

of battles to be had filled the air for weeks; and by night the yellow camp-fires glowed in long lines at the foot of the opposite mountain. It was the tenth day since she had had news of her lover and, knowing he was on duty at the lower ferries, her anxiety for him increased as the promised deliverance for her father came hourly nearer.

On the knee-worn rock at the spring's brink she knelt to plunge the pigg in the basin, and in the act a distance-muffled detonation, like the fall of plank upon plank, smote upon the hill-sides of the September afternoon. It was followed by another, and yet others, in a spattering volley. She filled the pigg with a single deft sweep and hastened up the path to the road, a solemn jubilation and a sharp agony of anxiety fighting for pre-eminence in her heart. Without pausing to catch breath at the summit she left the brimming pigg at the roadside and stepped out upon the sheer cliff which overhangs the spring and commands an unobstructed view of the valley. A single glance confirmed both hope and fear; the army of invasion was crossing the river.

While she gazed, breathless, a five-year-old child, with searching eyes and with a shock of soft, brown curls for his only head-covering, ran across from the door-yard opposite and put up his hands to be taken.

It's the sojers a-killin' somebody again; I'm scared—take me, Meddy!"

The terror in his eyes grew pitiful when the plank-like crashes blended in a second scattering volley. War and its horrors filled the small book of his remembrance, reaching back to a fearful night when he had tumbled out of his low trundle-bed in a frenzy of childish terror to find the house aglare with the reflected light of a great fire in the road, and a band of angry men haling his father forth to scourge him for sheltering a runaway slave.

Madeleine took the boy in her arms with a motherly caress—she was the only mother the small brother had ever known—and together they looked out over the broad valley. The purple haze softened the bold outlines of the opposite Cumberlands and hung a transparent veil over the intervening lowlands. In the middle distance the turbid flood of the Tennessee glowed with a metallic lustre in the slanting sunbeams, and the reds and browns of the houses in the little hamlet of Shellmound were curiously flatted by the tint of the color-scheme.

The girl pointed to the copper-hued reach of river beyond the village.

"Look, Jerry," she said. "It's Mr. Lincoln's men; they're coming at last."

The firing had ceased, and a flotilla of boats and rafts left the overhanging fringe of trees on the northern bank and crept diagonally across the stream.

The child put his thin little arms about her neck and shuddered. "It scares me. Tack Byers say they-all roast folks and eat 'em. I wisht pappy'd come home. Why 'n't he come, Sis' Meddy?"

"Never mind what Tack Byers says, Jerry, dear; pappy'll come before long. We must be patient."

"That's what you're always a-sayin', and he don't never come. I thess reckon he's some scared, too; that's what make him run off and hide out, ain't it? Tack Byers say he's a 'bama Yankee.' What-all is a 'bama Yankee,' Sis' Meddy?"

"Hush, honey; pappy mustn't ever hear you say that word. You'll know all about it some day, and then you'll think a sight more of pappy for being brave enough to do what he allows is right."

"But I want to know what-all it is," persisted the small one. "Tack Byers say it thess like he'd say 'nigger.'"

"They call him that because they hate him, little Buddy; because he makes out like Mr. Lincoln's men are in the right. But by-and-by—"

The prophecy was cut short by the thunder of hoof-beats in the road. It was a small detachment of gray-clad cavalry; and the officer in command, a handsome young fellow who sat his horse like a son of Atreus, lifted his cap as the troop swept past.

The boy struggled down from his sister's arms. "Why, it's Cousin Rick! Why 'n't he stop and say 'howdy?'"

While the dust cloud still hung in the air, and as if the query had recalled him, the young officer came galloping back to dismount beside the brother and sister.

"Howdy, Med—howdy, little Buddy." He stooped to pick up the child, and the horse made a lunge to thrust its foam-flecked muzzle into the water-pigg. "Hi! you brute!" he said, jerking the rein.

The soft, gray eyes of the girl were glowing with the loving

fire of gratitude for anxiety vanquished. "Let him drink," she said. "I can fill it again."

Rick tossed the boy to his shoulder and laughed. "Not out of your house pigg. I reckon you've heard the news, Meddy?"

"No; not even a word from you since Tuesday a week."

"I couldn't help it; I've eaten and drunk and slept in the saddle. The Yankees are across—at Caperton's and Bridgeport."

"And up this-away, too," said the girl. "See"—and she pointed to the slow-moving flotilla creeping up to the landing at Shellmound.

The young man took a field-glass from the saddle pocket and levelled it.

"They are, so. It's no corporal's guard, either. The boats are going back for more of them. Was there any fight?"

"There was a little firing: that was before they began to cross."

"That's curious." Rick was sweeping the valley with the glass and frowning. "Muhlberg was down yonder with enough men to—oh, there he is; fifteen minutes too late, and half a mile out of position. That's the Dutchman of it!"

A crash as of a falling lumber-pile followed a puff of smoke from the top of a cedar-crowned knoll in the valley; and five seconds later a shell burst high in air above the embarking host. A battery wheeled into position on a hillside north of the stream, and a quick succession of explosions jurred upon the air.

"Confound him!" said Calvert, apostrophising the German. "He had to go and dig himself in in our door-yard when that hill to the right would have given him the advantage. That settles the fate of the old homestead!"

"The Cedars?" Oh, Rick! I hope not!" Madeleine took the glass and focused it upon the fine old country-house nestling in its grove of fragrant cedars on the little knoll. While she looked, one of the great stone chimneys toppled and fell. Rick saw it, and ground his teeth.

"They're getting his range by the house," he said. "If he'd had the sense of a magpie, he might have known they'd do that. What do you see?"

She had lowered the glass, because her tears blinded her. "It's afire," she said, sorrowfully; and Rick took the glass and looked long and earnestly.

"It's gone!" he said, with a sigh. "This is war, Meddy; and I reckon it's no worse for us than for others. But it's hard, bitter hard. Let's not watch it burn."

He put his arm about her and drew her away from the cliff's brink. A pall of black smoke hung over the cedar knoll, and the cannonade boomed the requiem of the Calvert homestead.

"That's the end of peace and safety for every man, woman and child on this side of the river, Meddy," he said. "The time has come for you to choose between your father and me. You'll go with me, won't you, sweetheart?"

"Oh, Rick—I can't! They're men; they won't hurt me or Jerry. And—and they're father's friends; you forget that."

"No, I don't—I wish I could! But you mustn't forget that they are soldiers—soldiers in an enemy's country. They'll harry first and ask questions afterward—maybe. I can't leave you here alone and unprotected, Meddy. Take Buddy, and let me carry you to Aunt Patchen in Chattanooga. She'll take care of you—she wants you."

"I can't, I can't, Rick! Think of it a minute. father'd go hungry this very night if I didn't carry him his supper! And we'll be safe here, Buddy and I; they-all won't climb the mountain."

"Won't they? Listen!"

The contradiction was already astir in the air. A murmur as of flying wheels punctuated by drumming hoof-beats made itself heard between the cannon crashes. Rick strained his ears.

"It's cavalry—a reconnaissance on the mountain road! Say, quick, Meddy, darling! They'll be here in a minute! Dick'll carry the three of us. You must—I can't let you stay."

She turned and snatched the child from his shoulder.

"No, no; she cried. "My place is here. But you go, Rick, dear; if you love me like you say you do, mount and ride for your life! I'm safe here; I'll—"

In the midst of her passionate appeal he had freed the horse and sent it cantering down the road to the eastward.

"If you stay, I stay with you," he said, doggedly; and taking the child from her arms, he led the way at a quick run across the road, up the box-bordered path and into the house, shutting and barring the door with soldierly promptitude.

Their retreat was none too swift. As the oaken bar dropped into place a whirlwind of yellow dust, thick with straining