once made his escape, was informed in terse speech that he would doubtless be hanged as a spy when the general in command should have passed upon his case.

The horror of it was Madeleine's. When she recovered consciousness after fainting at the sight of Rick riding to his death over the precipice, the vanguard of the army was thronging the road and trampling the fields about the house. It was a friendly army, but she remembered Rick's warning and cast about anxiously for some place of concealment. The log farm-house was of the kind known in the region as "two pens and a passage," and there was a pole-floored loft extending over the two rooms and the wide passageway. To this space under the rafters the girl retreated with the terror-dumb child; and it was from a cranny in the shingles that she saw Rick's approach and capture, and heard his death sentence predicted.