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***** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK TOM OF THE RAIDERS *****

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[Illustration by Morgan Dennis: Again and again Tom fed logs into the flames.]

TOM OF THE RAIDERS

BY

AUSTIN BISHOP

ILLUSTRATED BY
MORGAN DENNIS

To
DOLORES AND SAM
WITHOUT ADHESIONS

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Again and again Tom fed logs into the flames. _Frontispiece_

The little ferryboat pitched and turned in the current of the river.

The men were feeding the fires they had collected, out upon the road through an opening they had broken in the rear of the car.

"I didn't want to come here, Marjorie, for fear I'd get you into trouble--"

CHAPTER ONE

WITH THE SECOND OHIO

As he rounded the last bend of the road, Tom saw the white tents of the Union army stretched out before him. He forgot how tired he was after his long walk, and pressed forward eagerly, almost running. The soldiers who were sauntering along the road eyed him curiously.

"Hey, you! You can't go by here without a pass!" The Sentry's rifle, with its long gleaming bayonet, snapped into a menacing attitude.

Tom stopped abruptly, caught his breath, and asked: "Is this the Second Ohio?"

"Maybe," answered the Sentry coldly. "What do you want to know for?"

"I've come to see my cousin--Herbert Brewster, of Company B."

The Sentry's position relaxed. He brought his rifle to the ground, leaned upon it, and gazed at the young man who stood before him. "Well now!" he said. "He'll certainly be glad to see you! We don't get many visitors down this way. What's your name?"

"Tom Burns."

"Going to enlist?"

"Yes. How'd you guess it?"

"Oh, I dunno. I just thought so. You're pretty young, ain't you?"

"Eighteen," answered Tom. "I'm old enough to fight." He looked past the Sentry, down at the even rows of tents which formed the company streets of the Second Ohio. His heart beat faster at the thought that he would be part of it after today. A soldier in the Union army!

"I'll send a messenger with you down to Company B," said the Sentry.

"You'll have to get the Captain's permission before you can see your

cousin."

It was early in April, 1862. The troops under the command of General O. M. Mitchel were encamped between Shelbyville and Murfreesboro, Tennessee, after a march from Nashville through a steady drizzle of rain. It had been a dreary, tedious march, made worse by long detours to avoid burnt bridges, detours over roads where the heavy wagons of the army sank hub-deep in the glue-like mud. It had been a fight against the rain and mud every inch of the way. And now, except for the details of bridge repairing, the troops were resting, drying their water-soaked knapsacks, and gathering strength for the march southward. Rumors of Chattanooga were in the air, and the camp was buzzing with talk of "Mitchel's plan of campaign." Groups of soldiers stood about exchanging views on what would happen next, speculating upon the points where they would come into contact with the rebels: others were playing games, or lying upon blankets spread before their tents, sleeping, reading and writing letters. The rows of tents gave a suggestion of military orderliness to the scene, but it was a suggestion only, for the tents and their guy ropes were strung with blankets and clothing put out to dry.

Although it was not quite what he had expected to see, the camp was wonderful and thrilling to Tom Burns. He had expected more military pomp and precision; not simply hundreds of men, half-clothed and weather-worn, loitering and shifting between rows of tents. Even the tents were patched and dirty. But if the scene did not compare with the picture he had in his imagination--of officers mounted upon spirited horses, buglers sounding calls, companies standing at attention--there was a spirit of action and excitement in the air which made him rejoice. These men, who were half-clothed because the only garments they had to put upon their backs were tied to the guy ropes drying, were hardened campaigners; men, roughened and toughened in their months of service, pausing a moment before battle. The stains and tears of the tents were campaign badges. Tom began to feel proud that "his" regiment was not like the new, raw troops he had seen in the north--immaculately clean troops which had never known a night in the open, far from the comforts of barracks.

He was speechless as the messenger who had been detailed by the Sergeant of the Guard led him down the regimental street, where the officers' tents faced each company street. Company F ... Company E ... Company D.... At the head of each street was a small penciled sign telling them what company they were passing. Tom glanced ahead to Company B. In front of the officer's tent two men were talking.

"Is one of them the Captain?" he asked.

"Yep--the short one," answered the messenger. "The other's the doctor."

"What's the Captain's name?"

"Moffat--Captain Moffat."

They stopped a few paces from where the Captain and the doctor were standing, and waited. Tom hazarded a glance down the street of Company B to

see if he could catch a glimpse of his cousin, but Herbert Brewster was not in sight. Presently the Captain turned toward them. He was a short man, heavily built, and his manner was that of a man who had spent a lifetime commanding soldiers.

"Well, what is it?" he asked.

The messenger snapped to attention: he saluted. "This man wants to see Herbert Brewster of your company, sir."

"I'm his cousin, sir," added Tom.

The Captain dismissed the messenger with a nod. "You're Corporal Brewster's cousin, eh?"

"Corporal?" asked Tom.

The Captain laughed. "I thought that would surprise you. Yes, he was made Corporal last week. You'll find him in the third tent on your left. I don't suppose you know that he's on the sick list with a bad ankle?"

"No!"

"Yep."

"I hope it isn't serious."

"Hm-m-m"--the Captain stroked his chin--"no, the ankle isn't serious, but being on the sick list is. Run along and cheer him up. Tell him that I'll be down to see him in a few minutes."

"Yes, sir."

The Captain turned back to the doctor, and Tom threaded his way down the street. At the third tent he stopped, pulled open the flap and peered in. There was Bert, stretched out on his bedding, writing a letter. His right ankle was a mass of bandages from which his toes peered out. He did not look up from his writing.

"Does Corporal Herbert Brewster of Cleveland, Ohio, live here?" asked Tom.

"You, Tom! you!"

"Don't try to get up on that bad ankle." He rushed over and grabbed Bert's hand. "How are you?"

"What in the world are you doing at Murphytown?--or whatever they call this end of the mud-puddle. And how are all the people? When did you see mother and father last?"

Tom held up his hands in surrender; then, as he sat down on the edge of the bedding, Bert took him by the shoulders and shook him. "They're all fine. I'm here to enlist, Corporal. Will you have me in your squad?"

"You bet! Tell me about home."

Bert had been among the first to enlist, and, except for one furlough of two weeks, he had not been able to return home. Many minutes passed before Tom reached the point of his own departure from Cleveland; how he had gained the consent of his father and mother to his enlistment; his trip to Murfreesboro and all his adventures and misadventures en route. "And, by the way," he ended, "the Captain said that I was to tell you that he'd be here to see you soon. And what did you do to your ankle?"

"The Captain's coming to see me, eh? Humph! A lot of good that'll do me. Was he talking with the doctor?"

"Yes."

"Humph!" Bert plunged into thought.

"How about the ankle?" Tom reminded him. "What did you do to it?"

"I was on a bridge detail yesterday," answered Bert gloomily. "We were loading some pilings to be hauled up to a bridge, and I was on the wagon, placing them as they were shoved up to me. They were all greasy with mud, and I--well, I was thinking about some other things, and I stepped on a slippery hunk of mud. I went down; then one of the pilings rolled over when my foot struck it, and went on my ankle."

"Gee, that's hard luck!"

"I'd just as soon sprain a dozen ankles," answered Bert. "That isn't the hard luck."

"What do you mean?" asked Tom.

Bert looked at him for a moment, then shook his head. "No," he said. "I can't tell you. It's something we were planning to do, and"--he motioned towards his ankle--"here I am. Perhaps I'll tell you later."

The flap of the tent was pushed aside and the Captain entered. He stood for a moment looking regretfully at Bert. "I'm sorry," he said, "but the doctor says it can't be done. Too bad!"

Bert glared at his ankle. "Well, sir, if it can't be done, it just can't."

Tom watched the two men, wondering what thoughts were in their minds. What was this mysterious plan that was ending so badly?

The Captain spoke at last: "It's nice that you have your cousin here to keep you company while you're waiting for your ankle to heal."

"He'll be with me longer than that, Captain. He's come to enlist."

"Good!" exclaimed Captain Moffat. He turned to Tom. "I'll be glad to have

you, my boy!"

"And I'll be glad to be with you."

"Sir!" corrected Bert. "You'll have to learn to say 'sir' in the army."

"Yes--sir!" replied Tom.

The Captain smiled: "What's your name?"

"Burns, sir. Tom Burns."

"And how old are you!"

"Eighteen, sir."

"Young," commented the Captain, "but you look strong enough to stand the life." He put out his hand. "I'm glad to have you. We need men these days, and we can always handle a few recruits. You can stay here with Corporal Brewster until you're assigned to a squad. I'll have some bedding sent down here for you to use until you draw your kit." He started out, then paused. "Don't be too disappointed, Brewster. There'll be other chances."

"Keep me in mind for the first chance, Captain."

"I'll promise you that."

"Thank you, sir," said Bert. "Do you know who will take my place?"

"Not yet," replied Captain Moffat. "I'll have to select a man."

He left the tent, his heavy sword clanking as he walked. Tom resumed his seat beside Bert.

"What is this scheme of yours, Bert?" he asked. "Can't you tell me? Is it a secret?"

Bert considered the matter for nearly a minute, while Tom watched him intently. "Yes, it's a secret," replied Bert; then he added, "But I'll tell you."

"If it's a military secret, perhaps you'd better not. Of course I wouldn't tell anyone, but...."

"No, it's all right for me to tell you." Bert put his hand into his knapsack which lay beside his bed and pulled forth a map. "Look here." Tom moved up beside him and they spread the map out on their knees. "There's a town called Corinth." Tom pointed with a brown forefinger. "Beauregard is there. And here is Atlanta, which is Beauregard's base of supplies. Here is Murfreesboro where we're camped. If Beauregard's supplies were cut off between Atlanta and Chattanooga, what would happen to Beauregard?"

"He'd been in for trouble," answered Tom.

"And Chattanooga...?"

"Chattanooga would be flying Mitchel's flag." Tom's eyes brightened, and he turned so that he could look squarely at his cousin. "But, Bert, how were you going to do it?"

Bert smiled wanly, and left Tom in suspense a moment before he answered. Then he glanced balefully at his ankle. "Some of us were going into the South, and ... well, we were simply going to do it."

"The railroad between Atlanta and Chattanooga?" asked Tom.

"You've guessed it, but, on your life, don't breathe a word of it."

Tom's eyes opened wide. "Never! And aren't they going to do it now! Just because you're ankle is broken?"

"They'll do it, all right," answered Bert. "I'm not that important. There's only one man who is so important that they have to have him."

"And who's that?"

"The leader--the man who planned it. He knows the country." Bert folded the map and put it back in his knapsack.

"I'm sorry about your ankle," Tom said weakly. "With a chance like that!" He whistled, and leaned back, with his hands clasped around a knee, gazing steadfastly at the roof of the tent. Bert rested his chin in his hands and sat silently, looking at him. Tom's eyes narrowed and his fingers tightened until they were white.

"Bert..." he began, then stopped.

"Yes?"

Their eyes met. Tom leaned forward and clutched his cousin's arm. "Do you think, Bert, that Captain Moffat would let me go in your place?"

"I don't know," answered Bert. "But we can ask. Asking won't do any harm."

"Will you ask him? Will you really?"

"Do you want to go? Without knowing any more about it than that?"

"More than anything else in the world. Do you think he will let me go, Bert? Tell him that I'm not afraid--that I can be trusted to carry out orders. You know I can do it, don't you, Bert?"

"Yes, I know you can do it. And I thought that you'd probably want to do it. That's why I disobeyed orders and told you. I wanted to give you the chance to volunteer."

"I wonder if the Captain'll just laugh and say that I'm a raw recruit."

"The Captain isn't that kind of man," answered Bert. "He doesn't laugh at a fellow just because he wants to do something. And about being a raw recruit.... It's my opinion that he'd rather send a recruit, if he's a good man, than a trained soldier. Trained soldiers are too scarce. He was willing to let me go because I volunteered months ago for any expedition that was to be sent out. When the call came for a man from each company, he called me into his tent, and just told me that I was going. Of course, a man doesn't have to go. It's for volunteers only. You know what it might mean if you got caught?"

"That we'd be held as spies. And perhaps...?"

"Yes."

They were silent for a moment.

"Will you ask the Captain now?" demanded Tom.

"You go on up to his tent and ask him if he'll come down here for a minute," said Bert. "You're absolutely positive that you want to go? You wouldn't rather have me wait until tomorrow while you think it over?"

"No! Ask him now, before he decides on someone else!"

Tom clapped his cousin on the shoulder, hurried out of the tent and up the company street.

CHAPTER TWO

THE RAIDERS START

"Come with me," said Captain Moffat, as he emerged from Bert Brewster's tent. Tom had been waiting outside, while Bert and the Captain were talking. He had recognized several men from Cleveland in the company and had tried to carry on a conversation with them. But conversation was impossible. His mind was too full of hopes and plans to recall the news from home. Now, as he walked up the company street, he wondered what the Captain was thinking. Would he be allowed to take Bert's place? He hazarded a glance at the Captain's face, but he could find no answering expression there--always the same stern mask, from which black eyes flashed. Tom could feel his heart pounding as they entered the Captain's tent.

"Sit down," said Captain Moffet, pointing to a box. He called his messenger. "I don't want to be disturbed for a few minutes."

"Very good, sir," answered the messenger. He stationed himself a few yards in front.

"It strikes me," the Captain said, as he sat in a folding chair directly before Tom, "that you are entirely too young to be sent out on such an expedition as this. But I like to know that you volunteer for it. It gives me a comfortable feeling to have men in my company who are always ready for anything that comes up, who are perpetual volunteers for the dangerous jobs."

Tom felt his heart sink. Then he wasn't to be allowed to go! This was simply a nice way of telling him that he couldn't!

"But, Captain," he said explosively, "I'd rather do this than anything else on earth. I am young--I'll admit that--but that'll make me all the more valuable. If it comes to carrying messages, I can run for miles without stopping. Why, I can move faster and fight harder just because I am young! Please give me the chance!"

The Captain looked at him narrowly. "You really want to go, don't you?"

"Yes!" Tom almost shouted.

"All right," said the Captain, rising from his chair. "You are going." Tom wanted to thank him, but he was speechless. "You will hold yourself in readiness for orders." The Captain had become the quiet, stern military man again. "You will let it be known that you are here to visit your cousin, and when you leave camp you will say that you are returning home."

"Yes, sir."

"In the meantime, provide yourself with some rough clothes at Shelbyville, and some heavy shoes. I will provide you with a revolver. That will be all now."

"Yes, sir."

Tom hurried back to his cousin's tent in a daze.

The next afternoon at the general store in Shelbyville he bought a rough suit, and a heavy pair of shoes. "Just wrap the suit up," he told the clerk, "I'll be in for it tomorrow, or the next day. I'll wear the shoes." He tramped back to Murfreesboro, displayed his pass to the Sentry, and went to Bert's tent.

"The doctor has been in again," Bert told him. "He says that my ankle will be well in a week or so."

"Good!" exclaimed Tom. "Look at my pretty little shoes." He displayed the heavy, rough boots he had bought at Shelbyville.

"You ought not to start in those things," advised Bert. "New shoes will cripple you. Here, we'll trade." He produced a pair which had been worn soft in miles of marching. "And here's a waterproof cape for you."

"No, I don't want to take your things."

But Bert insisted. "I know this sort of life. You take 'em and don't argue."

Bert had told him all that he knew of the raid, but, as he remarked, "that's little enough." None of the men who had volunteered knew the details of the expedition: they knew only that they were to accept orders from an unknown man, follow him blindly and willingly into whatever he might lead them. It was to be a raid of great importance, a raid that might change the course of the war if it proved successful. So great was the secrecy that no man knew who his companions were to be. All of them, as Tom, were waiting for orders to be given without knowing when the orders would come, nor what they would be. Tom spent hours, when his cousin's tentmates were away, studying the map, memorizing minute details of it.

Orders came on his third day at camp. He was clearing away the tin plates and cups from which they had been eating dinner, when the Captain's orderly appeared at the door of the tent. "Cap'n wants to see you immediately."

Tom and Bert exchanged a glance; then Tom followed the messenger to the Captain's tent.

When the messenger had been stationed to keep intruders away, the Captain said: "You will leave tonight. Take the Wartrace road out of Shelbyville and walk about a mile and a quarter. When you come to a fork in the road go into the trees and wait until you're picked up. You should be there at eight o'clock. You understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Repeat my instructions."

Tom repeated them without fault.

"Good! Wait here for a moment." The Captain left the tent. He returned presently with the Major of the battalion and another Captain. From the box where the documents of Company B were kept, he produced enlistment papers. For several minutes, while Tom stood tense and erect, the Captain wrote. The other two officers talked in an undertone.

"Sign here," said the Captain. Tom signed. The Major picked up the paper and glanced through it.

"Hold up your right hand," said the Major. Then Tom heard the oath which bound him to serve the United States of America honorably as a soldier.

"I do," he replied, and let his hand drop to his side again.

The two officers signed the papers, shook hands with him, nodded to Captain Moffat and left the tent. It all happened so quickly that Tom could scarcely realize that he was now a soldier. When he had entered the tent he was a civilian, bound merely by promises of service; now he was a soldier,

without a uniform, to be sure, but none the less a soldier. His eyes dimmed and he looked away from the Captain.

Captain Moffat folded the paper, returned it to the box, and faced Tom. He looked at him thoughtfully for a few seconds; then placed his hands upon his shoulders.

"Private Tom Burns," he said softly. "Good luck to you. It will be Second Lieutenant Tom Burns if this expedition is a success. Good luck, my boy, and may God be with you." He took Tom's hand and shook it.

And then Tom found himself walking down the street of Company B--a soldier of Company B--and he scarcely knew that his feet were treading ground.

There were two men in the tent, talking with Bert, and Tom waited impatiently for them to leave.

"Tonight," he said shortly, as the tent flap dropped behind them.

"Tonight?"

"Yes."

They sat silently until Bert exclaimed, "I envy you! You're the luckiest boy in the world, walking right into such a chance as this."

"I wish you were going."

"So do I."

Silence overcame them again.

"I'd better write a letter home," Tom said presently. "I'll say that I've enlisted and let it go at that."

It was shortly before six o' clock when Tom left camp. He went to the store in Shelbyville, claimed the suit he purchased two days before, and induced the proprietor to let him make the change in the back room of the store. He made a bundle of the clothes he had discarded, left them at the store saying that he would call for them in a few days, then went out on the one street of the village. It was deserted; the good citizens of Shelbyville were at dinner, and a few soldiers who had come to the village to make purchases were hurrying back to camp to be there when mess call sounded. In the excitement of his departure Tom had forgotten that he must eat, but, with a half-hour to spare before starting for the meeting place, he returned to the store and stuffed his pockets with food. Then, with a hunk of cold meat in one hand and a slice of bread in the other, he walked down the village road, eating his supper as he went. Near the edge of the village he saw two men ahead of him, and he wondered if they too were members of the expedition. They stopped, leaning against a fence, and eyed him as he went by.

Dusk came, and then darkness. The sky was overcast, but occasionally the

moonlight flashed through a break in the clouds, showing the road before him. Walking was difficult, for the half-dried mud was slippery, and the broad wheels of wagons had made deep ruts. Several times he stumbled, and once he wrenched his ankle. He made his way more carefully after that, sometimes feeling out the ground with the toes of his boots before he placed his weight forward. The thought of being disabled before he had really started on the adventure, of going back to camp to commiserate with Bert over sprained ankles, filled him with dread. The deepest ruts turned away from the main road to a farm house: a dog barked, and Tom hurried forward. Several hundred yards further along the road, he thought he saw a man who moved behind a tree and hid. He did not stop to investigate.

Tom paused for a moment at the fork of the road; then went forward breathlessly. Between the bushes which lined the edge of the fork stood several tall trees, with their trunks lost in black, ragged undergrowth. In the darkness he made out a trail. Again he paused, straining for the slightest sound. As he took a step forward he heard someone say:

"Hello, there!"

He stopped short. "Hello," he gasped; then, when he had overcome his surprise, "Where are you?"

"Just four feet ahead of you."

"Who are you?"

"Brown, Company F, Twenty-first Ohio."

"Oh,"--this with relief in his voice--"I'm Burns, Company B, of the Second. Are there any others here?" He went forward and they tried to make out each other's faces in the dark.

"No. There was to be a third man with us, Andrews said," answered Brown. "He hasn't come yet."

"And who's Andrews?" asked Tom.

Brown laughed. "Why, he's the man who's leading us. The one who's going to take us in."

"I didn't know," answered Tom. "They didn't tell me much--except that I was going. That was enough."

"That's about as much as most of the men know," remarked Brown. "Knight and I were the only ones who talked with Andrews. We are the engineers."

"The engineers?" asked Tom. "What sort of engineers?" He heard Brown chuckle.

"Well, they didn't tell you much, did they? Locomotive engineers, of course. We're going to steal a railroad train."

"Steal a railroad train!" exclaimed Tom.

"Yep! That's what we're going to do."

Tom gave a low whistle.

Brown continued: "We're going to take a train on the Georgia State Railroad. Knight and I are to run it, and the rest of you...."

From down the road came a mumble of voices. Brown clutched Tom's arm and they listened. "That's them!" exclaimed Brown in a whisper.

One man of the approaching group stepped off the road into the fork, while the others waited.

"Brown," he called.

"Right here, sir." Brown stepped forward, and Tom followed.

"How many are with you?" asked the man.

"Just one--Burns. The third hasn't come yet."

"How are you, Burns? I'm Andrews." He groped for Tom's hand in the darkness, shook it. "I wonder where the other man is. Well, it makes no difference. We won't wait for him. Come on."

They followed him, out to where the others were standing.

"This way, men," said Andrews, starting up the road on the left. Brown and Tom fell in beside him. "The rest of you straggle out so that you can get off the road quickly if anyone comes." Then, to Brown and Tom: "Perhaps he's lost, or perhaps he's changed his mind. Three others weren't where I told them to be, but we'll get along just as well without them. I arranged it this way so that if any of you did decide at the last minute that you didn't want to go...." He did not finish the sentence. Presently he said: "I want no men who aren't anxious to be with me."

Tom could not see Andrews' face, but he liked his calm, pleasant voice. Conversation stopped, except for Brown's remark, "It looks like rain," and Andrews' answering, "Hm-m-m." For several minutes they plodded along the road, hidden even from the intermittent light of the moon by the trees that grew beside the road.

"Here we are," said Andrews presently. They stopped and waited for the others; then turned off the road into a small opening in the woods. Andrews went ahead of them, and called back, "Come over here."

They found him with two men. There came a rumble of thunder, so remote that it seemed like an echo, but to the ears of Andrews' men it was a sharp reminder of the troubles that might lay ahead of them.

"Hm-m-m! Perhaps you were right, Brown," said Andrews.

Thunder sounded again, this time nearer.

"Let's count heads," said Andrews. "Get in a semi-circle, just as close together as possible."

The men groped about, arranging themselves. Tom found himself shoulder to shoulder between two of them. Presently they were quiet. Andrews' calm, authoritative voice came again: "Starting at this end, give your names and your organizations."

Then: "Bensinger, Company G, Twenty-first Ohio"--"Dorsey, Company H, Thirty-third"--"Brown, Company G, Twenty-first"--"Pittenger, Company G, Second".... There were twenty of them, not including Andrews. Tom found himself between Wilson, Company C, of the Twenty-first Ohio, and Shadrack, Company K, of the Second Ohio.

The thunder sounded again and a few drops of rain pattered down. A murmur arose from the men. More thunder, and a flash of lightning. Another crash, and more rain splashed about them.

"It looks as though we're in for bad weather, men," said Andrews. "Gather about me so that you can all hear what I'm going to tell you." A streak of lightning illuminated the scene as they moved forward. Tom caught a glimpse of Andrews: a tall man, heavily built, with a long black beard. The rain was falling steadily. Tom unslung the cape which Bert had given him and put it on. There was a general rustle of capes and coats: then silence. Andrews continued: "I want all of you to understand that any man who wishes to change his mind may do so, and return to camp when we leave here. I want only those men who are willing and anxious to see this thing through, to follow me to the end"--he paused--"and that end may well be disaster. You have three days and three nights in which to reach Marietta, and you may travel as you see fit. Avoid forming groups of more than four. The course is east into the Cumberland Mountains, then south to the Tennessee River. Cross the river and travel by train, from whatever station you come to, through Chattanooga to Marietta. I will follow the same general course. Be at the hotel in Marietta not later than Thursday evening, ready to start the next morning. Have you any questions to ask about the route?"

There were questions, many of them. Over and over again he traced the course they were to follow; told them what they might find at certain points, what to avoid.

"I will supply you with all the Confederate money you will need. Carry none of our money with you."

"And if we are questioned?" asked Brown. Tom recognized his voice; then, in another flash of lightning he caught a glimpse of his face. That one glimpse was to change the course of Tom's adventures.

"I am coming to that presently," answered Andrews. "Buy whatever you need, and hire any sort of conveyance that you may think safe. But don't be lavish with the money I'm giving you--it may have to last a long time. It

should be more than enough, but we can't tell what will happen. And now about being questioned: If you have to answer questions, say that you come from Fleming County, Kentucky; that you are on your way to join the Southern troops. I happen to know that no men from Fleming County are in the Southern army, and so there will be little risk of meeting anyone from there. And if you are asked why you don't enlist immediately, say that you want to join a regiment in Atlanta."

"And if we're completely cornered?" asked one of the men.

"Then enlist."

"In the Southern army?"

"Surely. Remember, men, that you are playing a bigger game than your own personal likes and dislikes. The idea of enlisting in the Southern army may seem terrible, but it isn't so terrible as being captured and tried as a spy. You can desert at the first chance. And remember this: upon every one of you depends the success or failure of this venture."

There was a murmur of approval, then silence.

Andrews continued:

"Tomorrow morning General Mitchel starts on a forced march. He will surprise and capture Huntsville on Friday. Our work is to capture the train that same day, destroy communications from Atlanta and join him with all possible speed. We will try to reach him with our train. Failing that, we will desert the train and join him as best we can."

Mitchel would move the next morning! Huntsville! Chattanooga! For a moment the men were silent; then came a sharp "Ah!" The long winter campaign was ended; now for action!

"We will start at once," said Andrews. A crash of thunder drowned his words. "From Marietta onwards we will fight it out together."

He began to distribute money to them. Several groups disappeared into the night.

"Shall we go together?" asked a man at Tom's right. "My name's Shadrack."

"Yes. Mine's Burns."

"Mine's Wilson," said another man. "Let's make it three."

"Good!"

They filed past Andrews, took the handful of Confederate money he held out, and started toward the road. The rain ceased for a few seconds; then came a flash of lightning, a burst of thunder, and the rain came swirling down. In an instant, Tom and his two companions were utterly alone in the black night, headed for the Southern lines.

CHAPTER THREE

ARRESTED

"The Union pickets are at Wartrace," said Wilson, as they plodded down the road.

"We ought to pass them tonight," Tom added. "Have we any way of identifying ourselves?"

"No," replied Wilson. "We'd better try to avoid them."

"What I hope," remarked Shadrack, with a chuckle, "is that our pickets are sleepy--dreaming of a nice warm fire at home, instead of keeping on the alert. Whew! what a storm!"

The steady pelting of the rain made conversation impossible. The road was becoming a slippery gumbo into which their feet sank deeply, and they put all their strength into the laborious task of walking. Finally, after an hour, they stopped to rest.

"I don't think we've gone more than two miles," said Tom.

"The railroad track runs along here to the left some place," Wilson remarked. "If we could reach it, we'd find better walking."

"You'll have to swim to get there," muttered Shadrack. "Those fields will be mud up to our necks."

"Be quiet!" Tom whispered. "Someone's coming."

"Probably some of our own men," said Wilson.

They stood silently as two men passed them on the road. It was impossible to see them in the darkness, but they caught a broken sentence, "...find a barn ... too much mud...."

"That's about the best thing that we can do," said Shadrack, after the men had gone by. "Find a barn some place, and stay there for the night."

"I'd like to push on," replied Tom. "What do you think, Wilson?"

"Let's try to reach the railroad."

"All right."

Shadrack grunted his assent, and they trudged along the road, looking for an opening to the left. Presently a flash of lightning showed them a field.

They climbed the fence and started across. Their feet sank in mud that seemed bottomless, and water oozed in over their shoe-tops.

"Can you make it?" asked Wilson.

"Yeh--go on," answered Tom, panting.

"I'm coming," muttered Shadrack.

It took them a half-hour to cross the field; then they sat on the fence exhausted. No lightning came to show them the way, so they climbed the fence, crossed another road, and entered a second field. The mud here was worse.

"Bogged!" exclaimed Shadrack.

They retreated to the road.

"Let's follow this road," suggested Tom. "It seems to go in the general direction of the railroad tracks."

"Probably goes to a farmhouse," replied Wilson.

"Suits me exactly," said Shadrack.

During the next twenty minutes they made their way slowly along the road, slipping in the mud, sometimes falling. Twice Tom went down on his hands and knees. Shadrack sprawled face downward, and got up muttering something about "eating the filthy stuff."

Ahead of them a dog commenced to bark; then a door opened, and a man stood looking out.

"Call your dog off," yelled Wilson.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" demanded the farmer. The dog continued to bark, but he did not approach them.

"We're on our way to Wartrace," answered Wilson, "and we're lost in the storm. Can you give us a place to sleep?"

"Are you soldiers?"

Wilson paused a moment, then answered, "No."

"Come on up here then, and let's look at ye," answered the farmer. "Here, Shep, shut up that barking! Come here!"

They saw the dog curl up at its master's feet, and they went forward.

"How far are we from Wartrace?" asked Wilson, as they approached the door.

"'Bout two miles," answered the farmer. "Wait there, and I'll take a look

at ye." He reached to one side and took a lamp. Then, shielding his eyes from the light, he held it up and glanced from one to the other. The dog came toward them, whining and growling. "Shut up, Shep. All right--come on in."

They entered the shanty. In one corner of the room a dilapidated stove was glowing; in another corner there was a bed, made of rough boards, with a pile of dirty bedding on the straw. A table and one chair completed the furniture. Near the door some farm implements were stacked. A rusty, battered pan on the floor caught the water that dripped in through a leak in the roof.

Now, for the first time, the three adventurers had an opportunity of seeing each other. Tom, as he took off his cape and water-soaked coat, glanced first at Wilson, then at Shadrack. Wilson was a tall man, nearly forty, with a serious face. His mouth was stern, and he had sharp gray eyes. Shadrack was short and plump. He was still blowing and puffing from his exertions in the mud, but he laughed as he took out a handkerchief and wiped his face. He had, in truth, been eating mud, for his face was streaked with it. "Had my mouth open when I fell," he explained.

The farmer stood at the door, watching them silently as they took off their shoes and put them by the stove. Finally he asked, "What are you going to Wartrace for?"

Tom had been wondering what story they had better tell him. They were still north of their own lines, even though they were in enemy country, and he felt that there might be some danger in saying that they were on their way to join the Southern army. He decided to leave the response to Wilson, who, because of his age and experience, was the natural leader. But, before Wilson could speak, Shadrack replied:

"We're from Fleming County, Kentucky, and we're going through the lines to join the Confederate army."

Wilson frowned and shook his head at Shadrack.

"So?" asked the farmer. "Goin' to fight the Yanks, eh?"

"Yep," answered Shadrack, "an' we're goin' to give 'em a good licking! That's what they need! We've seen all we want to see of Yanks."

"Well, I'll tell you right now that you're going to waste yer time," replied the farmer. "An' maybe you'll waste more than that."

Shadrack sat down on the floor near the fire, and Tom squatted beside him.

"You have some pretty bad rainstorms in this part of the country, don't you?" Wilson asked.

While Wilson was speaking, Tom nudged Shadrack, and muttered, "Be careful--don't talk too much." Shadrack's eyes lighted in puzzled surprise.

After a long silence, the farmer spoke: "You men better turn around again an' go back to yer homes. Yer folks need you more than the South does. The North is going to win this war."

In their hearts they were elated to hear a Southerner say that their own troops would be victorious; but, having told one story, they decided not to change.

"No," said Wilson solemnly, "we must go on."

Presently the farmer arose and stretched, "I'll go out an' see if the chickens are all right," he said, and left the shanty.

"Don't be a fool," said Wilson earnestly, "Don't be a better rebel than the Southerners."

"I'm sorry," replied Shadrack. "That's what we were told to say...."

"I know," interrupted Wilson, "but we have to be careful in the way we tell that story. For one thing, remember that we're still inside our own lines."

"Yes," replied Shadrack ruefully.

"I think you'd better do the talking for us," suggested Tom to Wilson.

"We'll just agree to what you say."

"Now, that's a good idea!" exclaimed Shadrack. "We'll just nod our heads an' say, 'That's right!' I'll not say a word after this."

A half-hour passed before the farmer returned. Without speaking, he took off his boots and coat, and lay down on his bed. The others arranged themselves on the floor about the stove, and Tom blew out the light. The floor was hard, but the stove was warm--and they were dry. Sleep came almost immediately.

They were awakened at dawn by the door opening, and a man shouting, "Get up there! Hold you hands up! Strike a light, Johnson."

Tom jumped to his feet. In the half-light of morning he saw the glint of a revolver. Wilson and Shadrack were beside him, and the farmer was sitting on the edge of his bed. They put their hands up--all except the farmer. The bluish flame of a sulphur match sputtered, then grew bright. Three Union soldiers stood before them with drawn revolvers, while a fourth lighted the lamp.

"These are the men, I presume, Smith?" asked the Sergeant.

The farmer grunted.

Tom and Shadrack looked to Wilson to speak, but he said nothing. So the farmer had sent word to Union troops! When he had gone out to look after his chickens, he had sent a messenger with the news that three ardent Southerners were to be captured at his house if the soldiers would come and

get them! Captured by their own troops!

"Pull on your boots," ordered the Sergeant. "Wait a minute! Look through their clothes and see if they're armed, Martin."

The soldier who had lighted the lamp approached, and ran his hands through their pockets. He produced three revolvers and laid them on the table. The Sergeant picked them up, glanced at them to be sure they were loaded; then distributed them among the soldiers.

"That's all, Sergeant," said the soldier addressed as Martin.

"All right, get on your boots. You did a good night's work, Smith."

"I told 'em they'd better go back home," said the farmer dully.

Tom, Wilson, and Shadrack sat on the floor pulling on their heavy, water-laden boots. When they stood up, the Sergeant said: "Call Jim and Max." Two more soldiers appeared, making six in all.

"Two of us to a prisoner. Come on."

They left the shanty. The farmer was still sitting on the edge of the bed, staring at them.

CHAPTER FOUR

TOM GOES ALONE

The rain had ceased. Dawn, flooding above the heavy clouds, was at last filtering through, and the world rested tranquilly in a bluish, shadowless light. Tom, as he stepped from the shanty, with his arms held by two Union soldiers, glanced about him in wonderment. This unfamiliar scene, which had been an endless blackness the night before, was like a dream country into which he was straying half awake. The events of the previous day became remote and unreal. He paused for a moment, but the apprehensive tightening of fingers upon his arms made him suddenly aware of the fact that he was a prisoner, and he fell into step with the soldiers.

"So you were a-goin' to fight the Yanks, were you!" asked one of them.

"We'll talk about that later," answered Tom.

"'Pears to me that it ain't anything I'd want to talk about at any time if I was you," answered the other soldier.

Tom, with his guards, was in the lead; then came Wilson, with Shadrack a few paces behind him. The Sergeant was with Shadrack. Tom glanced back, and his eyes met Wilson's. There was a flash of understanding between them;

then Wilson turned to look at Shadrack, as though cautioning silence. No one spoke as they picked their way along through the ooze of mud in the direction of the main road. To their left was another shanty, much like the one in which they had spent the night, and before the door stood a man, with his wife and child, gazing at them dumbly. The man was dressed, but the woman and child had wrapped tattered blankets over them for protection against the cold. Tom, as he watched them, reconstructed the drama of the night before. They, he thought, were "poor whites," like the man in whose shanty they had slept--Smith, the soldiers had called him--and their hearts were with the Northern army. Smith, when he had left on the pretext of attending to his chickens, had probably gone to them, routed them out of bed to tell them of the rebels he was harboring. The man had dressed and floundered through the mud until he came to the Union pickets, brought the soldiers back with him to Smith's shanty. That was his service to the Northern cause, and he must feel proud now, thought Tom. There, huddling together on the doorstep of their miserable, rain-soaked hut, they had visible proof of having helped the North, of having rendered their service. And their pride, lifting them for a brief moment from the pitiful squalor of their lives, seemed such a fine thing to Tom that he hoped they would never know of the mistake they had made. He glanced back and saw them still watching, silent and motionless.

When the procession had come to a spot where it was hidden both from the shanties and the road, Wilson spoke:

"Sergeant, I'd like to have a word with you."

"All right," answered the Sergeant. "What is it?"

"Alone, I mean," answered Wilson. "It's important. I'm not trying to escape. It's so important that I can't let the rest of your men hear it."

"You men stand by these two prisoners while I hear what the reb has to say," ordered the Sergeant. "Come over here."

Wilson went to the Sergeant and talked earnestly for several minutes. The Sergeant watched him narrowly, frowning. A few of Wilson's words drifted over to the others; "...not asking you to take my word ... to some person of authority ... not lose a minute about it...." The Sergeant was visibly impressed. He tilted his cap and scratched his head; shifted his weight from one leg to another; stroked his whiskers. Finally, after a brief discussion, they came to a decision.

"This man and I are going to take the wagon," announced the Sergeant. "We have to get to Wartrace as quick as we can. You others 'll have to walk. It'll take too long if we all ride--too much of a pull for the horses."

There was some grumbling among the guards at the prospect of trudging through the mud when they had expected a comfortable ride in the wagon. However, without understanding what it all was about, they accepted the Sergeant's decision. When they reached the road where the wagon was standing, Wilson said to Tom:

"I'll try and meet you before you get to Wartrace. Take your time."

"Yep," added the Sergeant, "don't hurry."

They saw the wagon, drawn at a trot, disappear down the road, the mud spurting out from the wheels. Tom and Shadrack exchanged glances and laughed.

"Now I call that extraordinary!" exclaimed one of the guards. Then, as if he liked the word, he repeated, "Extraordinary!"

"If we give you our words not to try escaping," asked Tom, "will you let go our arms? You have the guns, anyhow. It'll make walking easier."

"All right," drawled a guard. "That's a good idea." He turned to the other soldiers, and asked, "What do you think? Let 'em walk a couple of paces ahead, eh?" It was agreed.

Tom and Shadrack went ahead, while the guards followed, speculating among themselves on this new turn of affairs.

"Wilson is probably going to the officer in command and have him rush through a message," said Tom. "I suppose they have a telegraph line between Wartrace and headquarters."

"I hope so," replied Shadrack. "I wonder how far the others got?"

Tom had been wondering the same thing. "Probably not much farther than we did," he answered.

More than an hour later they saw a light buggy drawn by two horses approaching them; then they distinguished Wilson and the Sergeant. As the horses were reined in, Wilson jumped from the buggy.

"All right," he said, laughing. Then to the guards, "Thanks for your company, boys. Let's have our guns."

The guards looked at the Sergeant, puzzled. "Yep," said the Sergeant, "give the revolvers. These men are all right. The Captain says that we're to forget that we've ever seen 'em." He winked at Wilson, then reached out and slapped him on the back.

As the soldiers walked away, Wilson said: "Andrews arrived at Wartrace early this morning, just after these men left, and told the Captain to be watching for any of his men who might get caught by the sentries. When I went into the Captain's room, he looked at me and said, 'Andrews?' I said, 'Yes, sir.' In about two minutes I was on my way back. We have to cut down along a road about a hundred yards from here. I have a pass to get us by the Sentry. We have to make Manchester tonight."

Without wasting any time in talking, the three men hurried to the road that would take them past the Union lines and into the enemy country. A few minutes later a Sentry challenged them. Wilson produced his pass, the

Sentry nodded and they went forward.

As they pressed on across the strip of country between the Northern and Southern pickets, General Mitchel's army of ten thousand men broke camp. Tents were struck, wagons loaded, knapsacks swung into place ... and the army stretched out to crawl wearily through that sea of jelly-like mud towards Huntsville.

It was early in the afternoon when Tom, Shadrack, and Wilson reached Manchester. They were tired and wet, but far worse than being tired and wet, they were hungry. They resolved that the first thing they should do was forage for food, and so they made their way directly to the small store in the center of the village. But there was little food to be had there.

The storekeeper, a wizened old man who had lost all interest in selling things, told them that they might be able to buy something from one of the village people--he didn't know who had food for sale. Perhaps the Widow Fry--he indicated the general direction of the Widow Fry's house--might give them something. They turned away from the store disconsolately.

"It's raining again," remarked Shadrack. He turned his round face upward and gazed at the sky so solemnly that the others laughed. But there was no disputing the fact: the drizzle had commenced. To the south, in the direction of Chattanooga, the clouds had formed a dark, ominous wall, as though nature were raising a barrier to the expedition.

A man, hurrying to be home and out of the rain, came abreast of them. Tom stopped him.

"Can you tell us where the Widow Fry lives?" he asked.

"Yes," answered the man, and he glanced from Tom to Shadrack and Wilson deliberately. "But tell me why everyone is going to the Widow Fry's!"

"Everyone?" asked Wilson.

"Well, three men stopped me 'bout a minute ago and asked the same thing," the man replied. "Friends of yours, maybe?"

"No," answered Wilson. It was a truthful answer, too, for even if the men belonged to Andrews' party, they would not have recognized them. "The storekeeper said we could get something to eat there."

"Just traveling, are you!" persisted the man.

"So to speak," replied Wilson. He was determined not to risk trouble again, not to say that they were on their way to join the Southern army until they were well within the Southern lines.

"Come on, let's be getting in out of the rain," said Tom suddenly. "Don't let's stand here getting wet. Where is the Widow Fry's?"

"'Fraid of the wet, young man?" asked the native of Manchester.

"Yes," answered Tom bluntly.

"Well," drawled the man. He turned away from them sufficiently for Tom to nudge Wilson and motion up the street. Andrews was riding toward them! He was mounted upon a tired-looking bay, whose head drooped from hard riding. Andrews looked equally tired, for he sat hunched up in the saddle, his cape drawn tightly around him and his head bowed. "Y'see that clump of trees down yonder!" asked the man. "The Widow Fry's house is just beyond that. Are you journeyin' far?"

"Thank you," answered Tom. "No, we're not going far." They strode away, leaving the inquisitive citizen of Manchester staring after them. "The old fool!" Tom exclaimed. "He'd keep us there for an hour. I wonder where Andrews is going?" He hazarded a glance over his shoulder. Andrews was almost up to them.

"We'd better not speak to him until we're farther away from these houses," said Wilson.

"When we get down almost to the trees, I'll hail him."

They quickened their pace so that Andrews would come abreast of them near the Widow Fry's. Several times Tom glanced back to see if Andrews was watching them, but the leader's eyes seemed never to waver from the pommel of his saddle. The village street narrowed down to a country road, and the "plock-plock-plock" of the horse's hoofs on the mud sounded directly behind them.

"This is all right," said Wilson. "Let's slow down." Then, as the horse came up to them, Wilson said: "Andrews!"

"Follow me," Andrews answered. He touched his horse with his spurs. The animal was too tired to do more than quicken its step, but it carried Andrews ahead of them rapidly.

"He didn't seem surprised," said Wilson.

"He knew who we were when he saw us on the street, I think," answered Tom.

"Good-by, warm food," wailed Shadrack, for they were passing the Widow Fry's. "Hot coffee, a plate full of stew, bread...."

"Don't talk about it," begged Tom.

"Fried eggs and ham," continued Shadrack.

"We'll put you down and feed you mud, if you say another word. Won't we, Wilson!"

"If we don't starve to death first," Wilson replied.

"Good-by, food," Shadrack wailed again. He picked up a stick from the roadside and commenced to gnaw it; then, surprised because the others were

not eating, he broke the stick in three parts, and said: "Do have some of the nice tender steak, Mr. Burns and Mr. Wilson." They threw the sticks at him. He ran ahead of them. They finished the bombardment with hunks of mud, and chased after him, slipping and splashing along the road.

Andrews had dismounted, and they saw him leave the road, leading his horse. They followed, and found him standing at the horse's head, waiting for them.

"How did you fare, men?" he asked. After they had told him of their adventures, he continued: "This rain is bad. I'm afraid of it. If it keeps up, General Mitchel will be delayed one day, perhaps two days. It will be impossible for him to reach Huntsville in time--impossible."

He appeared to be thinking aloud, rather than talking to them. His head was bowed, and he stroked the horse's neck mechanically.

"I dare not go back now in hopes of getting into communication with General Mitchel. It would never do to leave my men scattered about the country, waiting for me to return. Do you men, from your experience, think that the General can reach Huntsville on Friday?"

Wilson was first to answer. "I don't think so," he said. "Some of the forces might reach there in time, but I don't think the General can concentrate at Huntsville for an attack before Saturday. Not with this mud to wade through."

"I agree with Wilson, sir," said Shadrack.

The three men turned to Tom. He felt suddenly embarrassed. Three veterans asking him, a soldier of one day's campaigning, for an opinion! "From what I've heard of General Mitchel," he said, "I think he will do whatever he says he will do--even if he has to attack Beauregard's army single handed." Then he added, as though to explain away what he had said: "But that is nothing more than my opinion of the man. I ... I enlisted just yesterday."

"Yesterday!" exclaimed the three older men.

"Yes. My cousin was going on the raid, but he sprained his ankle. I came to enlist, and I begged the Captain to send me."

"I see," answered Andrews, studying him. After a moment he plunged again into consideration of the problems which lay before him. "I am going ahead on the theory that Mitchel will be one day late in reaching Huntsville," he said at last. "We must find all the men and tell them, so that there will be no confusion in Marietta."

"There are three men at the Widow Fry's back there," said Shadrack. "I don't know if they're some of ours or not."

Andrews nodded. "We'll find out presently. I'm worrying most about our engineers. I think I know where I can find Knight, but Brown has gone on ahead. Do any of you know Brown?"

"I do, sir," answered Tom. "We met at the same place last night, and then I got a good look at him in the lightning."

"Hm-m-m! That may help."

"Mr. Andrews," commenced Tom.

"Yes? What is it?"

"If we're going to delay a day, shouldn't someone be sent back with a message for General Mitchel?"

"I've been considering that," answered Andrews. "Will you volunteer?"

"No," Tom answered flatly. "Of course, I'll go if I'm ordered, but I'll not volunteer."

"Hm-m-m ... well, never mind about that. I have some other work for you." Andrews seemed to emerge from a fog of indecision. "I want you to take my horse and travel south as rapidly as you can. If you come across any of our men who may be ahead of us, tell them that the raid is postponed one day. I--if I can--will get word back to the General. I want you to locate Brown. I was told that he and the man who is traveling with him--I don't know who it is--managed to get a ride in a farmer's wagon. They left here this morning, and the farmer was going to take them as far as a village called Coal Mines. You'll probably overtake them, but if you don't find them on the road, go into Chattanooga and catch the train for Marietta Thursday. Brown will probably catch that train. Tell him about the change in plans, and wait in Marietta for us. We will be there Friday night. In the meantime, I will locate Knight. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir," answered Tom. "What shall I do with the horse?"

"The poor brute is just about ready to drop now," replied Andrews. "Ride him as far as he'll carry you, then turn him loose. Throw the saddle and bridle into the bushes. It's after four o'clock now. You'd better be getting along."

"Yes, sir." Tom took the reins.

"Say!" Shadrack broke in, "he'd better have something to eat, or he'll fall off the horse. We were just going to the Widow Fry's to persuade her to give us a meal."

Andrews reached into his pockets, and drew forth two paper packages.

"Here's some bread and meat. I'm sorry I haven't anything more, or anything better. You can eat it while you ride."

Tom thanked him and mounted the horse. "Good-by, sir. Good-by, Wilson and Shadrack. Luck to you." He turned the horse into the road, and started southward. Now he was alone, with the South before him.

CHAPTER FIVE

TOM ARRIVES AT THE BEECHAM'S

Wednesday dawned in a drizzle of rain. It had seemed to Tom, riding through the long night on a horse whose legs trembled at every step, that the dawn would never come; that the world had been conquered by the downpour. At least it had seemed so until the monotony of the rain and cold deadened his senses, allowing him to fall into a doze.

He straightened in the saddle, and stretched. A chill seized him, and he commenced to shiver violently. His clothes were wet and heavy.

"This won't do," he said aloud, with his teeth chattering. At the sound of his voice the horse pricked up his ears feebly. "Poor fellow! You're just about ready to drop, aren't you?" He reined in, stroking the horse's shoulder; then dismounted. For a few seconds he clung to the saddle, supporting himself; his numbed legs refused to hold him until he brought them to life by stamping and kicking. Even then he was none too sure of his step.

"Poor boy!" he said to the horse. "It's been a hard trip for you. Poor boy! Here, let's take that bit out of your mouth and see if you can find something to eat. There's not much around here, is there?" The horse commenced chewing at some weeds which had sprung up along the roadside. Tom pulled out the sodden remains of the food Andrews had given him, gave the bread to the horse and ate the meat. Then, leading the horse, he walked along the road. He had passed Coal Mines shortly after midnight, but without coming upon Brown. Probably, he thought, Brown and his companion had found a house or barn in which they were spending the night, which meant that he was ahead of them and would be in Chattanooga when they arrived.

A half-hour later he tried to remount, but the horse was too exhausted to bear his weight. They rested for a few minutes and then walked for another half-hour. Several times the horse stumbled. When they stopped to rest again, the horse braced his legs as though it took all his strength to stand. His head was hanging, and his eyes were dull.

"Poor fellow," Tom repeated. "It's cruel to make you do this, but I can't leave you here." If he had to abandon the animal, he wanted to leave him where there was some chance of finding food. Here there was nothing.

They pressed on again, walking for a few minutes, then resting. It was nearly seven o'clock when they came to a big house, standing several hundred yards from the road. Tom turned up the driveway. Presently the odor of frying bacon came to his nostrils, and he felt faint and dizzy.

"Lan' sakes alive," exclaimed the negro woman who came to the door. "Lan'

sakes, have you all been out in this rain storm. Jasper!"

"Yas'm," came the answer. A little negro boy appeared from around his mother's skirts.

"Take this gentleman's horse 'round to de stable. Come right in, sir."

"Thank you," answered Tom wearily. "Can you give me something to eat?"

"Yassir. You come right in."

"I'd better unsaddle the horse first, mammy," replied Tom.

"Jasper, you tell yo' pa to unsaddle this gentleman's horse. You come right in here, sir. I'll tell the white folks."

Tom needed no second urging. He entered the big kitchen, his stomach wrenching and aching at the odor of food. "Don't bother about telling the white folks that I'm here, mammy," he said. "Just give me something to eat. I'm starving."

"Yassir, yassir," replied the old woman, "but a kitchen ain't no place for white folks to eat. I'll just run an' tell Mr. Beecham you all is here." She disappeared through the door leading to the back part of the house.

Tom decided that it was no time for ceremony. On the table lay a loaf of bread--the colored woman had been slicing it when he knocked--and in the pan sizzled a dozen slices of bacon. In less than five seconds, Tom was eating a bacon sandwich. And he was halfway through the second sandwich when the colored woman came back to the kitchen.

"Sakes!" she exclaimed. "I guess you is suh-tainly hungry. Mr. Beecham he's coming right away."

Mr. Beecham proved to be an elderly, stern-faced gentleman. He stood in the doorway gazing at Tom.

"Well, sir," he said at last. "Do you prefer my kitchen to my dining-room, sir?"

"No, Mr. Beecham, I don't," answered Tom. "But in these clothes, wet to the skin, it would be an intrusion to go farther than the kitchen."

It was an answer that Mr. Beecham appreciated. Tom was glad that the last evidences of the stolen bacon sandwiches had disappeared down his throat. He stood waiting for Mr. Beecham to speak--and wondering if he was to be invited for breakfast.

"Will you come with me, please?" asked Mr. Beecham. They passed through a corridor, and into the big entrance hall, where logs were blazing in a fireplace. "In these days," continued Mr. Beecham, "it is customary to ask people who they are. You understand, I trust."

"Certainly, sir," said Tom. "My name is Thomas Burns, and I'm from Fleming County, Kentucky. I'm on my way to Atlanta to enlist." He had been bracing himself for the past minute to tell that story, and it came smoothly, convincingly. For a moment after it was out, he hated himself.

Mr. Beecham pursed his lips and nodded. "Excellent!" he exclaimed. "Will you be my guest at breakfast, sir?"

"Thank you, sir," Tom replied. "But in these clothes...."

"I daresay we will be able to find other clothes for you. If you will come with me?"

"First I'd like to go to the stable and see my horse. I gave him a hard ride last night to put distance between me and the Union pickets."

"Certainly." Mr. Beecham called another colored boy, who guided Tom to the stable. There he found his horse munching hay, wearily but contentedly. The stableman approached, armed with grooming implements.

"That's good," said Tom. "Give him a good grooming, and a blanket. Then, in a half-hour, give him a feed of oats."

"Yassir."

He slipped a dollar into the negro's hand, and left him beaming.

Mr. Beecham escorted him to a room upstairs, where, with the aid of another negro servant, they found clothes to replace the wet things he was wearing. They left him to wash and dress.

"We will have breakfast just as soon as you are ready," said Mr. Beecham as he closed the door.

Tom wondered if all these negroes were slaves. He had seen an occasional negro in the North, but of course they were freed. He had expected to find them different; less cheerful, perhaps, and carrying an air of oppression. And it disturbed him slightly not to find them so.

Mr. Beecham had provided him with a suit of his own clothes. They were about the same size, but a suit cut for a man of more than fifty looks strange on a boy of eighteen. Tom glanced at himself in the mirror and laughed. However, it was part of the adventure he had been tossed into.

As he left his room and started down the stairs, the chatter of women's voices struck his ears. Then he saw two women standing with Mr. Beecham before the fire. One of them was elderly, and the other was a girl--about his own age, Tom thought. She was strikingly pretty, standing there in the glow of the fire, glancing up out of the corners of her eyes, as though she could not restrain her curiosity.

"May I present Mr. Burns, my dear," said Mr. Beecham. "My wife and my niece, Miss Marjorie, Mr. Burns."

Tom bowed, muttering "Mrs. Beecham, Miss Marjorie." When he caught the girl's eyes, he saw a twinkle of amusement. Then he remembered his clothes, and he blushed. The formalities of introduction over, they turned to the dining-room, where two negro girls were already arranging breakfast. It was a feast: coffee, hot cakes, eggs ... everything that Shadrack in his wildest moments of hunger could have dreamt of.

Mr. Beecham's conversation about the war, conditions in the South, his hatred of the North and the abolitionists, occupied most of Tom's attention. It was difficult to play the role of Southerner; he wanted to protest against some of the things the older man said. There was slight opportunity for him to reply, however, and so he simply nodded, apparently agreeing heartily.

"Did you ride far last night?" asked Miss Marjorie finally.

"From Wartrace," he said. "I came through the lines there."

"And weren't there any Union sentries?"

"I didn't stop to investigate."

Mr. Beecham broke in upon their conversation at that point with some observations of his own upon the subject of Northern politics. Then he drifted to war manoeuvres: "I tell you, Beauregard will smash that man Mitchel to a million pieces. Mitchel is so frightened that he dares not move. Whichever way he moves, he is lost. He is trapped like a man at chess. The best thing he can do is to surrender before he loses his troops. He dares not move."

And Tom was thinking to himself: "How surprised you'd be if you knew that Mitchel was moving this very minute."

Mitchel was moving. Under the weight of their water-soaked equipment, his men were plodding wearily through the mud, marching slowly and steadily upon Huntsville. While Tom had been riding through the night, Mitchel's men had slept on the flooded ground between Shelbyville and Fayetteville. Now they were prying the heaving wagons from the mud holes, while the cavalry swept out on the flanks to clear the country of enemy scouts. Skirmishers were advancing through the woods and over the hills, protecting the troops, with their thousands of wagons and guns, from surprise attack. General Mitchel, riding through the drizzle, announced to his aides: "Regardless of the weather, we will attack Huntsville Friday."

Even Andrews, underrating Mitchel's relentless determination to do what he said he would do, if all the forces of the weather were against him, thought himself safe in delaying the raid at least one day.

ON TO CHATTANOOGA

"I must leave, sir, as soon as my horse is fit to travel," replied Tom to Mr. Beecham's questions regarding his plans. "That will give me more than enough time if the ferry is running, and just enough time if I must follow the river to the Chattanooga ferry."

Mr. Beecham's house was only ten miles from the town, figured on the map; but the weather made map figuring hazardous. The Tennessee River had mounted to a torrent under the continual rains, and the ferries which customarily provided short-cuts were, for the most part, not operating. Tom gathered that information at breakfast. He had no intention of trying to cross at the Chattanooga ferry, for the Confederate guards there would be dangerously strong, and it remained to find some ferryman who could be bribed to risk the trip. That might take time.

"I'll look at your horse while I'm out," said Mr. Beecham. He was preparing, regardless of the storm, for his usual walk about his estate. He went out, and Mrs. Beecham turned to her household duties. Miss Marjorie and Tom were alone, standing before the blazing fire in the hall. There was still that disconcerting twinkle of amusement in her eyes.

"I suppose I do look funny," he said, glancing down at his clothes.

"It's not kind of me to laugh," she replied. "Were you very wet!"

"As wet as one person can possibly be. I absorbed at least half of the rainstorm between Wartrace and here. No more water would stick to me--it just rolled off, finally."

"I don't think I should like being a soldier," she said. "Do you?"

"I haven't tried it. I'm just beginning."

"Do you want to fight?"

"It isn't a question of wanting to fight," he replied. "It's a question of duty."

"Oh." She sat down and he took a chair beside her. "But you were out of it. No one would have said that it was your duty to run the danger of going through the Union pickets."

He wished that she would not talk about the war. It was unpleasant, this lying to a girl. With Mr. Beecham it was different. Then he remembered that she had said "Union pickets," instead of "Yankee pickets." It struck him as strange, coming from a Southern girl.

"Tell me about your home," she asked.

He gave a rather sketchy description of his imaginary home in Fleming

County, Kentucky--a none too convincing description. Then he tried to change the subject by asking her if she had always lived with the Beechams.

"No--not always," she answered. "Is Fleming Cou...."

"And is your name Beecham?" he interrupted, anxious to avoid the subject of Fleming County.

"My name is Landis," she answered. "Marjorie Landis. Is Fleming County very large?"

"No--no. Not very large. And where did you live before you came here?"

"With mother." It seemed to be her turn for evasion. "I presume," she continued, "that you know all the people in the county?"

He wondered if, by some chance, she knew people there, if she was going to pin him down to persons and definite places in Fleming County.

"No, indeed," he answered. "You see, I haven't been there all the time."

"I never was very good at geography," she began apologetically. "Where is Fleming County?"

"Oh, it is in the southern part of the state," he said. He decided to study the first map he could get his hands upon.

"Let's do as we used to do in school," she said. "Bound Fleming County for me."

Tom decided that he hated all girls, and Miss Marjorie Landis in particular. She had trapped him, easily and pleasantly.

He forced himself to laugh, and the laugh sounded mirthlessly in his ears. "Oh, I've forgotten," he said. "I can't remember what counties are around us there. I wonder when this rain will stop? We'll have to build us an ark if it keeps on much longer. Wouldn't a war on an ark be a strange thing? The ark would keep turning in the current--the North would become the South and the South would become the North, and so rapidly that we wouldn't know which side we were fighting on. Do you think we'd have to stop and change uniforms every time the ark turned?" He arose and went to the window. "I wonder if my poor horse is getting rested! It's a pity to ride him again this afternoon. Perhaps I'd better go out and see him."

She, too, arose. "Never mind about the horse, Mr. Burns," she said. "You'd much better be studying geography! Wait here a moment."

She turned and ran up the stairs. Tom, his head pounding, watched her disappear. What was she going to do, now that she had trapped him? Of course she knew that he had not been telling the truth. Presently she returned with a book under her arm. Scarcely glancing at him, she approached, opened the book--it was a geography--turned the pages to a map of Kentucky.

"There!" she said. He looked at her, rather than the book. "No--study it."

He did as she bade him--and found Fleming County in the north-eastern part of the state. It had been a bad guess. Then he glanced at the names of the counties surrounding it.

"But why...." he began.

"Give me the map!" she demanded. "Now can you remember them!"

"But...."

"Please! Say them--the counties!"

"Lewis, Carter, Morgan, Bath, Nicholas, Mason."

As the door opened and Mr. Beecham entered, they turned. "Mr. Burns has been showing me on the map where he lives," said Miss Marjorie sweetly.

"Ah, yes--ah, yes," answered Mr. Beecham. "Ah, yes, indeed."

Tom scarcely heard him, or saw him.

"Your horse will be ready to carry you in a few hours, I think," said Mr. Beecham. "You must have ridden him easily, sir."

"I didn't press him harder than was necessary," responded Tom.

"I tell you," announced Mr. Beecham, divesting himself of his storm coat, "it takes a Southern man to get the most out of horse flesh, without hurting the horse. A good reason for the superiority of our cavalry! I trust you are going to join the cavalry."

"Yes, sir," answered Tom. He was thoroughly sick of deception. At that moment, if he could have found an adequate excuse for departure, he would willingly have walked the remaining distance to Chattanooga--and swum the river in the bargain.

Mr. Beecham settled himself before the fire. "I've not known many gentlemen from Kentucky," he announced. "For the most part I stay at home, and we have few travelers along this road. There was a Mr. Charles, of Floyd County. Isn't that just east of Fleming County!"

"No," answered Tom, "Carter County is on our east." He glanced at Miss Marjorie. She was watching him intently, alive to the dangerous ground he was treading.

"Ah, yes," answered Mr. Beecham, "so it is--so it is. Let me see the geography a moment, dear." Miss Marjorie gave him the book, opened to the map of Kentucky. "Quite so--quite so. Floyd County is here." He pointed.

"Yes," answered Tom. "Does there seem to be any chance of the storm ending,

sir?"

The weather provided a safer subject of conversation, which lasted for nearly a half-hour. Then Tom became intensely interested in Mr. Beecham's estate, and the difficulties of handling crops in war time. Miss Marjorie sat near them, sewing. Tom would have given everything he possessed for two minutes alone with her. Why was she befriending him? He asked the question over and over again.

It was decided that one of Mr. Beecham's servants should go with Tom to the ferry landing. The servant, carrying a note from Mr. Beecham to the ferryman, would show him the way, and, more than that, it would be additional proof to the ferryman that Mr. Beecham was especially desirous of Tom's being taken across the river. "Then I'll know if old Jones who runs the ferry does as I tell him to do," explained Mr. Beecham. "They don't like to cross when the river's high."

Dinner was served, and still Tom had no opportunity to speak with Marjorie alone. The glances they exchanged were charged with meaning--but it was an unexplainable meaning. Several times as he pondered over it, Tom lost the thread of Mr. Beecham's remarks, and had to grope for the right answers.

"Your horse will be ready for you in a few minutes," said Mr. Beecham as they arose from the table.

"And your clothes are dried and in your room," added his wife.

It was time to be going. He mounted to his room, changed into the rough suit he had bought in Shelbyville, and forced his feet into his soggy shoes. They were waiting for him before the fire as he came down. After a moment, Mrs. Beecham left them. Tom hoped desperately that Mr. Beecham would do likewise.

"I'll see if Sam is bringing your horse," he said.

Tom's eyes met Marjorie's as the older man entered the next room, where he could look out toward the stables. He had no sooner disappeared than Tom asked in a low voice: "Why did you do that?"

"You're not a Southerner, are you?" she asked.

"No," he answered bluntly. "But what...?"

"I'm not either," she replied. Her glowed with excitement. "I'm from Albany...."

They were interrupted by Mr. Beecham's returning. "The horse is coming," he announced. Mrs. Beecham entered the room.

"Thank you for your hospitality," said Tom.

"It has been a pleasure," replied Mrs. Beecham.

"A pleasure, sir--a pleasure," responded her husband.

Tom's dislike for the deception he was practising made him want to run from the house. For the moment he hated the idea of the expedition.

He put out his hand to Marjorie. She gave him a cool, firm clasp, and looked straight into his eyes. "I wish you the best of luck for everything you undertake," she said slowly.

"Thank you," he replied. "I'll need luck." Her hand gave his a quick pressure. Once again the railroad raid became a great, thrilling adventure in which he was to play a part.

"He bowed and left the house.

"Sam!" called Mr. Beecham.

"Yassah!" answered the negro boy who was mounted upon another horse.

"You stay there until this gentleman is across the river."

"Yassah."

Tom mounted and they started down the road. He looked back, saw Marjorie at the window, and waved. She answered him.

Despite the rain which beat in their faces, Tom studied the country through which they were passing, and asked the negro boy innumerable questions. But he found his mind slipping back constantly to Marjorie. A Northern girl in the South! Surrounded by "rebs" but still true to her country! And she wished him luck!

"Whose place is that?" asked Tom, pointing to a small house which was almost hidden from the road by trees.

An expression of dislike came over the negro's face. "Mistah Murdock's," he answered.

"A farmer?"

"No, suh," replied the negro. The expression of dislike changed visibly to repugnance and fear. He added: "He keeps dawgs!"

There was no need to ask more. The negro's tone was sufficient. Dogs! There was only one reason why a man made a business of keeping dogs--to chase escaping slaves. The thought was horrible to Tom, and he turned away.

They found the ferryman in his shanty, hugging a stove.

"No crossing today," he announced. "Look at that there river. No crossing today. Besides that, it's forbidden by the law. No Sentry, no crossing."

That was good news! No Sentry! "Mr. Beecham thought that you would take me

across," said Tom. "Sam, give him Mr. Beecham's note."

"Yassuh." Sam produced the note.

The ferryman read it, scratching his head. "That man'll be my death yet," he said. "Take a horse across today? No, sir! I'll take you across if you and the nigger'll handle oars, but not the horse! No, sir! It's against the law, anyways. No Sentry, no crossing. No, sir! I'll risk the river an' the law, just because Mr. Beecham asks it, but I can't take that there nag."

"Well, then we'll leave the horse behind," answered Tom. "I can pull an oar. Can you row, Sam?"

The negro backed against the wall, shaking his head, terrified at the thought of the rough crossing.

"Just like all of 'em," said the ferryman. "When there's any danger, don't count on them. Mr. Beecham treats his niggers too easy, anyways. I always say if he'd lick 'em they'd be better."

"He's pretty easy with them, is he?" asked Tom.

"Treats 'em as though they were prize stock," answered the ferryman in disgust. "I guess you and I can get across," he grumbled. "Two white men're better 'an a dozen of 'em."

"Sam, you take my horse back to Mr. Beecham. I'll write a note for you to carry." Tom wrote a message, explaining that the horse could not be ferried across, and asking that it be disposed of in any manner that suited Mr. Beecham's convenience.

The little ferryboat pitched and turned in the current of the river. Tom, swinging on his big oar in answer to the ferryman's cries of "Ho!" "Now!", saw the other bank creeping nearer. At last they cleared the full flood of the stream. On the other shore, Sam stood open-mouthed, watching them.

[Illustration: The little ferryboat pitched and turned in the current of the river.]

It was eight o'clock that evening when Tom, soaked to the skin again, cold, hungry, and tired, tramped into the little town of Chattanooga. A few lamps shone through the windows into the deserted street, making dull splotches of yellow in the mist. Three or four people passed him, hurrying to be out of the storm.

He stopped one man and asked: "Where can I find a hotel?" Then he gasped as the man straightened and threw back the coat he had thrown over his head and shoulders: it was a Confederate soldier!

"That's about as good as any place," answered the Confederate, pointing across the street. "Where you see the two lights burning."

"Thank you."

"Welcome." He pulled the coat about his face again and disappeared into the storm.

Tom crossed the street to spend his first night behind the Confederate lines.

CHAPTER SEVEN

IN MARIETTA

Tom awoke dazed from twelve hours of sleep. For a moment he could not remember where he was; then it flashed across his mind. In Chattanooga! He sprang from bed, dressed and went downstairs. It was late, but the proprietor of the hotel gave him breakfast, after some grumbling about people who had nothing to do but sleep.

The train from Marietta did not leave until two o'clock, and as the hotel clock had just struck ten, Tom began to wonder what he should do with himself. For a half-hour he sat in the hotel watching the people who passed in and out. The sight of so many young men in civilian clothes reassured him, for it meant that there was less chance of being questioned by the military authorities. Finally he went out to the street. The rain had stopped, and the sun was struggling through the clouds.

There were crowds of civilians and soldiers upon the narrow sidewalks, and through the streets lumbered the heavy wagons of the Southern army. Tom walked along slowly, scanning the faces of the people he passed, hoping to catch a glimpse of Brown. Finally he reached the station.

A train had just come in, and the station was crowded with passengers, struggling out with the bags and packages, and townspeople who had come to get the news. Tom listened closely to the chatter. The train was from Memphis and had passed over the line which Mitchel was about to attack. There was no suggestion of excitement or activity along the route. Then the news of Mitchel's movement had not advanced before him, thought Tom. To him, that was the best news in the world. Mitchel's plans were successful.

He followed the crowd from the station and once again began wandering about the streets. Not far away was a big shed labeled Commissary Department. The army wagons were backed up to a loading platform, and Confederate soldiers were busy transferring boxes of supplies. By this time Tom had lost the first sense of strangeness at being in the enemy country, and so he went over to watch the soldiers work.

Presently it was noon, and time for dinner. He returned to the hotel.

There, sitting apart from the others at one end of the long table, were Brown and his companion! They glanced at him, and then continued eating. It

dawned upon Tom that while he knew Brown, Brown did not know him. He took a seat opposite them.

"How d'you do?" said Tom.

Brown and the other man nodded, but did not speak.

"Just traveling through?" asked Tom.

"Yes," said Brown.

"Where are you from?" Tom's manner was casual and friendly.

"Kentucky," answered Brown.

"Oh, is that so? Coming through to enlist?"

"Yes."

"Whereabouts in Kentucky do you hail from?" persisted Tom.

"Fleming County."

"Well, that's good news! I'm from Fleming County myself. Let's see, I think I remember you. Your name is Brown, isn't it?" Brown's eyes were wide; the other man's jaw was drooping. "Surely I remember you," continued Tom. "You're a locomotive engineer, aren't you? I presume you'll be running a locomotive here in the South. We need engineers."

Brown was speechless; his companion was rising from the table.

"That's all right," said Tom. "Sit down! I'm Burns. We met at the same place last Monday night, Brown."

"Young man!" said Brown, slowly recovering his power of speech. "When I get my revenge on you, you'll feel it!"

"Whew!" breathed the other.

When dinner was finished, they left the hotel to find a spot where they could talk. Tom told them of the change in plans. It was decided that they should leave for Marietta on the afternoon train, rather than spend the extra day in Chattanooga. Dorsey, who was traveling with Brown, thought that there might be some others who had not been told of the change and who would be on the train.

As they threaded their way through the crowd at the station, Tom caught the first intimation of Mitchel's drive upon Huntsville. "The train is jam-full," a man was saying. "There isn't a seat left. All those soldiers who went through here this morning are being sent back."

"Why is that?" asked his companion.

"They don't seem to know," the man continued. "They got as far as Stevenson--that's a little place down the line about thirty miles--and then they received orders to go back. They're to join Beauregard at Corinth as fast as they can by the way of Atlanta and Meridian."

"Hm-m-m, that's strange!"

"Perhaps there's a wreck between here and Corinth."

Tom whispered the news to Brown and Dorsey after they were aboard the train. They exchanged glances.

It was ten o'clock that night when the brakeman of the train called, "Marietta!" Dorsey was asleep on the coal box of the car, while Tom and Brown dozed against the door. They had taken turns at the coal box for eight hours. Now they moved stiffly out to the platform, relieved that the journey had ended. For several minutes they waited at the station, slowly circulating among the people to see if they could recognize any other members of the expedition.

"I guess we're the only ones here," said Tom.

"Looks that way," replied Brown. "Let's go to the hotel."

"I'd give a good deal to know where Mitchel is at just this minute," said Tom.

"So would I," replied Dorsey. "I hope we're not making a mistake by delaying a day."

"It's my opinion," said Brown, "that when Mitchel starts to do a thing, it takes more than mud to stop him."

They walked on silently toward the hotel.

While they drifted off to sleep that night, General Mitchel was perfecting the last details of the attack upon Huntsville. Every road was blocked by scouts to prevent the news of the advance going before them. Ten miles to the south lay Huntsville, unaware of the approaching army.

The last rush of the advance commenced at two o'clock in the morning. Mitchel's weary army struggled to its feet, and stood ready to march. The cavalry was the first away, and disappeared silently into the night. There were no bugle calls, and no shouting. Even the noise of the horses' hoofs was deadened by the deep mud of the road. The four cannons which the cavalry took with it fell into position; then the infantry moved forward. As each regiment passed, General Mitchel addressed his men; then when the last of them was on the road, he and his aides pressed towards the front.

When daylight came, the cavalry was four miles from Huntsville. The first section of cavalry galloped to the west of the town, the second to the east, while the remaining cavalymen, led by General Mitchel, dashed for the station. Now all restraints upon noise were removed. The shouting of

the cavalymen drifted back to the infantrymen to quicken their steps, and the cannons hammered along the road.

A few minutes later, Huntsville was in the control of the Union troops. At the station, Mitchel found fifteen locomotives, eighty cars, and a cipher message from Beauregard to the Confederate Secretary of War. Beauregard was desperately in need of troops, said the decoded message.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE TRAIN IS CAPTURED

"I have no positive information, but I think that Mitchel captured Huntsville today!"

Andrews was speaking. An exclamation of surprise came from the men who were clustered about him in a room of the hotel at Marietta. There were nineteen of them; travel-worn, tired and still wet from the incessant rain. It was their last conference before the raid.

"The line between Chattanooga and Corinth is blocked," continued Andrews, "and no one knows the cause of it. No trains and no telegraph messages are coming through. Of course it may be that Beauregard has heard of Mitchel's advance and has chosen to operate in silence. All that we can do is hope and pray for the best, and carry out our orders. If we can destroy the railroad between here and Chattanooga, it will put the city at Mitchel's mercy. Then our work is done. It will remain for Mitchel and Beauregard to fight it out."

He paused, and there was a moment of profound silence while the men considered the situation. Then Andrews spoke again:

"The fact that action has started between Chattanooga and Corinth means that our task is additionally hazardous. The odds we must overcome are greater than I expected. If we have made a mistake in delaying a day, we must work the harder to keep that mistake from costing Mitchel his victory. The train we are to capture leaves Marietta at six o'clock tomorrow morning. I will see that you are called before five so that you will have plenty of time to get to the station. Carry food with you, for there's no telling when you'll sit at a table again. Buy tickets for points north of Big Shanty--Allatoona, Etowah, Calhoun and Dalton--so that you won't excite suspicion. Get aboard the same car in groups of two and three, and don't show that you are acquainted. Avoid all talk about the raid. We must say everything that is to be said here tonight before we separate. I will be in the same car, and if trouble starts, follow me.

"At Big Shanty we will seize the train. The train stops at Big Shanty for the crew and passengers to have breakfast. Stay in the car until the others have left; then, when you see me leave, follow me to the head of the

trains. Walk slowly, and carelessly, as though you were simply out to stretch your legs. Brown and Knight will go with me to the engine, and you, Burns"--he pointed to Tom--"you come with us, too. I want you as fireman. Ross will uncouple the train after the third box-car. The box-cars are empties being sent to Chattanooga for supplies which the rebels are storing in Atlanta. The doors will be unlocked. The rest of you are to climb aboard the last box-car. Do all of you understand?" The men nodded. "Have your guns ready to use in case there is any interference, but don't fire unless you must. After the train has started...."

He paused; then, with a gesture which told them that he would not even try to guess what might happen, he added: "We will succeed or leave our bones in Dixie! That is all I can tell you. Tonight, before you go to sleep, examine your guns and make sure that they are not clogged or rusty."

The meeting was over, and each man, as he stepped from the room, realized that he was on the verge of a great adventure. They made their way silently along the dark corridors of the hotel.

"I'm about ready to explode," said Tom. "Think of it! I'm going to be fireman!"

"I'll make you heave wood so fast that you'll be sorry for that trick you played in Chattanooga," replied Brown. "Did I tell you about that, Knight?"

Knight, Brown, Dorsey, Wilson, and Tom were all occupying the same room. The hotel at Marietta was crowded, and the men were sleeping wherever they could squeeze themselves in. Tom, Dorsey, and Brown, having had several nights of good rest, had relinquished the bed and sofa to the three newcomers, and had spread blankets on the floor.

"Let's lock the door, and look at our guns," suggested Tom. The lock was broken, and so he barred the door with a chair. Then they sat on the bed, with the lamp beside them, and talked while they unloaded their revolvers, wiped away the rust and mud, and reloaded. Each told of his experiences and narrow escapes. Knight had been arrested as a deserter from the Confederate army. Wilson and Shadrack had stolen a ferryboat and crossed the Tennessee River at night, Brown and Dorsey had shared their food with two Confederate sentries who had stopped them as they crossed the railroad bridge at Stevenson. "Most sociable sentries I ever found," said Dorsey. "They believed our story, and told us all about Bull Run. It was mighty interesting to hear their side of it, because we were both in the fight." But it was Tom who had been most royally entertained. He told them about Mr. Beecham, and how Marjorie Landis had trapped him.

"But what did you do?" demanded Dorsey. "How did you get out of it?"

"She wished me luck when I left," said Tom. "She was a Northern girl."

The others whistled. "Whew!" said Brown. "That's about enough luck to last you for a year."

They talked until midnight; then divided the bedding between them and lay

down to sleep. It seemed to Tom that sleep would never come. The plan of the raid went racing through his mind again and again; he could see every move as Andrews had described it. His thoughts carried him back to the other side of the lines. What was Bert doing? He supposed that Bert had been left behind when Mitchel advanced. His parents in Cleveland? What would they think if they were told that he was a hundred miles behind the Confederate picket lines? What a story to tell them when he returned! And Marjorie Landis? Would she realize, when the news of the raid swept over the country, that he had taken part in it? She was a plucky girl!

The next thing he knew was that there was a terrific pounding in some remote part of the world. He sat up in the darkness and tried to recall himself. Then someone said, "All right--wait a second." The chair which had been placed against the door was yanked away, and Andrews entered, holding a lamp.

"Wake up, men," he said. "It's just five. You have an hour."

Brown lighted the lamp on the table; the others climbed stiffly to their feet, stretching.

"You can get breakfast downstairs," said Andrews. "The proprietor always has some packages of food prepared for people who are traveling. Stuff your pockets." He vanished down the corridor.

"That's the hardest floor I've ever slept on," said Brown. The others muttered in response.

To Tom, the scene was strange and unreal. The yellow light of the lamp and the faint dawn which was stealing in through the windows made the men seem ghost-like as they moved about the room, dressing. Huge shadows loomed on the walls, swaying and disappearing.

"Shall we go together, Brown!" asked Knight.

"You'd better not," said Tom. "Engineers are too valuable. If you go together you might both be stopped before you could reach the engine."

"The boy's right," replied Brown. "You and I'll go together, eh, Tom?"

"Yep."

"Are you ready?"

"All ready. Come on."

Tom and Brown left the room, found the way along the corridor to the stairs. "Now for it!" exclaimed Tom, clutching the other's arm.

"You bet!"

Breakfast finished, they left the hotel and went toward the station. Tom looked anxiously at the sky, and saw that the clouds were broken. They had

a chance, at least, of good weather for the raid. At the station they bought tickets for Kingston. There were about thirty people moving restlessly about in the dark, waiting for the train. Tom recognized Andrews and five of their men. Then the remainder appeared suddenly. Andrews paced upon and down, his head slightly bowed.

The whistle of the train came shrieking through the night. Tom's throat tightened and his heart thumped. Presently they could hear the engine, and see the sparks above the trees. Then the train came sweeping down the track towards them, the wheels rumbling and the brakes whining. The engine, with its name, *_General_*, painted upon the side of the cab, passed them.

Tom's eyes followed the engine. He saw the engineer in the light of the flames from the firebox; the fireman was in the act of sliding fresh logs upon the flames.

Several passengers stepped from the train. Andrews boarded the second coach, and the men followed him, distributing themselves through the car. Ahead of them were four freight cars and another coach. Brown and Tom found a seat not far from Andrews; Wilson and Knight settled themselves across the aisle. Tom glanced back and saw the others scattered through the car. His eyes met Shadrack's and, mindful of Andrews' warning, he turned away before he laughed outright. Shadrack's expression was comical: his eyes were wide and he was gazing about him apprehensively, yet still with that twinkle of amusement.

"Board--board," cried the conductor.

Tom could hear the rapid puffing of the engine as the wheels slipped on the wet rails; then the puffing became more laborious. There was a rattle of loose couplings, and the train jerked forward. It was lighter now. To the west, the Kennesaw Mountains made a splotch of black against the dark blue sky, and the houses and woods along the track were visible in the half light.

The train gathered speed, then settled down to a steady pace. The smoke from the engine drifted back to them. The forward door of the car opened and the conductor entered. He stood for a moment looking down the length of the car, then commenced to take tickets, scrutinizing each passenger closely. The conductor was a young man--about twenty-six--and the men of Andrews' party found his gaze disturbing. Tom met his eyes, and wondered if he knew anything of their purpose, suspected anything.

"I don't like the looks of that conductor," he whispered to Brown.

"Probably wondering why so many people got aboard at Marietta."

Andrews arose, as though to stretch, but Tom could see that he was watching the conductor. At last they heard the rear door of the car slam. The conductor had not stopped to ask questions, regardless of what he suspected.

"Big Shanty! Big Shanty! Twenty minutes for breakfast." It was like a bugle

call to Andrews' men. Their eyes were turned toward him. He sat as though he were sleeping. The other passengers stirred in their seats, making ready to race to the restaurant.

The speed of the train slackened, and the train glided into the town. Bordering the tracks on the west was an encampment of Confederate soldiers. Rows of white tents stretched down the slope towards a thick woods. On the east were the houses of Big Shanty. The train stopped opposite a long shed, before which a man stood ringing a bell. There was no need to call the passengers to breakfast; they tumbled off the train and ran to get places at the counter. And at the head of the crowd was the conductor. The engineer and fireman brought up the rear, wiping their hands on pieces of waste. Except for three passengers who were sleeping, Andrews' men had the car to themselves.

It was several minutes before Andrews showed any signs of stirring. Then he arose and walked to the rear of the car.

"Not yet," he said, as he passed Tom. Presently they saw him strolling beside the train. Then he boarded the front platform, opened the door and nodded. They got up and went out.

"Ross, you come with me," said Andrews. "Brown, Knight, and Burns follow. The rest go up the other side of the engine."

Andrews and Boss walked slowly towards the engine.

"Uncouple here, Ross," ordered Andrews. "Then cross over and get aboard with the rest." His tone was calm and untroubled.

Tom saw Ross pull the coupling pin, and duck under the train. He glanced back to the shed where the train crew was at breakfast. There was no sign of alarm.

They approached the engine as indifferently as though they were walking for exercise.

"Wait here," said Andrews when they were beside the engine cab. He went forward, crossed in front of the train and looked back on the other side to see if the men were aboard. Then he came sauntering back.

"Get aboard!" he snapped. "Knight at the throttle."

Knight mounted first; then Brown, with Tom and Andrews following. Knight jumped to the engineer's seat, and grabbed the throttle. There came the hissing of steam: the engine trembled and puffed. Brown lunged for the sand lever, yanked it open. The wheels spun on the track, then grabbed it, and the engine sprang forward like a beast unchained.

THE RACE

The sudden jerk of the engine sent Tom spinning against the side of the cab. Andrews, who was mounting the wood-pile in the tender to see what was happening behind them, was thrown flat. He scrambled to his feet, his hands bleeding from the splinters, and climbed up the pile. Then he waved his arms and yelled in exultation. The yell sounded faintly through the noise of the engine.

Tom swung from the cab and looked back. The crowd was spilling from the shed. Several men raced after the train. Others stood watching, dumfounded.

Knight was bending over the throttle, urging the train forward as though he were putting his own strength into the flying pistons. His lips were drawn back from his set teeth, and his left hand upon the throttle was white from its grip. With his right hand he was pounding upon the sill of the cab.

Brown was studying the steam gauge. He had opened the forced draft and the smoke stack had become a fountain of sparks.

"More wood!" he yelled.

Tom stripped off his coat. The General was pounding upon the rails, swaying from side to side. It was almost impossible to stand without clinging to the side of the cab. Tom lurched cautiously toward the tender, grabbed a log and dragged it back after him. Brown swung the door of the fire-box open. Tom gasped as the heat struck him. The red flames seemed to leap out at him, enveloping him, smothering him. He slid the log into the fire. The door crashed shut again. "More! More!" yelled Brown.

Again and again Tom fed logs into the flames. Each time, Brown opened and closed the door as though an instant's heat were too precious to be lost. Brown's eyes were constantly upon the wavering needle of the steam gauge.

Andrews, sitting in the fireman's seat, was leaning from the window, glancing first ahead and then back. Except for that first shout of triumph, he had been calm and deliberate.

"Enough for now," shouted Brown. "Rest!"

Tom, panting and weak, climbed up beside Andrews and put his head out so that the cool wind would strike it. The violent effort of dragging those logs from the tender to the fire-box, together with the heat that played upon him each time, had made his legs seem like jelly beneath him. But the cool air revived him, and he watched Brown constantly for the signal that more wood was needed. Once he looked back and saw Shadrack leaning from the door of the boxcar. They waved excitedly to each other.

"Stop!" yelled Andrews to Knight.

Brown repeated the order. Knight, aroused from his intense purpose of

forcing the last ounce of speed out of the _General_, shut the throttle. Brown gave the whistle a blast, and began twisting at the brake. Gradually the train lost its speed. The men in the box-car leaned from the door, asking why they were stopping.

"Come up here," yelled Andrews. "One of you men climb that telegraph pole and knock the insulating cap off. Then break the wire."

A little fellow named Scott scrambled up the pole. Telegraph communications were broken ahead of them.

"There's no telegraph station at Big Shanty," explained Andrews. "The best they can do is to go on horseback to Marietta and telegraph to Atlanta for an engine to pursue us. But they can't telegraph ahead of us! At Kingston we'll meet the regular freight train, which is traveling against us. While we're standing in the yards the door of the box-car must be closed. Do you understand?"

"Yes!" shouted the men.

"Hop aboard then!"

Once again the _General_ started forward. Brown was at the throttle.

"More wood!" yelled Knight.

With Knight at the door of the fire-box, Tom yanked a half-dozen logs from the tender and slid them into the flames.

"Not too fast," Andrews called to Brown. "We're out of the worst of it now, and we don't want to get to Kingston too soon. Have to wait in the yards."

Brown nodded and slackened the speed. Now they could talk without yelling. Presently Andrews ordered another stop and they drew up beside Moon Station. He jumped out and came back with an iron bar. "Go ahead," he yelled, then, pointing to the bar: "Good for pulling up track."

Tom added more fuel, and then stood at the door of the cab to see Allatoona as they went through. Brown opened the throttle gradually. The outskirts of the town whizzed past them; then the station. The crowd upon the station platform, expecting that this was the passenger train, stared uncomprehendingly as the train thundered in and out of town.

They rounded a bend which cut Allatoona off from view; then Andrews motioned to Brown to stop. Tom grabbed the brake and tightened it. The train stopped abruptly. Andrews pointed to the telegraph line.

"Tear it down, Scott. Let's pull up some rails here."

They ran to the rear of the train and pried one rail from the track. After ten minutes of feverish work, Andrews called:

"Load the rails on the box-car. Come on!"

They climbed aboard again, and the General carried them onward.

Tom was standing at the door of the cab, resting and watching the country, when Andrews came up behind him suddenly and exclaimed: "Look at that!" He pointed over Tom's shoulder to a locomotive that was standing, steam up, on a spur. "That's serious business," said Andrews quickly. "I wonder where it came from. I didn't think there was another locomotive between Atlanta and Kingston."

As they passed the locomotive, Tom read its name, Yonah, painted upon the side of the cab.

"Hadn't we better destroy the track?" asked Tom.

"No," Andrews replied, "we're only thirteen miles to Kingston. We better get there and past the freight without losing any time."

"More wood!" yelled Brown. Knight was at the throttle again.

The supply of wood was running low. A dozen sticks remained and those would soon be gone.

"Water's low, too," said Brown.

"We'll stop at Cass Station," replied Andrews. "It's a wood and water station--seven miles this side of Kingston."

As they drew up at Cass Station Andrews jumped from the engine. The old man who had charge of the wood and water came out to meet him.

"I'm running a special ammunition train to Beauregard and I have to have fuel," he said. "Tom, call the boys from the box-car and get them to work."

Tom raced back to the car and opened the door. "Give a hand on this wood," he shouted. They streamed out after him, and attacked the wood pile. Knight and Brown filled the tanks with water. Before the old station agent knew what had struck his little place, the General was steaming off up the road.

"We're a little ahead of time for Kingston," said Andrews anxiously. He peered ahead toward the town, and announced presently, "The freight isn't in. We'll have to wait. Let me do all the talking, boys, when we're in there. I don't like the looks of this. Run a few hundred yards up beyond the station, Knight. I'll jump off and have the switch thrown, and then you can back in on the side-track."

They coasted slowly into Kingston, and passed the station. Andrews jumped off. Tom, hanging out from the cab, saw him talking with the switchman. The latter threw the switch and waved.

"All right," said Tom. "Let her go back." Knight reversed the engine, and they cleared the track for the freight. Andrews swung aboard.

The station agent came running toward them. "What's this?" he demanded. "What's this train? Who are you?"

"I'm running this train on government authority," answered Andrews calmly. "I'm rushing ammunition to Beauregard." He waved toward the box-cars. Then he demanded sternly: "Why isn't that local freight here?"

The agent was subdued. "It ought to be along any minute, sir," he answered. "Is there a passenger train behind you, sir?"

"I suppose so," answered Andrews indifferently. "This engine was supposed to haul the regular train, but we had to take it for this work. Powder is more important than passengers these days. They were fitting out another passenger train at Atlanta when we left."

He handled the situation in masterful style. Tom, pretending to be busy inside the cab, listened and chuckled. Knight and Brown were out oiling the engine.

"When did the freight leave Adairsville?" demanded Andrews.

"I don't know, sir," answered the agent, "but I'll find out."

"Yes, please do--and hurry up about it."

"Yes, sir."

Before the agent returned, they heard the whistle of the freight far up the track. It approached slowly, and then crept into the station, stopping with the cars blocking the track for Andrews' train.

Brown, who was at the throttle, gave an exclamation of impatience. Andrews swung to the ground. At that moment the agent rushed out, and yelled to the freight engineer, "Draw farther up the track." The freight train started again, laboriously. Andrews jumped aboard.

"Run out of here just as soon as the switch is turned," he ordered.

The last car of the freight train rounded the trees and came into sight. On the rear of it was fastened a red flag! _It was a warning that there was still another train behind!_

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Andrews. He jumped to the ground again, and went toward the station. The conductor of the freight train met him. "What does this mean?" demanded Andrews. "I'm ordered to get powder up to Beauregard, and I find the track blocked ahead of me."

"It's not my fault," answered the conductor. "I haven't anything to do with it. But I don't think that you're going to get any powder to Beauregard on this road."

"Why not?"

"What will you do about Mitchel at Huntsville?"

"What do you mean?" asked Andrews.

"I mean that Mitchel broke through and captured Huntsville yesterday," answered the conductor. "If you're working for the government, you ought to know it by this time, too."

"Don't believe everything you hear," answered Andrews. "Mitchel wouldn't be fool enough to risk an attack on Huntsville in this weather."

"Then why are they bringing this special train down from Chattanooga with all the supplies?"

"That's their business, not mine," answered Andrews. "If Mitchel has captured Huntsville, then some of Beauregard's troops are split, and that's probably the reason why I'm ordered to get this powder up as far as I can. When I get there I'll find soldiers to use it."

"Maybe," answered the conductor.

"How long will it be before the special is here?"

"Probably about thirty minutes."

Forty minutes passed before they heard the whistle of the second train; then five minutes of anxious waiting before it came into the station. The first freight, in the meantime, had pulled up on another side track, waiting patiently for the arrival of the passenger train which Andrews' men had stolen.

The special train stopped, blocking the path of the General, just as the first had done.

"Oh, Lord," said Andrews. He sprang from the cab. "Move up there! Get out of my way! I'm running a special powder train! Pull up ahead!"

"I'll pull up if it'll do you any good," answered the engineer. "There's another special train right behind me."

"How far behind you?"

"Oh, twenty minutes, maybe. What are you running a powder train for? Who are you going to give the powder to? The Yanks?"

"To Beauregard!"

"You've got some trouble ahead. The Yanks have captured the line between you and Beauregard--two hundred miles of it--from Tuscumbia to Bridgeport!"

The conductor and the engineer of the first train had joined them. "You'd better turn back and go the other way," said the conductor. "If you go up

there, the Yanks will get your powder."

"I'll follow my orders," replied Andrews.

He walked back to the _General_, and called Tom. "Walk down there beside the box-car and let the men know what has happened. Don't let anybody see you talking with them. Tell them that we're likely to have a fight--to be ready to jump out and use their guns."

Tom sauntered to the box-car and leaned against the door. "Hey! you men! This is Tom Burns. Andrews says that we're likely to have a fight. Get your guns ready."

"What's the trouble?" one of them asked. Tom explained as best he could the difficulties they had encountered. "There may be some more trains behind this one," he told them. "They're moving out of Chattanooga. The rebs are on the run!"

The whistle of the second special train sounded as Tom walked back toward Andrews. He stood beside the engine, listening to the argument between Andrews and the three railroad men. The first special had pulled far down the track, leaving ample room for the second to come in and for Andrews to get out.

The station agent came running toward them. "I've just had Chattanooga on the wire," he said, "and they don't know anything about this powder train. I tried to get Atlanta, but the wire is down!"

"Of course Chattanooga doesn't know anything about my train," answered Andrews calmly. "If they did, they wouldn't be sending these trains down blocking me. My orders came from Beauregard at Corinth, through Montgomery to Atlanta."

"Chattanooga orders you to wait here until the order is confirmed," said the agent.

"I don't care a rap for Chattanooga's orders," Andrews responded. "I have my own orders."

"I won't turn that switch to let you out."

"Then I'll turn the switch myself, and if you try to stop me I'll have you up for treason!" Andrews said it so calmly, so quietly, that the agent's jaw drooped.

The second special came creaking into the station. Andrews ran forward and shouted: "Run down until you clear the switch." The engineer nodded. "Tom, get down there and throw that switch!"

"Yes, sir."

Tom ran to the switch and waited. The station agent, with the other trainmen, had withdrawn to one side; they were holding an excited

discussion as to what he should do.

The last car of the train rounded the bend. It carried no red flag! The road was clear ahead of them!

Tom threw the switch as the wheels of the last car passed. He waved to Andrews and the _General_ rolled toward him. Then, just as he was aboard and their train was twisting into the main track, they heard a piercing whistle from the south.

"They're after us!" exclaimed Andrews. "Probably a train from Atlanta pursuing us! As fast as you can make her go, Knight."

The _General_ went lunging down the track, gathering speed.

CHAPTER TEN

"THEY'RE AFTER US!"

At Big Shanty, the chatter of the train crew and passengers at breakfast died as though the world had been struck dumb. The hissing of escaping steam was followed by the whirl of wheels slipping on the track. William Fuller, the conductor of the train, was the first to his feet. He ran to the door, with Anthony Murphy, a railroad man who had been a passenger on the train, following him. They were in time to see the _General_, with three freight cars, swing around the bend and disappear. On the tender, a man arose, waved his arms and yelled. The yell came drifting back to them above the noise of the stolen engine.

"Deserters!" exclaimed Fuller. He raced up the track, with the engineer and the fireman of the train following him. They were so hopelessly outdistanced that the crowd laughed.

Murphy found the station agent. "Get a horse and ride back to Marietta," he ordered. "Telegraph Atlanta--train stolen--start a train in pursuit." He, too, joined in the chase up the tracks.

It was Fuller's idea that his train had been taken by conscripts who were deserting from the Confederate encampment on the other side of the tracks. He believed that they would run the engine until they had put several miles between them and Big Shanty, and then take refuge in the woods. He had been warned in Atlanta, just before he left on this run, to keep a sharp watch for deserting conscripts; it was for that reason he had scrutinized the passengers in his train so closely.

With Fuller in the lead, they rounded curve after curve of the track, hoping each time to find the abandoned engine.

"I can't go any farther," panted the engineer.

"Come on!" yelled Fuller.

The men yanked off their coats, tossed them aside, and settled down into a trot. Murphy was still bringing up the rear.

Presently they came to Moon Station. Not far away there was a miniature flat-car of the type which is loaded with tools and supplies and pushed along the track. Ahead of them the road swept down in a gentle grade.

"Throw that on the track," ordered Fuller. The four men, puffing from their long run, took the corners of the little car and dragged it to the tracks. Fuller started them with a shove, then scrambled aboard.

"I sent the agent riding back to Marietta," panted Murphy.

"At Etowah," replied Fuller, "they have an engine--the _Yonah_. It belongs to the iron works. If it isn't up at the mills we'll take it."

"Has it steam up?" asked Murphy.

"I don't know. If it hasn't, we're done."

The hand-car was coasting easily down the grade; it rounded a sharp bend.

"Jump!" yelled the engineer.

His warning came too late. The car reached the spot where Andrews' men had torn up the rail; its wheels left the track and it spun about, scattering the men over the ground.

"Anybody hurt?" demanded Fuller, scrambling to his feet.

"No," they answered. All of them were bruised and the fireman's cheek was cut. "It's nothing," he said. They righted the car and dragged it to the track.

"Look at that!" called Fuller, pointing to the broken telegraph wires.

"This isn't a conscript's job."

"What do you think?" asked Murphy. "The Yanks?"

"Probably. Get that car back on the tracks, anyway. Grab some of those fence rails. We've about reached the bottom of the grade, and we can pole the car faster than we can walk. I can't run another inch."

They found two light rails, boarded the car and coasted to the bottom of the grade. Then began the tedious work of poling. It was, as Fuller had said, faster than walking. On level track they could go five or six miles an hour; on the upgrades, two of them walked while the other two poled.

At the top of the last grade before they came to Etowah, they looked down and saw the _Yonah_ a mile away, upon the turn-table. The locomotive was

being turned for its trip up the branch to the iron works!

"Give a push!" yelled Fuller. "In another minute we're lost."

The four men ran beside the hand car and started down the grade, jumping aboard when they could run no faster. The car slipped to and fro on the tracks, yanked them about the curves.

"Keep a sharp lookout ahead on the tracks," ordered Fuller. But the way was clear. If Andrews had stopped at this point to obstruct the track, the pursuit which followed would have been impossible. The *_Yonah_* would have been on its way up the branch before the hand car arrived.

As it was, the engineer of the *_Yonah_* was climbing aboard when his attention was attracted by the yells of the men on the approaching car, flying down the track as fast as a hand car ever traveled. He waited, wondering what was wrong.

Fuller ran to the *_Yonah_*, while his men pushed the hand car from the track. "We'll have to take this engine," he said. "The Yanks have stolen my train!" The three men joined him, and before the engineer could protest, they were pushing at the bar of the turn-table, swinging the locomotive around.

"I haven't much fuel," said the engineer.

"You have enough to get us to Kingston," answered Fuller. "Get aboard there!"

The *_Yonah_* slipped from the turn-table, swung into the main track and started in pursuit. The throttle was open wide.

Fuller and Murphy exchanged glances; the same thought had crossed their minds. If the Yanks had torn up the track ahead of them, the *_Yonah_* would be wrecked, and, traveling at such speed, a wreck meant death for them all. The *_Yonah_* would hurl itself from the track, and end in a steaming, smoldering ruin. Yet the two men kept their thoughts to themselves and said nothing. Caution at that moment might mean that they would lose the race. It was better to lose in a wreck than to lose by delaying. The *_Yonah_*--it was a light engine--fairly danced upon the rails.

Passengers along the way who had been disappointed once by a train which did not stop for them, gazed in amazement as the engine flashed past.

Fuller, sitting behind the engineer, leaned out of the window and peered ahead, watching the track anxiously. Murphy, with the two men who had come with them, stood by the brakes, ready to apply them when Fuller gave the signal. They were two miles from Kingston when Fuller lurched across the cab and pulled the whistle cord. It was that long shrieking blast which Andrews' men had heard as the *_General_* swung around the bend of the side-track into the main line.

Andrews, as Kingston dropped behind them, stood leaning against the side of

the cab, his chin in his hand, and his eyes closed. Tom, stripped to his waist, was struggling back and forth between the tender and the engine with logs of wood which he shoved into the fire-box. The _General_ was belching great clouds of black smoke; red sparks flashed back over the train like a plume waving in the breeze.

"That's enough," yelled Knight. "We've got a full head of steam now. Push her, Brown, push her!"

And still Andrews stood there, with his eyes closed, thinking. Tom clambered to the fireman's seat.

"Stop here!" called Andrews suddenly.

Tom sprang for the brake.

"Rip down those wires," Andrews continued. "Two of you men--you and you--load those ties in the freight car." He pointed to a pile which lay near the track. "Put some of them on the rails." Then when they were under way again, he yelled to Knight, "Stop around that next bend--we'll tear up a rail."

The men streamed out again, when the train had come to a stop; they wrenched at the spikes with their inadequate tools, but the oak ties held them stubbornly. The task was little more than half completed when Andrews came running.

"Pry it up--don't bother about the rest of the spikes. Give a hand, here." They slid a bar under the rail and pulled upward, straining. Slowly it bent; then broke. The men tumbled over each other down the embankment, a mixture of bodies, legs, arms and tools, with the rail clattering after them. Miraculously, no one was hurt. Tom was at the bottom of the heap; he struggled loose and climbed up to the track.

Andrews snatched his hat off and ran, waving it, back to the engine. "Board!" he shouted. The _General_ rushed forward, under full power.

Andrews sat beside Tom in the fireman's seat. "The people who are chasing us will be held up by the freight trains at Kingston," he said. "It will probably be ten minutes before they can get clear of the station. It was a gamble, stopping to tear up that rail. I was afraid they'd come up on us. That will block them, though." He looked back along the track. "We'll be in Adairsville soon. We have to meet the through freight there."

"Wood!" yelled Knight. Tom slid down from his seat and struggled with the logs. Andrews moved over to Brown and yelled in his ear. Brown, without taking his eyes off the track ahead of him, nodded. He had the throttle open wide, and the _General_ was swaying perilously on the curves. Long moments passed while the engine seemed to travel on the outer wheels; then, as the track straightened, to come crashing down.

Tom was becoming accustomed to the swaying, jerking floor of the cab. He hurried back and forth between the tender and the fire-box, crouching to

keep his balance, struggling with the heavy logs. He was covered with soot, and the sweat made tiny rivulets in the black as it streamed down his body. His shirt had been caught by a puff of wind and carried out of the cab. He lifted the lid of the fireman's seat and threw his coat and cape into the box.

Andrews sat beside him again, glancing nervously at his watch. "If we are more than an hour late at Adairsville, the through freight may pull out and block the road. Then there's the southbound passenger train."

"At Adairsville?" asked Tom.

"No, at Calhoun," answered Andrews. "There is the same danger with that as with the freight. If we don't come within an hour of the time we're due, it has a right to go ahead and meet us at the next station." They were rounding a curve which gave them a clear view of the track behind for several miles. The pursuing engine was not in sight.

The speed of the General slackened. Tom glanced ahead and saw Adairsville.

"Are we going to stop?" he asked.

"Yes. I want to get that freight started south. They might wait, when they see that this is not the passenger train. Work up a full head of steam while we're here, Knight."

Tom put more fuel upon the fire. The train slid into the station at Adairsville and stopped. The freight train was standing on the side-track, ready to pull out. Andrews jumped to the platform:

"I'm running this special train to Chattanooga," he announced. "Some of Beauregard's troops have been cut off by Mitchel. Is the passenger train waiting for me at Calhoun?"

"I don't know," answered the amazed station agent. The conductor and the engineer of the freight train came running up.

"What's this--what's this?" asked the conductor.

"Special powder train," answered the station agent.

"Your way is clear to Kingston," said Andrews. "The passenger train is waiting there. I have to be going."

"But the southbound passenger train!" protested the conductor. "It has left Calhoun by this time. You'd better wait here."

"If I meet any train, I'll blow it off the face of the earth!" answered Andrews. "I have twenty tons of powder in those cars." He waved toward the empty box-cars--empty except for the sixteen men in the last. He swung aboard the General.

"Go ahead," he ordered.

Knight was at the throttle. After the one curve which took them out of sight of Adairsville, the tracks stretched straight ahead of them, and there was a slight down grade. Knight opened the throttle wide. The _General_ plunged forward in huge leaps, swaying through space. There were moments when all the wheels seemed clear of the tracks, when the locomotive seemed to fly; at other times it settled on the tracks and shook as though it were about to drop in pieces. Behind them, the freight cars lashed back and forth, throwing the men on the floor when they tried to rise.

"Wood!" yelled Brown.

Tom took up his struggle with the logs. Now he picked them up and heaved them into the cab, then followed, holding to the tender, and stuffed them into the flames. He stopped once for breath, and looked at Knight. The engineer's face was screwed into a grimace; his jaw was set, his eyes half closed, and his head thrust forward into the wind which swept past them. Occasionally he closed the throttle a few notches, as though he were tempering the speed just enough to keep the _General_ from leaping into the air. He seemed to be controlling a live monster, bent on carrying them to destruction.

Outside, the country flitted past them, a blur of trees and hills.

Andrews lurched across the cab and shouted to Knight: "Calhoun--around bend!" Knight nodded and slackened off on the throttle. The _General_ drifted into a normal speed which, by comparison, was mere crawling; it hit the curve, swayed and settled down upon the tracks.

"Brake!" screamed Knight.

Brown and Tom lunged for the wheel and twisted. When it was set, Tom leaned from the cab and saw that they were bearing down upon the passenger train, its whistle screeching a warning. The two engines stopped within twenty yards of collision.

Andrews ducked out on the running board of the _General_. "Get back!" he yelled, waving frantically.

The engineer of the passenger train did not wait to ask questions; he reversed his locomotive and slid back into Calhoun, taking the main track. That left the side-track for Andrews. The engineer of the passenger train, in his anxiety to be far away from the train which had almost wrecked him, had backed so far that his rear car was blocking the other end of the side-track.

"Draw up and let me out," called Andrews.

But the engineer descended from his cab. "What do you mean by running me down that way?" he demanded explosively. "You're over an hour late. I have the right of way." Then as he came closer: "Who are you?"

"I have the right of way here," answered Andrews. "This is a special powder train."

"Special or no special," answered the engineer, "no man can run a train like that on this road. Show me your orders."

"Get your train out of my way," answered Andrews. He was calm again now, and his tone showed nothing of the agony of suspense raging within him.

"I refuse to clear the track until you show me your orders for running like that."

Andrews glanced at Tom. And there was meaning in that glance. Tom swung from the engine and strolled back along the train, ready to call the men.

"Get your train out of my way," answered Andrews evenly. He pulled out his watch. "I'll give you thirty seconds to start your train forward. At the end of that time I'll have my men do it for you, and I'll take you to Chattanooga with me--charged with aiding the enemy!"

The engineer began to splutter; then he paused, turned suddenly and strode off toward his engine. The passenger train pulled slowly ahead. Tom ran to the switch, threw the handle, and swung aboard the General as it passed him.

"Whew!" said Andrews. "I thought we were going to have trouble there."

"Do you think the passenger train will pull out?" asked Tom. "That would block 'em."

"No," answered Andrews. "He'll stay there. I wanted to tell him that the way was clear to Adairsville ... but I couldn't. It might mean a wreck, if they are still pursuing us. That would be terrible--it's a passenger train."

Tom nodded. Brown yelled for more wood. When the fire had been stoked, Tom took his seat beside Andrews.

"We've left them behind now, I think," continued the leader. "That tangle of freight at Kingston will stop them."

A deep rumble, rising above the noise of the General struck their ears. For a moment they did not know what it was; then Tom exclaimed, "Thunder! Look!" He pointed to the black sky. Already the rain was splashing down upon them, streaking the forward windows of the cab.

"We're near the Reseca bridge now," said Andrews. Then he added: "If only the rain doesn't come down hard enough to put out our fires! It may take us longer.... Hey, Knight! Stop here! We'll tear up the rails!"

The General glided around a sharp curve in the road and came to a stop. The men jumped out from the box-car.

"Pull up some rails here, men," ordered Andrews. "Break the wires, Scott." Scott was already halfway up a telegraph pole.

"We dumped some ties out on the road back there," said Ross. "They're lying across the rails."

"Good!" answered Andrews. "I think we've left them behind, but we can't take any chances. We may have to spend more time at the bridges starting the fires."

He ran back to where the men were working at the rail, grabbed the iron bar and rained blows down upon the spikes. When half of the spikes had been drawn, he yelled, "Pry this up!" They put the iron bar beneath the rail, and pulled. Slowly the remaining spikes gave way, and the _inside rail of the curve_ rattled down the embankment.

"Now for the other side," ordered Andrews.

The men were beginning to attack the spikes when a prolonged blast of a locomotive whistle sounded to the south. There was an instant of quiet; then Andrews yelled:

"Come on! They're after us, but that rail will be enough to wreck them!"

They ran for the train.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE PURSUIT

The screeching whistle of the _Yonah_, which had sent the _General_ speeding away from Kingston, was a warning to the engineer of the freight train blocking the way of the pursuers. It had pulled out of the station and was lumbering southward, intending to make the side-track at Cass Station and wait for Fuller's passenger train.

Brakes were twisted, and the two locomotives approached each other slowly.

"Our fuel's about gone," said Murphy.

Fuller was swinging from the _Yonah's_ cab, ready to jump off. "Then we'll get aboard the freight," he replied. The others followed him.

"Back into the station," ordered Fuller, as he climbed into the cab of the freight locomotive. "The Yanks have stolen my train!"

"They've just pulled out!" answered the engineer. He threw the engine into reverse, while the fireman swung on the whistle cord.

Fuller sprang into the tender, climbed the wood pile and up on the box-car. The second freight was just pulling out, blocking the track. He waved and yelled to Murphy, who yanked at the whistle. The second freight stopped and waited. At that moment a combined passenger and freight train from the branch line to Rome swung around the bend and pulled into the station. The congestion was complete. With the fuel-less _Yonah_ at one end, and the Rome train at the other, the three freights were hopelessly locked and tangled.

Fuller ran back to the engine. "Come on," he said. "We'll take the Rome engine."

"This engine is faster," answered Murphy. "We can shunt the cars on the side-track and run her backwards."

"It'll take a half-hour to get her clear," said Fuller. "Come on!"

He jumped from the train, and ran up the track. Murphy, still protesting, ran after him. It was their second foot race that day, and they arrived at the station winded.

"Cut that engine loose!" yelled Fuller. The station agent recognized him, and asked what had happened. "The Yanks!" answered Fuller. It was explanation enough. The Rome engine, supplied with fuel for its return trip, was uncoupled.

"Telegraph Chattanooga train stolen by Yanks. Am in pursuit."

The station agent ran to his office, but it was too late to get the message through; Andrews' men had already torn the line down.

The engine which Fuller now had was smaller and slower than the _Yonah_. The engineer, upon entering Kingston, had allowed the steam pressure to sink, and they crawled slowly from the station. Five minutes later they came to the break in the telegraph lines, and Fuller knew that his message to Chattanooga had not gone through. They worked feverishly at the engine, but the steam pressure rose slowly. It was that fact which saved them from a wreck when they came to the spot where Andrews' men had torn up the rail. There was ample time to reverse the engine and bring it to a stop.

Without spikes and tools it was hopeless to think of bridging the gap. They stood gazing ruefully at the break.

"We're done!" muttered Murphy.

"No, we're not," answered Fuller. "Come on!" And he started running up the track. The others, nearly exhausted by the pace he had led them, followed on their third foot race after the stolen train.

This broken rail, which so nearly blocked the course of his pursuers, was Andrews' greatest mistake. If he had left the way clear for Fuller, sending the southbound freight against him from Adairsville, a collision would have been inevitable. As it was, Fuller and his men, running towards

Adairsville, heard the approaching train in plenty of time to stop it. Once again, scarcely fifteen minutes after deserting one locomotive, they were aboard another, the Texas.

It took but a minute to explain to the engineer what had happened. The engine, thrown into reverse, pushed back to Adairsville, with Fuller, mounted on the end box-car, controlling the train by signals. South of the station they stopped, while Fuller jumped from the train and pulled open the switch to the side-track. Murphy uncoupled the train at the engine. Again they started back, this time shunting the train to the siding and allowing it to run on its own momentum. When the wheels of the last car passed, with a gap of a few yards between the car and the engine, Fuller threw the switch and leaped for the cab. Murphy caught his arms and pulled him aboard. The Texas plunged backward down the track, racing the cast-off train as it rolled upon the siding. For a moment it seemed that they would collide at the north switch where the side-track re-entered the main line. Fuller, leaning from the cab, glanced apprehensively at the engineer. He had the throttle opened wide and the Texas was gaining speed at every turn of her wheels. The station agent was on the platform, waving his arms and yelling. Ahead of them, the leading freight car lurched as it struck the bend of the side-track; then the Texas rattled over the switch and out of danger--with two yards to spare.

Behind them, the freight car struck the closed switch, jumped it, ran off the track and turned over. The force of the cars shoved it over the ground: the second car crashed on its side.

Fuller glanced back indifferently at the wreck they had left behind them. "Keep her open wide!" he yelled, and the engineer nodded.

Ahead lay the clear straight road down which the General had swept just a few minutes before. There were no obstructions, and no breaks as far as Fuller and Murphy could see. They had climbed to the edge of the tender and were sitting, clutching the sides, studying the tracks ahead of them.

"Stop at Calhoun!" called Fuller, and the order was passed back to the engineer. As the station swung into view, the Texas came to a halt, with her brakes screaming.

Fuller jumped off. "That train--stolen!" he said to the station agent.

"Out of here five minutes ago."

"Get aboard!"

Fuller dragged the protesting station agent to the engine. When the Texas had started again, he explained: "The lines are down. I want you to jump off at Dalton, if we haven't caught them before then, and send through this message. If we press them fast enough they won't have time to cut the lines."

Fuller took a pencil and paper and wrote the message:

"To Gen. Leadbetter,

"Commander at Chattanooga:

"My train captured this A.M. at Big Shanty, evidently by Federal soldiers in disguise. They are making for Chattanooga, possibly with the idea of burning the railroad bridges in their rear. If I do not capture them in the meantime, see that they do not pass Chattanooga.

"WILLIAM A. FULLER."

He handed the message to the station agent.

Murphy, on the tender, suddenly raised his arms and yelled. The engineer of the Texas closed the throttle, and reversed the engine. Fuller jumped to the brake; and the fireman, thinking that he had a train crew to man the brakes, swung on the whistle cord to give warning. It was this blast which fell on the ears of Andrews' men as they were tearing up the rail, a mile and a half farther north.

The Texas, trembling under the power of the reversed pressure against her piston, seemed to buck upon the tracks. She stopped as though she had come to the end of an anchor chain.

"Ties on the track," shouted Murphy, jumping from the tender. The others followed him and they tossed the ties to the side. Then they scrambled back aboard the locomotive.

"You men stand by the brake," ordered Fuller. "Murphy and I will be on the tender. When we raise our arms--stop!"

Two minutes later, Fuller and Murphy, straining to see obstructions on the track, caught a glimpse of the gap where a rail had been torn loose. It was only a glimpse, for the engine was almost upon it, swinging around the curve. They yelled and raised their arms, but it was too late.

Even before the engineer could close the throttle the Texas was on the verge of the break. Fuller and Murphy sat paralyzed, their arms outstretched, expecting the locomotive to plunge from the rails. Then, an instant later, they knew that the Texas had miraculously sailed over the gap!

Fuller was the first to regain his senses. He waved to the engineer to go ahead, and the Texas swept down the road. Murphy and Fuller looked at one another in dumb amazement.

"The inside rail of the curve," Murphy said at last. Fuller nodded in comprehension.

The Texas, lunging around the curve, had been thrown against the outside rail; the inside wheels were lifted clear of the break. Had Andrews' men attacked the outside rail first, the race would have ended there, with the Texas a battered wreck, strewn over the trackside. On the other hand, if

Fuller and Murphy had seen the break sooner, a wreck would have been inevitable, for the locomotive, in checking its speed, would have rested evenly upon both rails. Luck was with the pursuers.

Now the rain was falling in torrents. It stung the faces of the two Confederates as they sat on the tender, peering ahead, but they were oblivious to it. Oblivious, that is, except that they knew the rain would help them. The bridges would be the harder to burn.

Time after time, they raised their arms and the _Texas_ came to a stop, while they jumped to the ground and threw ties from the track. The _General_ was gaining a greater lead each time the _Texas_ was checked. And seconds were counting.

Fuller grabbed Murphy's arm, and said: "Look!"

Far ahead they saw a black cloud of smoke. It was the _General_ approaching the Reseca bridge.

CHAPTER TWELVE

SPEEDING NORTHWARD

Tom slammed the door of the fire-box and climbed up on the seat beside Andrews, who was leaning half out of the window, absorbed in his own thoughts. He glanced back, and turned to Tom.

"They're still after us," he said grimly. "I want to drop the last box-car. Can you get back there and tell the men?"

"Yes," answered Tom. "Why not break 'through the ends of all the cars--so we can get back and forth without having to climb over the roofs!"

"All right--but hurry. Uncouple just as soon as you can."

Tom climbed over the logs in the tender; then, balancing carefully, he stood up and clutched the top of the swaying freight car. In an instant he had swung himself over and was running down the roofs of the cars, silhouetted against the cloudy sky. When he reached the end of the train he lay on his stomach and looked down. The men were feeding the ties they had collected out upon the road through an opening they had broken in the rear of the car. The hole was large enough so that he could climb down the ladder, swing around the corner, and enter.

[Illustration: The men were feeding the ties they had collected out upon the road through an opening they had broken in the rear of the car.]

"Andrews wants to drop this car," he told the men when he was safe inside. "Break the other end open." They took one of the rails they had removed

from the track north of Big Shanty, and with it as a battering-ram knocked a hole in the forward end; then in the end of the second car. They passed the remaining ties and the rails forward.

"I'll pull the pin," said Tom. He lay down on the floor and reached for the coupling; then he drew back. "No--here, shove a tie off. Well see if we can wreck her."

As he drew the pin out, the others threw a tie down. It struck one wheel of the detached car, bounded, struck again and then bounded out of the way. The men silently watched the car rolling along behind them.

Tom shook his head in disgust. "Let's knock the ends of these cars out," he said. Once again they took the rail up and battered their way through. Tom climbed up over the end of the tender and reported to Andrews.

"We tried to wreck it," he said, "but the tie bounced out of the way."

Andrews nodded and leaned from the cab. "We're within a mile of Reseca bridge," he said slowly. "I don't dare to stop and build a fire. They're too close upon us."

Now, for the first time, Tom realized that the raid might fail in its purpose. The excitement of the race, of reaching this point where the road to Chattanooga lay clear before them, had been upon him; it had never entered his head that their long struggle against so many obstacles could end in anything but glorious success. Surely they could do something to block the way of the pursuing engine.

"Can't we stop and fight?" he asked. "Put up an obstacle at one of these curves, and attack them from ambush? We're all armed."

"No," answered Andrews; "they'll be better armed." He still believed that the engine in their rear had come from Atlanta--probably with a detachment of soldiers aboard, prepared for a battle. "There are bridges ahead--the Chickamauga bridges. We'll drop another car on the Reseca bridge. Go back and tell them. I'll slow down. Try to wreck it in the shed."

Tom hurried back again over the wood pile.

The Reseca bridge which ran over the Oostenaula River was covered by a long shed. And, as it was built upon a curve in the road, a box-car--either wrecked or merely left standing--could not be seen until the pursuing engine was almost upon it.

Ross stood at the side door of the first freight car, while Tom clutched the coupling pin, ready to draw it. Others waited with ties. The train's speed decreased.

"Get ready," yelled Ross; then, as they entered the shed, "Go!"

Tom drew the pin. The car seemed to cling to the train for several seconds; then the General leaped ahead. Ties streamed out upon the track. The

wheels of the abandoned car knocked several out of the way; then, as the train swung about the curve, leaving the car hidden in the shed, Tom saw one tie resting at an angle across the track. The wheels struck it, and the car lurched heavily.... They could see no more.

"I think we put it off the track," cried Tom exultantly when he was back in the engine. Andrews slapped him on the back.

"We'll have to break the wires above here," he said as the little station in Reseca flashed past them. "Stop about a mile up here, Knight. On a curve."

"Wood!" yelled Brown.

Tom took up the work of dragging logs from the tender and stuffing them in the fire-box. He stopped once, and pointed to the wood pile. Fuel was running low.

"At Green's Station," said Andrews.

"Water there, too?" asked Brown.

"At Tilton--just a few miles farther on." Andrews waved to Knight to shut off the power.

"If that car at Reseca bridge doesn't stop them, we're cornered," panted Andrews as he ran back. "Put an obstruction here! That bent rail!"

The men ran back to the car and pulled out the rail. It was the one they had ripped from the ties north of Calhoun. They forced the straight end of it under the track, leaving the bent end projecting toward the pursuers--a scarcely visible snag which would rip into the engine.

"Keep dropping ties, men," ordered Andrews. "We have to stop at the wood yard."

Brown took the throttle and pushed the General onward toward Green's Station. Tom put the last of the fuel in the fire, and leaned wearily against the cab. Drops of rain, carried by the wind, splashed upon him and ran down his body, streaking the soot which covered his chest and stomach. His eyes met Knight's and they looked at each other dumbly, asking each other how the race would end. Instinctively they turned toward Andrews. He was in the fireman's seat, hands clenched and face set, staring ahead. He did not move until they were within sight of Green's Station.

The General stopped at the wood pile and the men jumped out. The keeper of the yard came running toward them. Andrews waved him aside.

"Throw that wood aboard, men," he said. But they had already attacked the pile.

Then they heard repeated short blasts of a whistle to the southward. The men paused and looked at Andrews.

"Pile it in! Hurry!" he yelled.

"Who are you?" demanded the keeper. "What's this train!"

Andrews seemed not to hear him. Four Confederate soldiers who were standing several hundred yards away yelled and pointed in the direction of the whistling.

"Board," called Andrews. As he climbed into the cab of the General, Tom saw that his face had become suddenly drawn. There was no talking now. The race had reached the final test of strength. While Tom, in the tender, yanked logs loose from the pile, Andrews stood ready to pass them to Knight, who shoved them into the fire-box.

"The wood's wet," said Knight. The others heard him and made no reply. He worked with the drafts, coaxing the fire. Occasionally, Brown glanced at the steam gauge; then the two engineers would exchange glances. Slowly the needle of the gauge crept up.

In the box-car the men silently dropped ties upon the tracks. Sometimes there was a mumble of satisfaction as a tie fell squarely across the rails; or a grunt of disgust when one tumbled end for end and landed out of position.

Running a mile or so behind them, they caught occasional glimpses of the smoke of the Texas. There were moments when the smoke paused and mounted straight into the sky; then a few seconds later it flattened out and rose in a long black stream. The Texas was running from obstruction to obstruction, clearing the way and pressing forward. How had they done it? How had they passed the broken rail, the ties along the track, the box-cars and the snag? Those questions were pounding in the brains of Andrews' men.

If ever a man combined determination with luck it was Fuller. He had started on foot from Big Shanty in complete ignorance of what was happening to his stolen train. Undoubtedly, if he had known that a party of Northern raiders had taken it, he would have waited until a locomotive came from Atlanta. The idea of running after a locomotive would have seemed too ridiculous. But, expecting to find it abandoned around each curve, he raced on and on until they came to the hand car; then the Yonah. When the Yonah had run out of fuel, the New York was there to carry him to the Rome engine. When the Rome engine had been stopped by the break in the track, they had come to the Texas. They had shunted and outraced the train, jumped the broken track, and avoided wrecking on obstructions so many times that they had lost count. And still they pressed on. The force of Fuller's determination seemed greater than the force of the steam which flashed against the pistons of the Texas.

Fuller and Murphy, still sitting on the edge of the tender, saw the abandoned box-car as they swerved around the bend. Fuller waved his arms up and down slowly to the engineer as a signal to come to a gradual stop. They coasted down upon the box-car, picked it up and carried it on with them. Fuller and Murphy climbed to the top of it; Murphy, staying at the rear end

to repeat the signals of Fuller, who was perched on the front.

At the sight of ties lying across the track, Fuller's arms shot up. An instant later, the _Texas_ was laboring to a stop under reversed power, her brakes grabbing at the wheels. Then, when the decreasing speed of the train gave his legs the advantage, Fuller was ahead, heaving ties from the road.

Far to the northward, across the bend which hid the Reseca bridge from view, Fuller caught a glimpse of the _General_ speeding on its way. He saw that the train had been shortened once more, that the engine was hauling only one box-car. He dreaded that first sight of the Reseca bridge, for, if Andrews had left it in flames, the race was over for the _Texas_. Then they swept around the curve and the bridge lay before them, indistinct in the drizzle of rain. It appeared intact, but Fuller knew that long curving shed too well through his years of travel over the road not to be suspicious of what lurked inside.

He waved a signal to approach gradually; then, as they came to the entrance, his arms shot up. The _Texas_ came to a stop.

"Wait here," he yelled, sliding down the ladder. He ran into the shed.

The left forward wheel of the box-car had mounted upon one of the ties thrown before it. The tie was wedged diagonally across the track, and the flange had cut a deep groove in it. The right wheel was nearly a foot off the track. Apparently the car had struck the tie just at the moment of losing momentum.

Fuller made a hasty examination, then ran back to the _Texas_. Murphy was coming forward to meet him.

"They've dropped the second box-car in there," explained Fuller. "The front wheels are off the track. We can drag it back, I think. We'll have to find a coupling pin."

The fireman was racing through his chest, looking for something which would serve to couple the cars together. "Will this be all right?" he asked, holding up a short crow-bar.

"Yes," answered Fuller. "And bring a heavy hammer."

While Murphy signaled the _Texas_ into the shed, Fuller and the fireman ran forward with the crow-bar and hammer.

"Careful now," yelled Fuller, as the two box-cars came closer together. "Easy--easy!" The cars met gently. He slid the crow-bar into the hole and held it while the fireman hammered the top over.

"Now run back slowly--an inch at a time," ordered Fuller.

The engineer opened the throttle, and the _Texas_ crept away, taking up the slack in the couplings. The left wheel followed back along the groove its flange had cut in the tie. Fuller watched it breathlessly. There came a

clash of metal as the wheel slipped down from the tie and struck the track. For a second the flange rode on the rail, then settled into position, forcing the right wheel up.

Fuller yelled in triumph, kicked the tie off the track, and jumped for the ladder. The steam hissed as the Texas was thrown into reverse again. They swept out of the shed, pushing the two cars.

The bent rail which Andrews had left as a snag in the track would have wrecked Fuller if the Texas had been traveling forward instead of backward. As it was, the cars cleared it. The snag caught on the low cow-catcher of the engine and gave the train a mighty jerk. They were past it before they knew what had happened. In fact, Fuller did not know until later, for he had not seen the snag ahead of them, and he could see nothing as he looked back.

He motioned Murphy ahead. "What was that?" he asked.

"Don't know. Something on the track. Thought the engine was going off for a second."

"They'll probably stop at Green's for wood," said Fuller. "Keep the whistle going."

Murphy hurried back over the swaying cars. An instant later the whistle was screaming out its warning to the keeper of the wood yard at Green's Station.

Fuller's arms went up again, and he was on the ground removing ties.

"We'll have to stop for fuel," yelled Murphy.

When the Texas swung around into view of Green's Station the track ahead was still clear. The General was speeding northward.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

FIGHTING WITH FIRE

Tom discovered that the weariness which was creeping over him, stealing his strength, was hunger. The sight of Knight gnawing at a hunk of bread sent him to his coat for the package of food he had bought at Big Shanty. Andrews, too, became suddenly aware that he must eat. Brown, hovering over the throttle, was too intent upon pushing the General forward to be conscious of his body. He sat there as though hypnotized by the gleaming rails which stretched before him.

Tilton came into view. Andrews crossed over to Brown and told him where to stop for water; then he stood ready to swing off the engine to confront

anyone who might interfere. The station was one hundred yards north of the water pipe, so the agent could not get a good view of the freight car. It was obviously no car to support the special powder train story: its end was broken open wide, and the sixteen men within were waiting in readiness to swing off and fight.

Brown and Knight adjusted the water pipe. Andrews hurried forward to meet the keeper. Tom was a few yards behind him, prepared to run back and call the men out.

"Special train," said Andrews. "Running through to Corinth."

"Through to Corinth?" demanded the man incredulously.

"All right!" yelled Knight.

Andrews and Tom turned and ran back to the engine without waiting to answer questions. The _General_ with Knight at the throttle now, went roaring past the amazed agent. He stood rooted to the ground while the men in the freight car waved derisively.

Brown had collapsed in the fireman's seat, his head thrown back against the cab wall and his eyes closed. The strain of driving a locomotive at full speed over a strange track was beginning to tell upon him.

"There is nothing for us to do until we get past Dalton," said Andrews. "On the other side of the tunnel is a bridge. We'll set fire to it." He glanced at his watch. "We're ahead of the passenger train's schedule, and we may find the tracks blocked at the switches in Dalton."

"What then?" asked Knight.

"We'll have to fight our way through," answered Andrews. "Tom, tell the men to stand ready to jump out and fight at Dalton. You stay up on the tender and don't let any man show a head until I give the signal." Then, to Knight: "Stop a couple of hundred yards below the station while I run ahead and see if the switches are clear. If the way is open, we'll rush it."

"Right," answered the engineer. "More wood, Tom."

Tom climbed up on the tender and passed the orders back to the men; then he turned to stoking the fire.

"Here we are," said Andrews. Once again he was calm and deliberate. He seemed to be gathering himself together for the conflict with the station authorities at Dalton.

Tom glanced ahead and saw the town looming up before them--the big station, with its high roof sweeping out over the tracks, the passenger coaches and freight cars standing upon the side-tracks, and the maze of switches. It seemed like a network, spread out to catch them. He climbed up on the wood pile in the tender where he could see Andrews and repeat a signal for help to the men.

As the _General_ stopped, Andrews sprang off and walked ahead. He paused to talk with several men who were coming down the track, then walked on toward the station. Suddenly he turned and motioned sharply.

Knight pulled the throttle open and the _General_ fairly jumped. Andrews swung aboard. "Push her, Knight!" he yelled.

Tom, perched on the tender, saw a man rush from the station and wave. He shouted something but it was lost in the noise of the locomotive. Then they plunged into the darkness of the roof, and out again on the other side.

Ahead of them the track swerved sharply to the left. Knight saw it too late to moderate his speed. The _General_ hit the curve and reared on its right wheels, hanging there for a breathless moment. Tom clutched the edge of the tender to keep from being thrown off. He saw Knight's hand slip from the throttle as he slammed it shut, saw Andrews' expression of horror. It seemed as though whole minutes passed while the _General_ balanced on the curve, swaying and trembling. Then slowly it tilted back to the left and struck the tracks with a clash that made the locomotive shudder. It wavered from side to side, gradually settling itself upon the rails.

Knight glanced at Andrews; his hand went to the throttle again and drew it open. Tom entered the cab. There was not a word said about their narrow escape from a wreck.

Ten minutes later Andrews called to Knight to stop. "Tell them to tear up the tracks and break the telegraph line, Tom," he ordered.

Tom climbed over the tender and into the freight car. He repeated Andrews' orders. Shadrack grabbed him and asked: "What was that we struck back there?"

"Curve in the road," answered Tom. "Almost threw me from the tender."

"It bounced me five times between the walls of this car," answered Shadrack.

The train came to a stop and the men streamed out through the back end of the car. Scott fairly shot up the telegraph pole.

Once again the whistle of the pursuers sounded.

"Board," shouted Andrews. "Never mind about the track." When Tom joined him in the engine, he said: "Have the men start a fire in the freight car. We'll leave it in the first bridge shed. It's our last chance."

"How about the tunnel?" asked Tom. "An ambush--anything. Stop and fight them!"

"No--not now. Hurry! Get that fire started! Use the engine fuel!"

Tom went to the box-car. "Andrews wants you to start a fire here. We'll

drop the car under the bridge shed. When you get the fire going, climb aboard the tender." He left the men gathering the splintered boards into a heap, and returned to the engine.

Shadrack's head appeared above the edge of the tender presently. He motioned to Tom. "This wood is so wet we can't light it. We haven't any paper."

"Wait," ordered Tom. He grabbed a log from the tender and went to the fire-box, thrusting one end into the blaze. "I'll have to pass the fire back to them," he explained to Andrews. "The wood is too wet."

When the end of the log was blazing, he pulled it out and raced back to Shadrack. The wind and the rain extinguished the flames, but he hurried forward again determinedly. This time he lighted several of the smallest logs, which burned more freely. He made three trips to the freight car, each time carrying a blazing torch, and he had just stepped into the tender with the last log when the blackness of night fell upon them. Tom paused for an instant bewildered. They had plunged into the tunnel.

The scene around him was illuminated by the flickering tongues of flame which lapped up the end of the log. He stumbled over the wood in the tender, and handed the log to Shadrack. Through the hole in the box-car he saw the men working at the fire. Several were bending over it, fanning, while others hurried back and forth in the dull glow bringing fuel. One man was breaking the walls of the car with the iron bar, throwing the boards back as he pounded and wrenched them loose. Then, suddenly, the blaze increased and the car was filled with smoke. Flames leaped several feet in the air, mounting high and higher until they spread out against the roof of the car.

"More logs, Tom."

Tom recognized Shadrack's voice. He passed log after log back.

The train emerged from the tunnel. The car was leaving a trail of smoke behind it; flames were darting from the side doors and flowing back against the walls. Several of the men climbed into the tender, wiping their eyes and coughing. More followed them until the tender seemed overflowing.

"All out, I guess," said Ross. "Whew! that's a hot fire."

"Where's Shadrack?" demanded Tom. They glanced about from one to another. Shadrack was not among them.

Tom jumped up to the edge of the tender and let himself down into the freight car.

"Shadrack!" he called; then louder, "Shadrack! Shadrack!"

There was no answer. The dense smoke choked and blinded him. "Shadrack!" He ran down the car, holding his breath and dodging the flames. "Shadrack!"

"Here!"

"Where?"

"Outside."

Tom swung out around the end of the car and found Shadrack on the ladder, climbing and fighting the waves of smoke which drifted back upon him, enveloping him, from the side door. He was dragging himself wearily from one rung to another.

"Can you get up?" Tom asked. Shadrack gasped and shook his head. "Hold on tight! Just hold there!"

Tom started back for the center of the car, found the side door and put his head out for a breath of clean air. Then he drew the door shut and made his way to the rear end again. That would keep the smoke from Shadrack as he climbed to the top of the car. Tom clung there, holding to the brake bar and the ladder, looking up. He saw Shadrack's legs disappear over the edge. Dizziness overcame him for a moment. He held on with all his strength, closed his eyes, letting the cool rain splatter in his face. Then he climbed the ladder, Shadrack was sitting on the top of the car, swaying weakly.

"Are you all right, Shadrack?" asked Tom.

"Yes--in a second. Thanks for coming. The smoke almost finished me. I was scattering the flames around. Is the fire going all right?"

"Yes. We'd better get back to the tender."

"I would have fallen off, if you hadn't closed that door. I'm still dizzy."

Tom looked ahead and saw the bridge. "Come on, Shadrack," he said. "We have to get forward. On your hands and knees." He, too, was so dizzy that he could not trust himself to walk upright. Together they crawled forward over the hot roof. Beneath them the flames crackled.

As they came to the end of the car and looked down into the tender, they found the men yelling, "Shadrack! Burns!" One of the men was gesticulating wildly to Andrews.

"Here we are!" yelled Tom. He waved to Andrews.

"We thought you were caught in there," said Wilson, helping them into the tender. "Dorsey started after you, but the fire forced him back."

"We were almost caught," gasped Tom, still choking from the smoke. The forward part of the car was a solid mass of flames, which roared and crackled above the noise of the engine. "Pass some of those logs into the engine!"

Tom entered the cab and stuffed fuel into the fire-box. Andrews, leaning

from the fireman's window, was gazing back. He called to Tom and pointed. Behind them, perhaps a mile and a half, came the pursuing engine.

"Tell the men to pull the coupling when we stop," said Andrews. Tom obeyed, and Ross crawled over the end of the tender, his coat wrapped about his head to protect him from the flames, which spurted out in the eddies of wind.

"How much fuel have you left?" asked Andrews.

"Ten sticks."

"This is our last chance, then," Andrews replied. "We'll have to abandon the locomotive if they get through."

Andrews jumped up and crossed to the other side of the engine. He stood beside Knight, shouting into his ear. Knight nodded; then he closed the throttle, and the General's speed slackened. The bridge shed was looming ahead of them.

The General darted into the shed and came to a stop. Tom stood at the door of the tender, waiting for the signal that the car had been uncoupled. Already the flames were licking the shed walls and mounting to the roof; the scene was illuminated in a wavering, red glow.

Boss jumped up from behind the tender, and yelled, "Go!"

"Go!" repeated Tom. The steam hissed and enveloped them in a cloud. The walls echoed the screeching of the wheels as they slid upon the tracks. Brown yanked at the sand lever. The wheels gained traction and the General jumped ahead and sped from the bridge.

Smoke was pouring from the ends of the shed as they looked back. And across the bend, a mile behind them, came the Texas!

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE END OF THE RACE

Fuller had stopped at Green's Station and at Tilton for wood and water; at Dalton he paused for a moment to shunt the two freight cars which Andrews had dropped. The telegraph operator who had been dragged into the chase at Calhoun ran to the station and pounced upon a telegraph key. Chattanooga answered him and he hammered out half of the message; then the wire "went dead." Andrews had broken the lines. But half of the message was enough to warn Chattanooga. The Commander of the Confederate troops rushed his men out to block the tracks against the raiders.

Fuller, relieved of the two box-cars, ordered the Texas ahead, and they

swung out from the Dalton station.

"How about the tunnel?" Murphy asked.

Fuller thought for a moment. "We'll go straight through," he answered.

"You don't think that they'll drop that last box-car there?" asked Murphy.

"We'll have to take the risk. A minute's delay will be enough for them to destroy the bridge."

Murphy nodded and climbed up beside Fuller on the edge of the tender. Both of them realized that they would be in the very center of the wreck if Andrews had abandoned his last freight car in the tunnel. Yet they sat there, coolly and indifferently, awaiting whatever might come of the risk they were taking.

"If I were leading those men," said Fuller, "I would rush for the bridge, and not bother about the tunnel. And I think that is what they'll do." That was all he said as the black entrance grew larger before them.

The engineer glanced at Fuller and Murphy, wondering if they would give the signal to slow down. Neither of them moved. Then the Texas plunged into the smoke-laden darkness. Presently there appeared a faint luminous splotch ahead of them, growing brighter as the seconds passed. They flashed out into the daylight again.

"Whew!" said Murphy. They exchanged glances and Fuller laughed nervously.

The General was just disappearing around the bend.

"Look!" exclaimed Fuller. They caught a glimpse of the smoking freight car. He climbed down from the tender and went to the engineer. "Put every ounce into her! They're making for the bridge--freight car on fire!"

The Texas, unburdened by cars, had the advantage in speed now. For seconds she seemed to hover above the tracks as the engineer forced her around the curve under full throttle. They came to the point where they had caught the last glimpse of the General; then the bridge swung into view. Black smoke, with wisps of red flames breaking through it, poured from the ends of the shed.

"They've left the freight car in there," shouted Fuller to the engineer.

"Just the shed is burning now. Slow down and pick the car up, then rush on through."

"Through that fire?" demanded the engineer.

"Yes! If we stop we're lost." Fuller went to Murphy. "Better come in the cab--we're going through." Murphy followed him. They stood looking out over the tender.

The engineer reversed the Texas and brought it to a crawling pace as they

reached the mouth of the shed. Smoke and flames enveloped them, blinding them, and they felt the wheels of the locomotive crunching over charred board which had fallen across the track. Then came the shock as the tender bumped the freight car. Flames showered down over the locomotive, streaking through the blackness. The heat was scorching, sickening. The speed of the _Texas_ increased. And then they found themselves in the clear air again, pushing the smoking remains of the freight car before them.

"Go on! Go on!" yelled Fuller. "Never mind about the bridge." He glanced back and saw the shed collapse, shooting sparks into the pillar of smoke that was rising. "We'll get them between here and Chattanooga."

* * * * *

That smoke, rising into the sky, came like a signal of triumph to Andrews' men. They watched it silently; then they yelled. It was recompense for all those long hours of tension and violent effort. The men danced, shouted, and hammered each other upon the back. Andrews' face, drawn by hours of anxiety, relaxed into a smile.

"There's one bridge down!" he shouted. "How much fuel have we?"

"This is the last of it," answered Tom. He kicked the two logs which lay on the tender floor, ready to be shoved into the fire-box.

Andrews went to the tender and gathered the men about him. "What we'll do from here on," he said, "depends upon whether the Rebs come through that bridge. If they don't get through, we'll have time enough to gather fuel and burn the bridges ahead of us. If they do get through, the only thing that we can do is to abandon the engine and take to our legs."

"Stop and fight 'em," protested Boss.

"No," answered Andrews. "We're not here to fight. It won't do us or the North any good. We're here to burn bridges and we've done it. If we can't reach the next bridge our work is done. Scatter--each man for himself!"

The _General_ came into a long straight track, which had the small town of Ringgold at its northern end. "If we don't see them by the time we reach the next curve it means they're stopped," said Andrews.

Tom put the last of the fuel into the fire. Brown closed the dampers and glanced at the steam gauge. He shook his head savagely. "If we only had some of that fuel we used on the freight car!" he exclaimed.

"More important to burn the bridge," answered Tom. "I wish Andrews would stop around this bend and fight 'em."

The _General_ was thundering down upon the station at Ringgold. The men stood in the tender gazing silently back, watching for the _Texas_ to come around the curve.

"There!"

Tom looked down the track. The Texas, pushing the smoldering freight car before her, was still after them! The Ringgold station flashed past, with the bewildered agent looking first at one locomotive and then at the other. The General whipped around the curve.

"Slow down, Knight!" ordered Andrews. "Jump off, men. Scatter and make your way back to the lines!"

Knight shut the throttle and allowed the _General_ to lose speed. Tom, Andrews, and Brown stood aside while the men filed from the tender into the cab. The first stood on the step for a moment, then jumped. Tom saw him strike the trackside and go sprawling. The second jumped ... the third ... the fourth....

"Get ready to reverse the engine, Knight," said Andrews. "We'll send it back on them." Knight threw the lever over. "They'll stop in Ringgold for a minute to shunt that car."

All the men, except the engine crew, were off.

"You next, Tom," ordered Andrews. "Then Brown and Knight. I'll stay by the engine and send her back. Here, Tom, take your coat." In that last moment, Andrews was as calm as if he had reached the end of some commonplace, humdrum journey.

Tom took his coat and put it on. He paused for a second on the step of the _General_, then leaped. His feet struck the ground and he pitched forward. He arose, dazed and shaken, and stepped into the woods which lined the track.

The _General_ disappeared up the track; a minute later the _Texas_ passed him, and he caught a glimpse of the two men who had pursued them from Big Shanty. They were sitting on the edge of the tender, leaning forward eagerly.

"If we'd only stopped to fight them!" thought Tom. But it was too late for that now. The great railroad race was over, and ahead of him lay miles of enemy country. He wondered where the other men were, if he would meet them. He was aroused from his thoughts by the noise of a locomotive coming from the north. The _Texas_ came rolling back, with the two men on the tender waving to the engineer; the _General_ followed, steaming down the track with its cab deserted. But the Southerners had seen it in time to avoid collision.

The gap between the two locomotives narrowed; then they came together gently. One of the men jumped to the _General's_ tender, rushed into the cab and shut the throttle. The locomotive which had carried the raiders on that wild trip from Big Shanty was again in the hands of the Confederates.

Tom stood behind a tree watching them. Presently the _Texas_ started north, pushing the _General_ before her. The last of its fuel and steam had been used in that final charge down the track.

Tom walked into the woods, away from the railroad, and sank to the ground exhausted. Minutes passed while he lay there resting. Every muscle in his body was sore, and it was enough just to stretch out with his head against the cool moist ground. The problem of getting out of the enemy's country and back to his own lines seemed too remote to be considered now. But presently he sat up and began to wonder what would happen next. He was about twenty miles from Chattanooga--he knew that from studying the map at Marietta. Mitchell's lines lay to the west, probably fifty miles away. To the north lay the flooded Tennessee River, which he would have to cross. And as for himself, he was shirtless and grimy with soot; he was almost without food, and dead tired. To make matters worse, just as though they were not bad enough, the drizzle of rain, which had been an implacable enemy since that night on the road to Wartrace, gave no signs of ending. Evening was approaching.

Tom got to his feet. First, he decided, he would put a greater distance between himself and the railroad. He walked through the forest and came to a road. It was deserted. Regardless of the danger of being seen so near to the spot where they had burned the bridge, he followed the road to the north. His ears were straining for the least sound of people approaching, and he dived into the bushes several times when he thought he heard someone. Then, since no one came, he took to the road again. He had his cape fastened around his neck to hide his shirtlessness, and he dabbed at his face with his handkerchief, wiping away the soot. But the idea of getting clean without soap and warm water was hopeless.

He heard the unmistakable creak of wheels behind him, and sprang into the bushes. Presently a heavy wagon, drawn by two tired-looking, emaciated horses, appeared on the road. In the wagon were two men and a woman. The man who was driving was carrying on a grumbling monologue. You worked like a dog, he said, to grow crops and then the government seized them to feed to good-for-nothing soldiers. The only crops he'd grow this year would be just enough for his own family. If the government wanted anything from him the government would have to pay him in advance.

Not a word about the burnt bridges or the stolen train! Tom listened eagerly. These people were coming from the direction of Ringgold, and certainly they would be talking about the havoc the Yanks had raised--if they knew of it. When the wagon had disappeared around the bend, Tom came out on the road again. Until the news spread over the countryside he was safe from interference.

After an hour's walking he came to a scattering of houses at a cross-roads. Over one was a sign "General Store," painted in sprawling, uneven letters. It would probably be his last chance before the chase began to buy the things he needed. He opened the door and entered the dimly lighted store. An old man came out from the back room.

"Good evening," said Tom. "I want to buy a shirt."

"Evenin'," replied the man. "Shirt? Well.... Shirt? Don't think I've ever seen you before. D'you live around this a-way, young man?"

"No, I'm just going through to Chattanooga."

"Mary," called the man, "bring that light." A woman in the back room mumbled in response. Tom dreaded the light. In the dusk of the store he could hide his appearance, but with the lamp they would see how disheveled and dirty he was. And, if they had heard any rumors of what had happened during the day, they would suspect him instantly. He looked around at the door and picked his course between the barrels and boxes which lay strewn about the floor.

The woman entered with the light. "Well, I declare!" she exclaimed, looking at Tom. He was, indeed, a strange looking specimen. His face was streaked with black, for his attempts at rubbing himself clean with his handkerchief had been unevenly distributed. His black eyelids, as he blinked in the light, made him grotesque. "What's happened to _you_?" demanded the woman.

"I've been fighting a fire," answered Tom. He was ready to jump for the door.

"A fire! Where?"

That was encouraging. "Down south of Ringgold," Tom replied. "The bridge caught on fire from a locomotive."

"Y' don't say so!" exclaimed the man. "Y' don't say so!"

"Jeb!" screeched the woman.

"Yes'm," came the response from the back room. A small boy straggled into the store.

"Whyfor you don't tell us there's a fire down Ringgold way?" asked the woman.

"There wa'n't no fire when I left," he answered.

"When did you leave?" asked Tom.

"Round noon."

"I guess you just missed it," replied Tom. He was on fairly safe ground now. "The fire didn't start until after one o'clock."

"Huh!" grunted the boy.

"Y' don't say so!" exclaimed the man again. "What happened?"

"Let's have a shirt," said Tom. "I'll tell you about it while you're finding the shirts." The old man turned toward the littered shelves and commenced pawing over the merchandise which had accumulated there. The woman and the boy drew closer, waiting anxiously for the news. "I was waiting for the passenger train at Ringgold," continued Tom. "But the train

didn't come. After a while we saw some smoke to the southward and we thought that was the train. But it wasn't. The smoke just stayed in one spot."

"Y' don't say so!" exclaimed the man, stopping his search.

"Yep," answered Tom, "but find the shirt for me. After a few minutes the station agent...."

"Morrison," interjected the woman.

"Yes, I believe his name was Morrison, come to think of it," replied Tom.

"Well, Morrison got on the hand car."

"I rode on the hand car once," said the boy.

"Shut up!" ordered the woman. Her husband stopped again in the search to glare at the offender.

"Come on, find that shirt for me," said Tom. He was talking with one eye on the door, fearing the entrance of someone who would spoil his story. "The agent got on the hand car and went a piece down the track. Pretty soon he came back a-flying. 'The bridge is on fire!' he yelled. So we got on the hand car, and went down to the bridge. There the passenger train stood, with all the passengers and the train crew fighting the fire. They were trying to put it out so the train could get across. Can't you find it?" This last to the old man.

"We don't sell many shirts," he answered. "Don't pay. Most of the people makes 'em 'emselves. Have we got any shirts, Mary?"

"I ain't never seen any," she replied. "I bin here twenty years."

"Then sell me one of yours," Tom said.

"Can't do that."

"Why not?"

"Well...."

"If you won't sell me a shirt, I can't waste my time here talking." Tom started impatiently towards the door.

"Here, young man," said the woman, "you come back here with me. I reckon we can find something for you." She picked up the lamp and led the way into the back room. It was the combined living-room, bedroom, and dining-room of the family. One door led to the yard behind the house, the other into a lean-to shanty which served as a kitchen. Tom, by way of precaution, took it in rapidly.

"Tell us about the bridge," urged the boy.

Tom continued on a rambling story of how he had helped to fight the fire, how sparks had fallen on him, and how he had to tear his shirt off because it was in flames. He gave a lurid description of the scene. The woman clucked her tongue at intervals, the man exclaimed, "Don't say so!" repeatedly, and the boy grunted his appreciation. Tom talked on and on, reserving the end of his story. At last the woman held a shirt out to him--it seemed to Tom to represent everything which stood between him and his ultimate triumphal return to the Union lines. Without a shirt he could do nothing; with it there was some chance of having his story believed. He took it from her.

"And finally the bridge went down," he continued. "The flames shot hundreds of feet in the air, and the sparks fell down for five minutes afterwards. The passenger train went back to Dalton, and I decided that I'd go to Chattanooga on foot."

"Don't say so!"

Through the door to the kitchen Tom could see a kettle of water steaming on the stove. "I'd like to wash some of this soot off," he said.

The woman led him to the kitchen and gave him a tin basin. "When the door was closed behind her, he stripped off the cape and coat, and fell to scrubbing with the hot water and soap. Then he dried himself and pulled on the shirt. It was several sizes too small for him, but it was better than nothing at all. He could hear the two old people and the boy discussing the fire. Probably, he thought, they would talk of little else until they heard the real story. He thanked his stars that he had struck this one quiet spot in the chaos of war to prepare himself for the adventures of the next few days. It was providential. Now he was ready to meet the world.

"I'd like to buy something to eat," he said as he stepped from the kitchen.

"We ain't got much," answered the woman.

"I'll pay you well," he replied. "I'll have to carry it with me. It's getting dark and I must be getting on to Chattanooga."

"Will some ham an' some bread do?"

"Splendidly."

She went into the kitchen.

"How did you say that bridge caught on fire?" asked the old man.

"Sparks from a locomotive, I suppose."

"You don't say so--in all this rain!"

Five minutes later he left the store and disappeared down the road which led to Chattanooga. Then he climbed a fence and made his way across the fields to a road which ran north. For a half-hour he plodded through the

mud. The strain of the long day was commencing to tell upon him, and each step forward cost a mighty effort. The hunks of mud which accumulated on his shoes felt like blocks of lead weighing him down.

"About enough for this day," he mumbled to himself. Ahead of him he saw a barn, standing a few yards from the road. Farther along, perhaps a hundred yards, was the house with its lighted windows. He walked close to the rail fence and approached the barn cautiously, listening for dogs; then he crawled under the fence and squatted there, waiting. It was still light enough for him to be seen from the house, and so he decided not to make the rush for the barn until later. Several minutes passed, then he heard the sound of boots splashing along the muddy road, and the mumble of voices. He threw himself on the wet sod and lay there, hidden by the weeds and darkness. The voices came near.

Tom caught the words "...some damage anyhow."

"Yes," replied the other man, "but if Andrews had only...."

Tom did not wait any longer. "Shadrack!" he called. The two men stopped as though they had been struck. "Over here by the fence. It's Tom Burns."

"You, Tom! You scared the life out of me."

"Who's with you?"

"Wilson."

"Hello, there. Crawl through. I'm waiting for it to get dark enough so that I can make the barn." They shook hands. "I recognized your voice, Shadrack. How are you, Wilson?"

"All right enough. Have you seen any of the others!"

"Not a soul. Wonder what happened to them?"

"Scattered all over two miles by the locomotive," answered Shadrack.

"Probably some of them went on the other side of the tracks, making for Mitchel's lines. We decided to go straight north and get across the Tennessee just as fast as we can."

"So did I," answered Tom. "Let's get over to the barn now. It's dark enough."

They hurried across the short open space. A farm wagon standing at the end of the barn formed a step to the hay mow. By standing on the edge of the wagon box, Tom could reach the floor. He pulled himself up and struggled inside. Then he helped Shadrack and Wilson to come after him.

"Whew!" breathed Shadrack. "Just like home." He chuckled.

"It does me good to hear that laugh again," said Tom. He gave Shadrack a dig in the ribs. "I don't suppose you're hungry, are you?"

"Don't talk to me until I get through eating this hay."

"Leave enough for us to sleep on," protested Wilson.

"Smell this," said Tom. He opened the package of ham and bread. Shadrack moaned. Tom took out his knife and divided the food; then they had supper.

"We ought to be out of this before daybreak," said Tom, throwing himself back on the hay. "I hope one of us wakes up. I feel as though I could sleep forever."

It was just dawn when Tom awoke. From his head to his feet, he was sore and stiff. He sat up, rubbing his legs and stretching painfully. "Hey, Wilson! Shadrack! Come on. It's getting light." He went to the door and looked out. "If we drop straight down between the barn and the wagon, they can't see us from the house." He slid over the edge, hung by his fingers and dropped to the ground. The others followed, silently. A minute later they were on the road again.

"Do you know exactly where this road is taking us?" asked Wilson presently.

"No," answered Tom, "but so long as it doesn't take us into Chattanooga, I'm satisfied. We're going north and the river is about twenty miles ahead of us."

"And we're going about one mile an hour," replied Shadrack, slipping in the mud.

It was nearly noon when they heard the sound of horses galloping along the road toward them. They jumped into the bushes and waited breathlessly. A few seconds later, four horsemen, each of them carrying a rifle over his arm, went riding past.

"They're after us," said Wilson.

Tom nodded. "What do you think we'd better do? I'm for staying to the road."

"If it wasn't so blamed muddy we could go across the fields," said Shadrack, "but we'd get bogged again."

"The road's our one chance," added Wilson. "Let's get to work."

During the remainder of the afternoon they worked their way up along the edge of the road, hiding in the bushes time after time. Several small bodies of armed men passed them, and once they caught a scrap of conversation about "Yank bridge burners." The hunt was on.

CAPTURED

"Halt there!"

The command came from behind. They whipped about and found themselves facing a raised rifle. The man was a civilian, tall and lanky. He waved the rifle from one to the other.

"Where're you going?" he demanded.

"Chattanooga," answered Tom. He said it coolly but it required an effort.

"And yer going with me," replied the man.

"That so?" asked Wilson. "I can think of better company if you're going to keep that rifle waving around in the air. What's the matter with you?"

"Put your hands up, an' keep 'em up," ordered the man.

"Well, this way we won't take the wrong road again," said Tom. "I'd rather walk at the end of a rifle than drown in this mud. The folks at home'll laugh when they hear that we were held up just as soon as we got in the South."

"Hey? What's that?" demanded the man.

"If you're after our money you won't get much," Tom replied.

"I ain't after yer money," said the man. "I'm after you."

"What sort of a Yank trick is this!" demanded Wilson.

"Huh?"

"I'm asking what sort of a Yank trick this is? Are you a Southerner or are you a Yank?"

"I'll unload this gun into your head if you call me a Yank," answered the man.

"Then what do you want?"

"I'm arresting you in the name of the law for burning bridges. That's what I want."

"Burning what?"

"Burning bridges!" shouted the man. "An' don't stand there the rest of the day talking, either."

"You seem to be running the talking match," said Tom. "What do you want us

to do? Want us to run so's you can have a good excuse for taking a shot at us with that gun?"

"And you might have the decency," answered Wilson, "to ask us who we are before you go any further."

"Well, then, who are you?"

"We're from Kentucky and we've sneaked through the Union lines to enlist. If you want to show us the way to Chattanooga we'll be much obliged to you. But if you're going to the trouble of arresting us for burning.... What was it we burned, Tom?"

"Bridges," replied Tom, laughing.

"Yes--for burning bridges, then you're wasting your time."

"Maybe," answered the man. "But you're a-going with me all the same."

"Then let's go," said Tom. "What's the use of standing here in the mud?"

"I'll walk you back to Judson, an' you can tell yer story there. I ain't believing you and I ain't disbelieving you. Turn around the way you was a-going, an' keep yer hands out of yer pockets. I'll let a bullet go smack into the first man that makes a move he shouldn't."

Here was a man they couldn't talk down. He was probably a good shot, and ready to keep his threat. If only they could get him at a disadvantage, and pull their revolvers before he could fire. But such hopes were shattered a few minutes later when two horsemen pulled up before them. They yelled when they saw the three prisoners.

"Good work, Alf!" said one of the men. "Three of 'em. Hello there, Yanks."

"You're a Yank yourself," answered Tom hotly.

"What's that?"

"We're no more Yanks than you are. We were on our way to enlist in the army at Chattanooga, and this is the way we get handled."

"Don't believe 'em," said Alf. "Let's search 'em."

"Why not wait until we get back to Judson? Easier to do it there."

"All right," replied Alf. "You two ride along beside 'em. I'm done up totin' this gun."

The procession started again. Tom heard Wilson whisper to Shadrack: "Keep to the story!"

"No talking, there!" ordered one of the horsemen. "You can do all your talking when you get to Judson."

It was nearly six o'clock when they reached the little town of Judson. As they went down the main street, men and boys tagged along beside them, plying the guards with questions. The guards waved them aside, and answered, "Don't know if it's them or not. Picked 'em up a piece down the road."

They stopped at a two-story frame building labeled "Hotel." One of the guards went in, then motioned to the others to bring the prisoners. Presently they found themselves in a big room, lighted by two lamps which hung from the ceiling. The air was cloudy with smoke. A dozen men sat about at the tables. Instantly there was commotion. Everyone commenced talking.

"Got three of 'em!" shouted Alf. "Three of 'em, Judge."

"He thinks he has," said Wilson.

"You better keep your mouth shut," yelled Alf.

"No use talkin' like that, Alf," said the man addressed as Judge. "Where did you find them?"

"Down the Ringgold road about five miles."

A murmur arose from the men.

"I can tell a Yank one mile off," boasted Alf.

"I can tell a fool just as far away as I can see you," interrupted Wilson.

"You...."

"Now, Alf, keep quiet," said the Judge. "What were you men doing down the Ringgold road?"

"We were trying to get to Chattanooga," Tom replied, "We got started on the wrong road this morning."

Wilson broke in: "We tried to tell this wild man with his rifle that we were going to enlist in the army. We've sneaked through the Union lines from Kentucky, and came across the Tennessee yesterday. Then we got on the wrong road. This fellow held us up and arrested us in the name of the law for something-or-other. I don't know yet what we're arrested for."

"For burning bridges," yelled Alf. "That's what I arrested you for."

"All right," answered Wilson. "We're arrested for burning bridges. Whose bridges? What bridges?"

"We're getting a whole lot of encouragement to fight for the South," said Tom.

"He's crazier than any Yank I've ever seen in my life," remarked Shadrack,

nodding toward Alf.

"Search 'em," demanded Alf. "That'll show you whether I'm right or not."

"Now, Alf," said the Judge, "you go on out to the kitchen and get something to eat. I'll examine these prisoners and I'll see that you get the credit for capturing them if they are the Yanks. Go on, now." He pushed Alf gently toward the door. Alf, still protesting, disappeared reluctantly into the kitchen. The Judge shook his head, laughing.

"That man acts a little crazy," said Tom.

"Oh, he's hot-headed," said the Judge. "He gets one idea and he can't think of anything else. Lock the door, Joe, so we won't be disturbed. And lock the kitchen door, too, or Alf'll be back. Now let's search these men, and see what we can find."

Tom, Shadrack, and Wilson held their arms up, while the men dumped the contents of their pockets on a table. Three revolvers, handkerchiefs, Confederate money.... They found nothing of importance.

"Now let's sit down here and talk this thing over," said the Judge. "Where do you men say you come from!"

"From Fleming County, Kentucky," replied Wilson. "We were getting tired of the way the Yanks were running things and so we decided that we'd go and fight for the South. We started out last week and made our way through the lines. It was easy. We didn't see a single Union sentry."

"Where did you come across the river?" demanded the Judge.

"A few miles this side of Decatur," said Tom.

One of the men beside the Judge interrupted: "There aren't any ferries running up there."

"I know there aren't," answered Tom. "We were afraid to tell anyone what we were going to do until we got across the river, and so we had to build a raft."

"A raft!" exclaimed the Judge.

"Yes, out of logs. I got washed overboard and I grabbed on to one of the logs and held there. Look at my hands." He spread his hands out upon the table, palms up. They had been torn and bruised by the logs he had yanked from the tender.

"Hm-m-m!" grunted the Judge, "must have whipped you around some in that current!"

"Once it whirled me right over, and I thought my wrists would break before I could get another grip. They were trying to pull me aboard, but every time they came to help me the raft tilted so that they had to crawl back."

"And finally," said Wilson, "I got down on my stomach and held to his wrists, while Shadrack sat on the other side and balanced us."

"I came mighty near going overboard myself, then," added Shadrack.

It was a good yarn, and they enlarged upon it.

"And so you're going to enlist, eh?" asked the Judge finally.

"Yes," answered Wilson. "We thought that Chattanooga would be a good place for us. It's near Beauregard and we'll probably get into action pretty soon."

"It's not so near to Beauregard as you think," the Judge answered. "The Yanks have taken a bite out of the railroad between there and Corinth."

"They have?" asked Tom. "Is that what this man Alf was so excited about!"

"No--not exactly," replied the Judge. "Some Yanks stole a train on the Georgia State Railroad yesterday and burned a bridge."

"Stole a train!"

"That's what they did!" He gave them a wild and inaccurate account of what Andrews' raiders had done. "A daring bit of work!" he ended.

"Judge, we're famished," said Wilson. "Do you think we could get some supper here?"

"Joe, run out to the kitchen and see if Mrs. James can give these boys some dinner. And tell Alf that I don't want to be disturbed."

Dinner came and they ate ravenously. The Judge sat across the table from them, talking with some of his friends. Obviously, the atmosphere had changed, now that Alf was no longer there to incite trouble, but they noticed that the Judge took good care to keep the revolvers out of their reach. What did he think? Did he believe their story? Were they to be set free again, or would they be taken to Chattanooga?

"Now, boys," said the Judge as they pushed back from the table, "I want you to stay here in this hotel for the night. Tomorrow you can go to Chattanooga and enlist." It was a request which amounted to a command.

"Well, sir," replied Wilson, "we'll be glad to stay here and have a good night's rest. We need it."

"Joe, you show them their rooms. I'll keep these for the present, if you don't mind." He motioned towards the revolvers. "You can take the other things."

They nodded and said good-night. Joe handed them candles and they followed him upstairs. "Here's one room," he said. "Two of you can sleep there."

"You and Shadrack take it," said Tom to Wilson. "Good-night." They shook hands.

"Here's the other," said Joe, leading the way down the corridor. Tom entered his room, said good-night to Joe, then closed the door and commenced to investigate. It was a narrow room with one window looking out upon the yard. He opened the window and looked down. In the dim light which came from the room in which they had been sitting downstairs he could see a wagon drawn up beside the house; there was a stack of farm tools against the wagon, and the ground was strewn with objects he could not make out. Just a mixture of things which had been thrown there for want of a better place, he thought. The window of the next room was within a foot of his own window. He leaned over and peered in, but he could see nothing. Then he put his ear against the thin wall and listened. He could hear no sound but the mumble of voices from the room downstairs; those he could hear distinctly. He glanced about the floor, wondering if the sound was coming up through a crack. A patch of tin caught his eye and he carried the candle over to examine it. It was about a foot square, covering a stove-pipe hole, and was held in place by four tacks. He pulled out his knife, loosened one tack and bent the corner up. Then he put his ear down and listened.

Alf had just returned to the room. "Why not take 'em to Chattanooga now?" he was demanding. "Turn 'em over to the authorities."

"Now, Alf," said the Judge, "I'm taking care of this. The men are upstairs going to bed, and Joe is in the hall on guard. If they've come all the way from Kentucky to fight for the South, we don't want to make them hate the South so much that they'll be sorry they came. If they are Yanks we'll have plenty of time to deal with them tomorrow. I'm going over to Chattanooga with them in the morning and turn them over to the authorities. They can do whatever they think best."

"I'd take 'em over tonight," answered Alf.

The conversation, carried along upon those lines, lasted for half an hour, with the Judge dominating. One of the men said, finally, "Oh, for Lord's sake, Alf, shut up!" For a minute it seemed that the two men would fight, but the Judge quieted them. They called for drinks and cards, and commenced playing.

Tom left the hole, and continued his investigations. With Joe on guard in the hall, there seemed to be no chance of warning Wilson and Shadrack. But perhaps Joe might leave for a moment. Then he could run down the hall, enter their room and spend the night, plotting out a way of escaping. He decided to remain at the hole, listening for Joe's voice. But first he barred the door with a chair.

A half-hour passed. Then the door of the room downstairs opened with a bang. The man who had entered announced: "They've captured two of the engine stealers over at Julian's Gap! They confessed to it, but first they told a cock-and-bull yarn about coming from Fleming County, Kentucky, to join the Southern troops!"

"What!" yelled the Judge.

"There you are!" Alf shouted triumphantly. "Get 'em!"

Tom jumped to his feet. There was no time to warn Wilson and Shadrack. He could hear the boots pounding up the stairs. He sprang to the window and threw it open. To jump on that mess of farm tools below him would probably mean a broken leg. Leaning far out, he reached around and pushed up the window of the next room, climbed in and closed his own window. Through the wall he could hear them banging at his door.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

ESCAPING

Tom stood in the center of the dark room and listened to the tumult in the corridor. They were pounding at the door of the room he had just deserted, wrenching at the knob.

"Open up there!" yelled Alf. "Open up!"

Then came a crash as the door splintered. Alf's voice sounded in rage of fury: "Gone!"

Tom heard him bolt from the room and up the corridor, screaming: "Is he in there with the other two? Have you got them?"

Then the Judge's voice: "We've got these two. Where's the other?"

"Gone!" answered Alf. "Escaped! I told you...."

"Joe!" boomed the Judge.

"Here I am, sir."

"Have you been here all the time?"

"Yes, sir."

"The dirty rat let him escape...."

"Shut up, Alf! Have you been here all the time, Joe?"

"Yes, sir. I've been right here, sir. I didn't leave for a second."

Alf yelled: "Look out the window! He jumped out the window! Run around outside!" He came bounding down the hall again, entered the room, and threw open the window.

Tom could see his head in the candle light. He shifted back closer to the wall, his heart pounding. "Look through them bushes," yelled Alf to the men who had run into the yard. He let the window slam shut and went up the hall. Then: "Where'd that other one go? Come on! Out with it! You know!"

"Don't try any of that," said the Judge. "You're wasting your time. These men don't know anything about it. Joe was here in the corridor."

A few seconds later, Tom heard Alf's voice in the yard: "He's got away. Get horses! If we only had a pack of dogs...." The noise in the corridor ceased, and the men clumped down the stairs, leading Wilson and Shadrack with them. The sound of voices in the yard grew indistinct and far away.

Tom began quietly to investigate his new room. It was on the corner of the house, and there were two windows--the one through which Tom had entered, and another which looked out to the rear. He felt his way along the wall and came to a wash-stand and a chair. He took the chair and wedged it silently under the door-knob; then stole across to the rear window. It was black dark outside. After a few minutes, he raised the window and listened. Men were yelling in the distance. Apparently they were starting on a wild night chase in the hopes of finding him on the road.

"If you had more sense and less energy, Alf," muttered Tom, "you might get me." The vision of Andrews' calmness during the raid flashed across his mind. "Let them get excited," he said to himself; "you keep your wits."

Then he heard the Judge's voice, booming in front of the hotel: "Tell them to get that wagon around here in a hurry--we'll get these two engine stealers started for Chattanooga, and hunt down the other one when it's light."

Tom left the window and snatched up the bedclothes, knotted the blankets together and tied them around the leg of the bed. They would shorten his drop to a few feet, so that the noise would not be heard above the general commotion. Then he waited until he heard the wagon creak up before the hotel and stop. The crowd followed the prisoners and their guards out to watch the departure.

Tom opened the window and tossed the blankets down; then he squirmed to the sill, clutched the blankets with his hands and knees, and slid. He dropped to the ground noiselessly, and stood for a moment scanning the yard for obstacles. Thirty or forty yards ahead of him there was a row of bushes which led into the woods south of the village. That would be the best way, he decided.

Then he changed his mind, for it was too obviously the best way--others would think of it too, and look for him there. To the bushes, then, and across the road to the north at the first opportunity. He took off his shoes, tied them together through a button-hole so that he could not drop them, and raced, crouching, across the open space. In the bushes, he stopped and listened. The crowd was yelling and talking in front of the hotel. Regardless of the stones and twigs which cut into his feet, he

pressed on through the bushes as rapidly as he dared, skirting the yard and avoiding the woods which lay to his left. A dog yipped frantically, and Tom stopped; then he decided that the dog was aimlessly sharing in the excitement, and went forward again.

Five minutes later, he sat on the ground and began scraping the accumulation of mud and twigs from his socks. He pulled his shoes on, laced and tied them; then he stood up and began to make his calculations. In leaving the hotel he had gone west; now, with the village on his right, he was facing northward, and the Tennessee River was directly ahead of him, probably four or five miles. The sky was heavily clouded and there were no stars by which he could set his course through the fields and woods which lay between him and the river. There was a road going northward from the hotel, but it would be inviting capture to follow it. The best he could do, he decided, was to parallel the road, stealing to the right every half-hour or so until he came to it, then stealing back again until he was under cover.

Presently he heard the wagon creaking, its wheels sinking through the mud and grinding upon the solid ground beneath. Men were talking, but he could not distinguish what they said. Poor Wilson and Shadrack! Prisoners, and bound for Chattanooga under heavy guard! As he stood there listening, a sense of utter helplessness wrenched at him. He could do nothing but fight his own way back to the lines. Plans for going to their rescue tumbled over each other in his mind, but all of them were hopelessly inadequate.

When the wagon had passed, he walked to the Chattanooga road and crossed, plunging into the bushes on the other side. Once again he took his bearings, and hurried northward as quietly as he could. The branches whipped in his face; sometimes he stumbled and fell. Once he walked into a ditch half-filled with water, and sprawled on the slippery mud of the bank. Then he came to a field where his feet sank in the gumbo over his shoe-tops. His feet accumulated mud until he was obliged to stop and scrape it off with his hands. But he labored forward, step after step.

After an hour, he turned to the right and went towards the road to make sure of his course. He reached it after more than a half-hour's walk.

"Must have veered off to the left," he muttered; then he silently retraced his steps for ten minutes, and turned northward again.

Ahead of him he made out a farmhouse, so he went on a long detour to avoid arousing the dogs. An hour later, he struck back toward the road again, and found it after fifteen minutes' walking.

"That's better," he said. He was puffing from the exertion of dragging himself through the mud, so he sat near the road and rested. His ears caught the sound of horses' hoofs. He worked his way to the roadside and waited there to overhear a scrap of the conversation, for the riders were talking.

"...trying to tell Alf," were the first words he caught.

"He's too crazy to listen," answered the other. "Can't find a man on a night like this. He won't be fool enough to travel on the road, anyhow. Better wait until daylight, I says to Alf, but he goes raving 'round like a mad dog into the woods."

"Well, we'll go to the river an' lay low there. Probably he'll come popping out along 'bout noon."

"Can't get across the river, anyhow, can he!"

"Can't tell about a Yank. Who'd have thought they'd have stole an engine!"

"Yeh, that's right...."

So they were posting a guard along the river! That was valuable information. And Alf was in the woods!

At three o'clock in the morning Tom spread his cape upon the ground and sank down to rest. The long struggle through the mud had become a nightmare. He was too exhausted to care greatly if the man-hunt ended with him a prisoner--if it would only end. To be out of this sea of jelly-like mud would be enough. He lay there breathing heavily, his body aching and throbbing. Minutes passed. Then he became vaguely aware of a faint roaring. He listened for a moment, but it meant nothing to him. Presently the sound came to his ears again, and he sat up.

"The river!" he exclaimed at last. He forgot his exhaustion and sprang to his feet. During the past two hours he had been straining to catch that sound, and now he wanted to rush forward, recklessly. But he held himself in check, remembering the conversation he had overheard, and approached slowly, choosing each step of the way. Many times he paused to listen; the noise of the rushing water seemed nearer, but always far away, just out of his reach. It was maddening. Again and again he felt himself becoming unnerved by the mud and the darkness and the idea of being hunted.

The clouds were breaking, and a faint blue light seeped through the rifts. It was as though the trees and bushes had grown magically from the blackness, only to dissolve in blackness again as the rifts closed. For a moment he paused, thinking that he had heard the sound of voices. Ten minutes passed while he crouched in the mud, listening. There was another brief instant of moonlight, this time brighter, and the shadows cast by the trees seemed living, moving things. Tom could feel his heart thumping.

"Don't get excited," he muttered to himself. It was encouraging and comforting to hear the sound of his own voice: "Don't be a fool and lose your wits--and spoil your chances."

To his left was a forest, and directly ahead of him ran a long row of bushes. He wanted to avoid the forest, so he hurried as fast as he could across the field during the next interval of darkness. Then came another wait of five minutes, and another dash forward. He gained the bushes and discovered that he had come to a road. It bordered the river, he decided, for now the rush of the water seemed directly before him. Just as he was

about to cross the road, he caught the beat of a horse's hoofs upon the mud. A minute later the horse galloped past; Tom had a brief glimpse of the rider, with his rifle held in the crook of his arm.

Tom crossed the road and entered the thicket on the other side. Now the river sounded below him, and he decided that he must be close to the edge of an embankment. He crept forward slowly on his hands and knees through the tangle of branches, feeling the ground before him. One hand went off into space, and he groped about. Then he drew back and waited for another moment of moonlight to show him his position. When it came, a few minutes later, he saw the Tennessee, swollen and tossing, forty feet below him. He was on the edge of a sheer embankment.

"Can't do it here," he said, moving away. He crawled back to the road, crossed it, and walked in the direction of Chattanooga. Presently he heard someone yelling in the distance. He decided that it was the horseman calling a farmer from his bed and warning him of the escaped Yankee.

After a half-hour of slow traveling, he made his way towards the river again. Now the dawn was coming, and the water rippled luminously as Tom looked over the embankment. At this point, the descent to the water's edge was more gradual--a straight drop of twelve feet, then a slope of gravel. Once down there, he would have no choice but to swim the river, and swimming in such a current was no easy matter. Would it be better, he asked himself, to go farther down, to risk another half-hour in exploring!

His thoughts were interrupted suddenly by voices on the road, twenty yards behind him. A man said: "Reckon this is as good a spot as any. Out there I can see as far up as Johnson's and a mile down."

"Suit yourself," answered the other; "you know the country. I'll go down an' get Phipps out if nobody else has. Then I'll be back along up this way and tell the boys that you're here."

"You say this Yank's a young man?"

"'Bout twenty, I'd say."

"How many of them were there that stole the train?"

"The stories are all different. Some say five and some say fifty. Can't tell. Well, I'll see you later."

Tom swung over the edge of the embankment and dropped. He struck the loose gravel and rolled down with the gravel sliding after him in a great wave. It seemed incredible that the men should not hear him, but he trusted to the noise of the river and ran down along the water's edge. Presently he came to a large rock projecting from the embankment and dodged behind it. There he sank down to get breath for his next move.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

FIGHTING THE RIVER

Tom began to explore the rock behind which he had taken refuge. It projected several feet from the side of the embankment, and the wash of the water in former days when the river was even higher than at present had carried away the dirt on the down-stream side, forming a small pocket. In the darkness, he ran his hands over the wall of it. There was room enough for him there if he sat with his knees drawn up under his chin. He squeezed himself in, and fell to considering what he had better do next.

He decided that it would be hopeless to try swimming the river at this point, after his night-long struggle through the mud. He was too tired, and the current would simply toss him about. On the other hand, it was too dangerously near dawn to attempt going farther down the river in hopes of finding a place where the current was not so strong. If he spent the day here would he be stronger when night came again after having gone twenty-four hours without food? But with the next night clear before him, there was at least a slight chance that he might find some means of getting across. It wasn't quite clear in his mind what such means might be.

However, luck had been with him in escaping from the hotel. Poor Wilson and Shadrack! They were in Chattanooga by this time. At any event, swimming was out of the question for the present. Sleep was the most important thing.

The thoughts which had been hammering through his head were lost as he dozed off. Then, a few minutes later, he awoke with a start. Every muscle in his body was cramped and aching. He shook himself awake, felt around until he came to a large flat stone. With this he scraped away several feet of dirt at the side of the pocket. Then he climbed in again, braced himself against the wall and kicked more dirt loose with his heels. Alternating with the rock and his heels, he made the pocket long enough so that he could stretch out comfortably. Then he scraped away the back wall, so that there was no danger of being seen from above, and piled rocks along the edge of the pocket, so that he could not easily be seen from the opposite bank. That completed, he crawled in and scooped out dirt with his hands, to make the bottom of the pocket conform to his body. Then, with a sigh which expressed his weariness and comfort in a breath, he plunged into sleep.

It was noon when he awoke. He raised himself on one elbow and glanced out over the rocks at the river. His joints protested at every move, and his muscles seemed bruised and hurt. He was thoroughly chilled, and yet his head felt hot.

"Hmmm, a little fever," he said. He stripped off some of his clothes and began chafing his body; then he lay back and flexed his arms and legs in the scant room of the pocket. After a half-hour of this he could feel the blood flowing through him again.

From the pocket, he could see across the river and down, where the embankment sloped towards Chattanooga. He peered cautiously out, trying to decide what he should do when night fell; but there seemed to be no choice except to swim, for he could see nothing that gave him an atom of

encouragement. And the swift current of the river swept on as far as his eyes could reach.

He settled himself again on the floor of his hiding-place. Hunger was gnawing at him, and which was more difficult to bear, he was thirsty. He shut his eyes and lay quietly. After a few minutes he sat up, and fell to rubbing his body again. Towards the middle of the afternoon he drifted off into an uneasy, troubled sleep. People--friends from home, his companions on the raid--approached him in his dreams, and promised to bring water; then they went away, talking and laughing, and forgot to come back. Again and again he asked them, and always they promised. He awakened himself by crying, "Please! Please!"

His body ached and throbbed; it was painful to move. His throat was parched, and his tongue felt swollen. After he had pounded and rubbed his muscles again, he sat up and looked out. The sun was setting, and the river appeared to be a long shimmering ribbon of gold. He let his eyes wander along it slowly. A large oblong thing, which rested near the water's edge about three-quarters of a mile below him, caught his attention. At first it seemed a mere trick of the shadows; then, as he watched it more closely, he wondered if it could be a flatboat, drawn out of the water. He sat gazing at it anxiously. The minutes passed and he forgot that he was hungry and thirsty.

"It's a flatboat or a raft," he said to himself.

Finally the sun set, and Tom waited in an agony of suspense while the dusk slowly turned into darkness. As the time for him to move approached, his thirst became almost unbearable. The rush of the water, which was the only noise he could hear, was tantalizing, maddening. His body felt as though it were being consumed by a slow fire, which mounted steadily to his head, sickening him and making him dizzy. He wanted to kick the stones away, spring from his hiding-place and rush down to the water's edge, plunge his face into the cool water and take great gulps of it... Yet he sat quietly, his hands clenched, forcing his mind to think of other things. Across the river, the embankment became a soft blue-green blur, which turned darker and darker. The ripples of the river caught the last rays of light, flashing as though the surface were in flames.

"I'll get out," he said to himself, "when I can't see the water." Then, grimly: "And not before." He looked down the river again towards the oblong object which had caught his attention, but it was lost in the night.

"Must be careful when I go to drink," he muttered. "Just a sip at first. Then another sip in a minute or so."

He began to take the stones away from the opening of the pocket; then he swung his feet out and sat on the edge. He glanced up: there was no moon, and the sky was filled with heavy clouds. The rim of the embankment where the guards had spent the day watching for him was scarcely distinguishable. He got to his feet and leaned weakly against the rock.

"Whew! Weak as a baby! Water'll make me feel better." The effort of rising

had made him dizzy, and his legs were like soft rubber beneath him. His knees seemed to bend in all directions under his weight. "Better crawl," he muttered; then he sank to his hands and knees. He found himself laughing as he made his way to the water, and it struck him suddenly that he was delirious. That realization had the effect of clearing his mind instantly. "Careful about drinking," he cautioned himself. "Just one sip."

Water! He put his face in it, took a mouthful and let some of it trickle down his throat. He spat the rest out and pushed back from the stream. Presently he was at the edge again, bathing his face and taking little sips. Dizziness came over him like a great wave which caught him up and spun him around. He lay flat and waited for it to pass; then he felt better.

After a few minutes he arose and commenced to walk back and forth over a small strip of sand, limbering his muscles. Finally he stripped off the damp clothes and stood naked in the shelter of the rock, pounding and chafing his body until it glowed. Gradually he overcame the paralysis of the cold. "Legs," he said, rubbing and beating them savagely, "when I tell you to move, don't take five minutes about it. Now, move!" While the legs did not respond with alacrity, they showed improvement. His nervous system, which transmitted the orders of his mind to his body, seemed asleep--or broken like the telegraph lines they had torn down along the route of the raid. But slowly his nerves awoke, and strength replaced the numbness.

Hunger seized him, and so, remembering the stories he had heard of Indians tightening their belts during famines, he wound his underdrawers about his stomach, pulling the legs taut, then tying them. "Poor substitute for a meal," he mumbled, laughing. At least, he could laugh now, and that counted for something. He dressed and went to the water for another drink; then he began to pace slowly along the strip of sand, not daring to sit down and risk becoming numbed again.

"Better wait here for a few hours," he said. "They'll probably get sick of watching and seeing nothing but black night. Later I'll go down and see what that thing is. If it's a flatboat or a raft, I'll try to get across on that. If it isn't, I'll climb up the bank and get a log. Then I'll try swimming across holding to it. That'll keep me up if I get a cramp. Lord, I'm hungry! Guess I'd better not think about it. I'm talking to myself as though I'd reached my second childhood. Oh, well...." He paused and looked up toward the embankment. "You thought you'd get me, didn't you, Alf? Not this Yankee!"

So the next two hours passed, while Tom walked back and forth, keeping the blood stirring in his veins, talking to himself. At last he decided that the time had come for him to go down the river. He took up a small stick to help him feel the way along the shore, pulled his sodden felt hat down securely on his head, and started, picking his way carefully and silently among the stones. After a few minutes he began to zig-zag along the bank so that he could not possibly miss that oblong thing for which he was searching. He was wondering if he had passed it, or if, after all, it had just been a trick of the shadows, when his stick sounded hollowly against a wooden object. He leaned forward and felt of it. It was a flatboat!

In the darkness he walked about it, running his hands along the edge. It measured about ten feet by fourteen feet, he decided. Then he climbed in and felt of the bottom. At one corner there was a hole. The boat had probably been washed loose from its mooring during some previous flood time, and had come ashore here, striking the rocks. Certainly it had not been in the water for a long time, for the bottom boards were warped, with gaping seams between them.

"But it's a boat," said Tom, as he got out. He went to the water; the end of the flatboat was two yards from the river. Then he went back, clutched the end and tried to move it. Exerting all his strength, the boat barely stirred.

"Whew! Too heavy for me." He tried again, but with no better success. "Have to get a lever," he panted.

He spent the next ten minutes feeling about the beach, hoping that he would come upon something which he could use to pry the boat forward. But there was nothing; the beach was bare of everything except rocks and sand. For a moment he stood there, too keenly disappointed to know what he should do next. Then he turned toward the embankment.

Halfway up, a stone upon which he was standing became dislodged and tumbled to the bottom, carrying a rush of gravel with it. Tom, clinging to an exposed root, waited breathlessly, expecting an outcry from some guard who had heard the noise. He secured another footing, reached higher on the root, and dragged himself up another foot. Presently his head came over the edge; then he found a little tree which would bear his weight, swung a leg over and squirmed to the top. Again he waited, listening and getting his breath.

He crawled through the bushes on his hands and knees, pressing down the branches and selecting each inch of the way. Presently he came to the road. Another wait to catch the sound of a guard. Then forward again.

"There!" he exclaimed, as his hand touched a rail fence. He arose and pressed down on the top rail, testing it for strength. It bent too easily under his weight, so he tried the one underneath. That was stronger. Silently he disengaged the ends of the top rail and laid it on the ground; then he took up the rail he wanted, held it above his head and swung it over the bushes until it pointed towards the river. He made his way to the center of it, balanced it carefully over one shoulder and started creeping for the river again.

The barking of a dog stopped him just as he crossed the road. The suddenness of the barking made it seem as though the dog were at his heels, but he realized, as he collected himself, that the animal was a considerable distance away. Probably it was at the farm where the horseman had recruited a guard the night before, Tom decided. He hurried through the bushes and narrowly escaped tumbling over the edge of the embankment. He went down again, pulling the rail after him and letting it slip to the bottom.

"Now I'll move you," he said to the flatboat. First he rolled stones away, clearing the path to the water; next he went behind the boat, shoved the rail under and heaved upward. The rail curved under the strain, then the boat slid forward, grinding on the sand. One foot nearer the water. Tom took off his coat, threw it aboard, and worked the boat forward another foot. At last the forward end was in the river, with the water lapping against it. He stopped for breath.

Once again he heard the barking of a dog, this time nearer. Then again, still nearer. Presently he heard a man shouting, and another man answer him. They were on the road above him, and the dog was yipping with excitement.

Tom drew back to the embankment, every nerve throbbing. So they were chasing him with dogs!

Then a man's voice: "Don't see nothing here. That good-for-nothing cur--bringing us out in the middle of the night to chase squirrels. Come here, Stub!" Tom heard the yelp of the dog as the man kicked it. "Teach ye to git us up in the middle of the night fer nothing." Again the dog yelped.

"Ain't this about where Saunders' old boat is?" asked the other man.

"Yeh, I reckon so. There you can see it--right down there."

"Ain't it nearer the water? Say, you don't s'pose...?"

"Naw, that's because the water's high--mighty near as high as it was three years ago. Get out of here, you mangy cur!" Another yelp. "He couldn't get across in that sieve. Couldn't get it into the water, for one thing. Come on, let's go back. I tell ye that Yank ain't...." The rest of his words were lost as they left the embankment and went back to the road.

Tom, breathing more easily, waited for five minutes, then picked up his rail and shoved it under the boat. "If you had as much sense as your dog, mister, you'd be all right." That was his parting shot at the two men as he gave another heave at the rail. Water was pouring into the boat, so he stuffed his coat into the hole. That would keep the boat from filling so rapidly, at least.

Two more heaves at the rail and the current caught the forward end, swinging it around slightly. Another heave; and he jumped aboard, dragging the rail after him. He stood up and poled the boat away from the shore. The current turned it end for end; he changed his rail to the other side, reached down for the bottom and gave another shove, which sent him out into the full flow of the Tennessee River.

The flatboat had shipped about two inches of water, and more was entering just as fast as it could flow through the cracks. "But it's a boat," Tom repeated. "And she'll be a boat until she sinks--and then I'm a swimmer."

He tried to reach the bottom of the river with his rail, but the water

washed it aside; then he tried to steer by holding the rail against the upstream side, but the old boat was in no mood to answer a helm. She veered about in the current, twisting, turning, going sideways, wallowing in the uneven water. Tom, squatting in the center, watched its aimless, crazy actions, wondering what he could do to get it edging towards the opposite shore. The water was mounting higher; the boat was half-filled now, and the waves were splashing over. But still she careened, as though enjoying her new freedom, down the Tennessee.

Tom glanced up, and saw, to his amazement, the lights of Chattanooga glowing like dim yellow stars in the darkness. Chattanooga! And he was passing it in the darkness! He sat speechless watching the city as the current carried him along.

Below Chattanooga there was a sharp bend in the river where it turned to the northward. He remembered that from studying the map. Would he be washed up on the same side of the river from which he had just escaped? Would it be better to jump overboard and swim, letting the boat drift wherever it pleased her? But there was no time for considering what might happen, and what he might do: he was already at the bend. The flat-boat, caught in the eddy, was whirling about dizzily. Tom snatched up the rail and reached for the bottom, poling her off towards midstream whenever he could get the rail down. Gradually the boat drifted into the current, and started north. It had sunk far down in the water, and the waves slopped over the sides.

"If you'll last to the next turn!" exclaimed Tom prayerfully. He was sitting waist-deep in water, and his teeth were chattering. He was becoming numb again, but there was no opportunity for exercise now. The old flatboat seemed ready to slide from under him at any minute.

The next bend of the river, where it turned southward again, was only a few miles from where Tom had crossed in the ferryboat on his way to Chattanooga and Marietta. From that point he knew his way north. But the first necessity was food. Hunger had become a sharp pain which tore at his stomach. He reached inside his shirt, and wound the knot of under-drawers until it hurt. That pain was preferable to the other.

The moon, half-hidden behind a bank of clouds, was beginning to flood the world with its light, showing the course of the river. Ahead of him, Tom could see the bend, where the stream seemed to end in the black shore. He reached along the bottom of the boat until he touched his coat, pulled it out of the hole; then he stripped off his clothes and wrapped them together in his cape. With this soggy bundle tied around his neck he waited, shivering, as the boat swung out of the main current toward the north bank. Then he jumped.

It seemed hours before he could get his legs and arms working; then, as he started to swim, he felt a wrenching pain in his stomach. His arms worked spasmodically, beating against the water, dragging him slowly ahead. An eddy caught him and rolled him over. He righted himself and put his legs down; his toes touched the bottom for an instant, then lost it. The bundle of clothes seemed to press him down, deeper and deeper into the water. Then he felt his feet squarely on the bottom, and he struggled out of the water.

At last, he was across the Tennessee.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

NORTH OF THE TENNESSEE

Dawn found Tom near the house of the ferryman who had taken him across on his trip South. Rather than risk another walk through fields and woods, he had chosen to follow the bank of the river until he came to a road. That course, even though it was longer, made less demand upon his strength, for the walking was easier.

He skirted the ferryman's house and took to the road. For a little while at least he would be safe from interference; then, when light came, he would forage for food. Food.... It had been thirty-six hours since he had eaten--so long ago that the pains in his stomach had stopped. He was weak and dizzy, and the importance of ever reaching the Union lines shrunk as he thought of finding something to eat--anything. Security? What good was security if it meant starvation? "Oh, shut up, and keep your legs moving," he said to himself wrathfully, shaking such thoughts from his head. He took another twist at the improvised hunger belt. It really did help, he decided.

At his left he saw Murdock's house, and the words of the negro boy came back to him: "He keeps dawgs." Dogs for tracking down escaping slaves or Yankees. Now, for the first time, it seemed to Tom that the rain which had fallen during the past week was befriending him. The ground was too wet to hold a scent. If Murdock's "dawgs" were brought out to chase him, they would become hopelessly muddled and lost. Nevertheless, his step quickened. After he had walked another mile, the faster pace began to tell upon him and he lagged.

"Have to rest, I guess," he said, and he entered the woods. A chill seized him as soon as he sat down. He arose, and remarked: "If I sit down, I'm finished, and I can't walk much farther. I wonder...."

He had been fighting the idea of going to the Beecham's, or, rather, to Marjorie. She was the one person he knew south of the lines who would help him, yet he had been trying to keep the thought of going to her out of his mind. It might involve her in danger. Three miles above the Beecham's there was another farm. He had planned to go there, to tell them that he had just come through the Union lines to enlist with the South, and ask for food. But now he realized that he could not walk four miles--one mile to the Beecham's, then three more to the farm. If his legs would carry him for one mile, they would be doing well. It was difficult even to stand, and the woods and sky lurched and whirled about him.

"I'll go to Marjorie," he muttered. "Get word to her some way. She'll help." He started for the road, then stopped. If an alarm were raised, and

Murdock's dogs were brought out, they might track him along the road. Somewhere behind the Beecham's house, running through the woods, there was a small stream. It came within three hundred yards of the house; then there was a long row of thick bushes which led up to the garden. The negroes' shanties were far to the other side. He had taken all of them in at a glance when he rode away. It seemed that years had passed since that day.

He stumbled through the woods until he came to the stream; then he splashed along through the water. That would kill the scent. He had read of slaves wading through streams to throw dogs off. He was just like an escaping slave now, he thought. It was curious that he should know all the dread and terror that they felt, that he should be experiencing the same sort of man-hunt. He felt sick at the thought of all the brutality men were showing to each other--the killing, the destruction of war, the gigantic effort to bring ruin down upon each other. Such ideas went streaking through his mind as he stumbled along the rough bed of the stream. It was incredible, unbelievable. The railroad raid seemed like some sick man's dream, crazy, tortured, and awful.

He knelt down in the water and splashed it over his face, took a drink. His head became clear again. He pulled himself to his feet.

Through the trees he could see the Beecham's house, stark white in the early morning light. It was after seven o'clock, he thought, and the family would soon be at breakfast. A small stream of smoke drifted up from the kitchen chimney, wavering and drooping in the still air.

Tom left the stream and entered the bushes. When he was within fifty yards of the house, he dropped to the ground. An instant later, he felt himself going to sleep. It was like whirling through a great dark space to oblivion.

He awoke two hours later, and felt the warm sun beating down upon him. He raised his head and glanced about, recollecting how he had come here. Then he squirmed through the branches and looked toward the house. There, in the garden, stood Marjorie, snipping at a rose bush with a pair of scissors.

"Marjorie!" he called hoarsely. She glanced at the house, as though she thought that someone there had called her. "Marjorie!" She turned in his direction. "It's Tom Burns--over here. Down at the end of this row--in the bushes." Her scissors dropped to the ground and her hands went to her throat in a gesture of alarm. "Come here," he said. "But slowly--so that they won't know."

She recovered the scissors hurriedly and came toward him. "Where are you?" she gasped.

"Here--hiding. Stop at that last rose bush and pretend to be working."

"Oh, Tom--you escaped! You got away!"

"Yes, but I'm famished. Crossed the Tennessee last night--nothing to eat since night before last. Can you...?"

"Yes, I'll get you something," she gasped. "I'm so glad you escaped. I've been worried.... Wait there."

She walked toward the house and entered. Presently she came out of the kitchen door and sauntered into the garden again.

"I told Mattie, the cook," she said as she came near him and went to trimming the rose bush again. "She understands. Her little boy is going to bring you something to eat. Here he comes."

He looked out and saw the little colored boy, Jasper, running to the stable. He entered and appeared a second later out of the rear door; then he made a wide detour to avoid being seen from the house, and disappeared in the woods.

"As soon as he comes, go back until you're out of sight of the house. I'll meet you there. Watch for me."

"Yes--I understand."

She turned away, walked idly through the garden, and entered the kitchen again. Presently Tom heard the crackle of branches, and Jasper, his eyes and mouth wide open, came through the bushes.

"Here, Jasper," said Tom. "Come on--I won't hurt you." The boy had stopped, suddenly terror-stricken. "Come on, Jasper." He approached cautiously, step by step, holding a package before him. He dropped it when Tom put his hand out, and hurried back a few feet. "Now, Jasper, you go right back to your mammy again," said Tom. "Don't say a word to anyone."

Jasper nodded vigorously, then fled.

In the package Tom found bread and chicken. At first he revolted at the odor of food, then his appetite awoke and he wanted to wolf it down. But he ate slowly, making his way toward the wood as Marjorie had said. He stopped beside the stream, where he could watch for her.

Soon he caught a glimpse of her white dress, and he called. She hurried toward him.

"I read all about it in the Atlanta paper," she said. "You were in the railroad raid, weren't you?"

"Yes."

"I knew.... Oh, you're all wet. What happened to you? Oh, Tom!"

"Wet?" he said. "I've been wet for so long I've forgotten about it. You sit down there where you can see if anyone is coming." He pointed to a log. "I'll lie here and rest." He wrapped his cape about him, and stretched out on the ground. "I didn't want to come here, Marjorie, for fear I'd get you into trouble, but I was starved into it. Will you forgive me?"

[Illustration: "I didn't want to come here, Marjorie, for fear I'd get you into trouble."]

"Oh, I'm glad you came. I've been worrying ever since you left. I didn't know what you were going to do, and I was afraid you'd be caught. Then the news of the raid and the stolen engine came. I knew that you were one of the men. Uncle didn't guess it until yesterday when he read about it in the Atlanta paper. Tell me about it--please!"

"What did your uncle say? How did he guess that I was one of them?"

"The paper said that some of the men were captured, and that they told the story about coming from Kentucky. When Uncle read that, he ... he...."

"What did he do?"

"He swore terribly," answered Marjorie. "Aunty sent me from the room. But tell me about it. Oh, what's the matter, Tom?"

He had risen on his elbows, then fallen back on the ground. "Nothing," he said. "I'm dizzy, that's all. Every once in a while it strikes me. Wait a second, and I'll be all right."

She knelt beside him and touched his forehead. "You're feverish," she said. "Oh, Tom ... I ... can't I do anything?"

"Feverish!" exclaimed Tom. "I'm so cold that I can't move. I'm frozen!" His teeth were chattering, and he commenced to shiver. "I'll be all right in a minute. Guess I'd better get up." He arose, then sat down abruptly on the log, for his legs felt too weak to support him. "I'm sorry, Marjorie," he said. "I'm pretty tired."

She watched him, too alarmed to speak. She exclaimed: "But you are feverish, Tom. Oh, I didn't know. I might have seen that you were sick...."

The rest of her words were lost in the great buzzing noise which filled his head. Everything turned black before him--black filled with a thousand shooting colors; then the world gave a vicious lurch which toppled him over. He awoke, flat on the ground, with Marjorie leaning above him, crying and dabbing his forehead with a wet handkerchief.

"Fainted!" he mumbled disgustedly. "Fool to faint!" He closed his eyes again to rid himself of dizziness. "Big baby! Sorry, Marjorie."

"You must come to the house, Tom," cried Marjorie. "It doesn't make any difference about Uncle. I'll tell him that he must take you in. He must!... he must!"

"No--be all right in a minute. Terribly hot! Take this cape off." He tried to get out of the cape, but she stopped him. "It's too hot," he protested, but he let her draw the cape up more tightly about him.

"Won't you let me take you to the house?" she begged.

"No--have to get back to the lines."

"But you can't, Tom. You're sick. It's the fever that makes you hot. Oh, Tom...."

"Got to get back to the lines," he interrupted. "Start in a few minutes. I guess ... sleep a little first. Mustn't be captured. You wake me up if anyone comes. Murdock's dogs...."

It was night when his brain cleared again. He was wrapped in blankets, lying comfortably on the ground. Overhead the branches of the trees, black against the sky, waved solemnly.

"You 'wake, massah?"

Tom started at the voice. An old negro was sitting beside him.

"Yes--what...?"

"You jes' rest quiet," said the negro. "Ev'thing's all right. Miss Marjorie, she comin' soon."

Tom closed his eyes and began to unravel the tangle of the day's events. He could remember voices which had circled around him, babbling endlessly; two negroes who had taken off his wet clothes, put him in dry things and wrapped him in blankets; and Matty, the cook, who had soothed him and given him hot drinks. Then Marjorie had come. Twice he had awakened and found her sitting there. The afternoon was all confusion, like some half-forgotten thing of his imagination. But he was comfortable now, and he didn't care.

He drifted off into an untroubled sleep, and awoke again with the sound of voices in his ears. In the faint light of the moon, he saw two negroes squatting near him. They were talking in whispers. One of them was saying:

"O! Murdock's dawgs is a-cryin' and a-moanin'--"

And the other answered: "Oh, Lor'!"

"An' ol' mammy, she's a-looking at the tea grounds in a cup."

"What she say?"

"She don' say nothing." He paused to give his words effect. "She got a rabbit foot."

"Oh, Lor'!" The negro glanced fearfully about them. "Oh, Lor'!" he repeated. "Oh, Lor'! Oh, Lor'!" It had become a wail of terror now, a wail so piteous and so moving that Tom felt as though an icy cold hand had reached out for him, taking away all his strength. The stark trees of the lonely, shadow-infested woods seemed to press in upon them like an army of fantastic giants. The fear which was torturing the negroes came over him in

a spasm, then passed away.

"What's the trouble there?" he demanded sharply.

The negroes gasped audibly. "Nothin'," answered one of them presently. It was the negro who had been talking about Murdock's dogs and the rabbit's foot.

"What are you getting scared about?"

"Nothin'," came the muttered response.

"Then don't lose your heads," replied Tom. He sat upright and sagged forward weakly. The strength seemed to flow suddenly from his body; his legs and arms felt flabby and useless. "Whew!" he exclaimed. "I'll have to do better than this. Weak as a baby!" Bracing himself on one arm, he flexed the other slowly. The negroes watched him.

"Oh, Lor'!" wailed the older negro again.

"Shut up!" said Tom.

"O Lor'--der's horses on de road! Now der a-coming!"

Tom listened and heard a faint clatter of hoofs, growing louder and louder. It stopped for a moment as the horsemen pulled up to round the bend into the Beecham's farm. Then a man yelled, "Hey, Beecham! Beecham! Hey, Beecham! Come down for a minute. This is Kirby talking. We're on a Yank hunt. Want you to help." There came a muffled response from the house, the yelling ceased and the night was quiet again.

Tom found himself on his feet, without knowing how he managed to get up. He was clinging to the trunk of a tree for support. "Here, you," he said to the negroes. "They're after me. Take these blankets and get back to your huts. If they catch me they won't catch me here." Whimpering, the negroes scooped up the blankets.

"Wait!" ordered Tom. "How about these clothes? Where're mine? If I'm caught in these things...." The negroes collected his clothes, which had been spread out to dry, and he changed rapidly. "Take everything and get back as quickly as you can. Come just as soon as it's daylight to be sure you haven't left anything. Tell Miss Marjorie that I've gone...."

They jumped at the crackling of some underbrush near them. It was Marjorie.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE LAST DASH

"Here we are, Marjorie." He went forward to meet her. "Thanks a thousand times for all you've done. You must go back now. I'm going on--so that they won't catch me here."

"No, Tom, you can't go this way," she answered, crying. "I won't let you. Here!--Joe and Sam--put those things down and stay here. Oh, Tom, they'll surely catch you if you try it." She clutched his arm as though to hold him from running into the woods.

"But, Marjorie, there's nothing we can do," he protested. "Please go back. Don't you see what it'll mean if I'm found near here? If I had my horse, the one I sent back from the ferry that day...."

"It's in the far pasture--three miles away," she answered. "Kirby'll have the whole country looking for you by the time we could get it. You'll have to stay here, Tom. I'll hide you in the house--Matty'll hide you over the kitchen. Let me do that for you--let me take the risk. Please!"

"No! If they get me, they'll get me in the open. No, Marjorie. Go on back."

"Then take a horse from the stable. Take my horse."

"Yours?"

"Yes. Uncle gave him to me, and I give him to you. You must...."

"But they'll know...."

"No, they won't...."

"But tomorrow when they find...."

She was facing him squarely, holding to his arms and shaking him. "Matty's husband is the stableman. He knows about you. He'll say that he turned the horse into the pasture. You must.... Joe! Sam! Go up to the stable and saddle my horse and bring him here. Run!"

"Yassum," replied the negroes in a breath. They disappeared into the darkness. Tom's protest was smothered under Marjorie's hand. The wave of excitement which had kept him on his feet passed, and it was as though he had been caught in a powerful undertow which swept his legs from under him. He sank down on the fallen log where they had been sitting together earlier in the day.

"Can you ride? Are you strong enough?" she asked anxiously.

"Yes--if I once get my legs wrapped around him I can stick there. Marjorie, if you're caught at this, all the raid will seem like an immense failure."

"But I won't be caught, and I will always be proud that you came to me when you needed me, when I could help you."

"You're worth a dozen soldiers!" he exclaimed.

There was a moment of silence. "Poor Tom!" she said softly. "It's all so terrible, isn't it? And so wonderful! You men have left the whole South gasping at your bravery. Even Uncle--and he hates everything from the North--says it's the most daring thing he's ever heard of."

"But you--you're from the North."

"Yes," she answered. "We don't talk about the war. He just takes it for granted that I believe everything he believes. I've been here two years now. When mother and father were alive I lived in Albany. I'm going back just as soon as I can. Listen!"

There were more horses on the road.

"They're coming to join Kirby," she said. "I heard him say that more men were coming. When Uncle went down to let them in, I went to the head of the stairs to hear what they were saying. Uncle took them into the dining-room to give them something to eat and drink; then I dressed and stole down."

"But how did they know that I was in this part of the country?"

"There was something about a boat. It was found ashore a few miles down the river, and there was a report from Chattanooga that the boat had been taken. I didn't wait to hear it all. Oh, I wish Joe and Sam would hurry! You must get started before they leave. Men are going out in all directions, and Kirby is taking the road to Wartrace. If you're ahead of him they'll never catch you. Star can run like the wind."

"Star?"

"My horse," she explained. "He's a beautiful horse.... Oh, I wish they'd hurry." There was anguish in her voice.

"They'll come just as fast as they can," replied Tom calmly. "Why don't you go back to the house now!"

"I can't until you're on the road."

"Why not? Please go back now."

"I-I'll have to wait until the men have gone. I wouldn't dare to go back until then. Then, too...." She faltered and stopped.

"What?"

"You can't leave by the main road. I'm going to show you the way through the woods. Then there's a fence to jump. I'm going to take Star over it."

It was useless to protest, for she became calm again and determined. "I want to do it," she said. "You've come to me for help, and it's my right to help you all I can. And remember, I'll always be proud of it. Oh, so proud!" She slipped her hand into his and they sat there quietly, straining

to catch the first sounds of the negroes returning.

"There they are--General Marjorie," he said presently.

She jumped up and ran to the horse. Tom could see her pressing her cheek to the horse's nose, stroking its head and neck. "Go back now," she said to the negroes. "Take everything with you. If Matty is up, tell her that I'll be home in a few minutes."

"Yas, Miss Marjorie." Again they took up the blankets and clothes, and the night swallowed them.

"Mount, Tom," ordered Marjorie. "No, don't argue! Hurry! You'll need all your strength."

Laboriously, he did as he was told to do. With Marjorie leading Star, they made their way through the woods. Once she stopped and listened. "They haven't started yet," she said.

A few minutes later she stopped again. "There's the fence," she said. "Let me mount now. You hold Star while I fix the stirrups." He slid to the ground and stood there, while she measured the straps with her arms and fixed the buckles. He could see her plainly now in the soft moonlight which was flooding the world. Ahead of them was the black wall of the rail fence.

"Now," she said, "if you'll help me mount." He held his hands braced against his knees so that they formed a step for her. She was up, adjusting herself to the saddle, stroking Star's neck, talking to him softly. "You climb the fence and wait on the other side," she ordered. Once again he did as he was told to do.

She brought Star to the fence at an easy trot, let him smell it and see it; then she tossed her handkerchief to Tom. "Put it on the top rail as a marker," she said, as she turned back for the run.

Tom spread the handkerchief on the fence--a tiny spot of white to guide Star over. Then he watched her, as she retreated into the black background of the woods, his heart thumping so that it hurt. She had thrown aside her cape when she mounted, and now she seemed so small and immature, sitting there on Star's great back.

Star's hoofs pounded upon the soft turf, then his body emerged from the shadows. Tom could see Marjorie crouching, riding to his gait, holding him down for the jump. At the fence there was an instant's pause; Star's forequarters rose slowly, deliberately; then, as easily as though he were a great projectile reaching the topmost limit of its flight, Star floated over the fence. He had cleared it by a foot.

Marjorie wheeled about, dismounted, and readjusted the stirrups. "There!" she said. "Now--now, go."

"I can never thank you," he began.

"Don't--please don't even try," she interrupted. "Good luck once again. Good-by, Star dear." She pressed her cheek against the horse's head. "Good-by, Tom. Remember me always."

He mounted and for a moment they delayed the parting. He reached down and took her hand. "Always, little soldier, always," he said. "Good-by."

"Listen!" The sounds of shouting came from the Beecham's. "They're starting. Go straight ahead until you come to the road, then to your left."

He gave Star the reins, and above the beat of hoofs heard her call: "Good luck, Tom!" He glanced back and saw her standing there, her arms raised above her head. Then he realized that he had her handkerchief, which he had taken from the fence, clutched in his hand, so he waved it as a last signal of parting before he crammed it in his pocket.

They came to the road suddenly; Star planted his feet and slid on the soft earth. Then, when they turned northward, Tom could feel all the strength of the fine, valiant animal he was riding. It was a strength which seemed to flow into the road, which carried him forward in long, swinging leaps.

"Go it, Star!" he said. "Go it, boy!" In his excitement he forgot that he had ever had the fever, that his legs had been too weak to carry him. He leaned forward, riding easily, peering ahead at the road.

Star was willing, but no horse could stand such a pace forever, so he reined in to a trot. After he had passed the first farmhouse, he brought the horse to a walk. "They'll stop there, old fellow," he confided. "You've shown them what a pair of hind hoofs look like."

He remembered the road vaguely from his trip southward, but the houses and the little towns looked different now in the moonlight. Through each settlement he walked Star quietly, but always ready to throw himself forward, dig his heels into the horse's flanks and race away. An hour passed ... two hours ... three hours. They pressed northward steadily, sometimes at a walk but usually at a comfortable, steady trot, and always saving energy for that last dash if the need arose.

The first light of dawn found him a mile south of Manchester. "Guess we'd better begin to step lively, Star," he said, reaching forward and stroking the horse's neck. Star snorted and shook his head. They trotted around a bend in the road. Ahead of them Tom distinguished a man who had dismounted and was standing beside his horse.

"Get ready, boy," he whispered, reining in slightly.

"Hey! You!" called the man. "Where're you going?"

Tom held his reins in his left hand, and took off his hat with his right hand.

"None of your business!" he replied. Then with his hat he slapped the man's horse on the head. He whooped, and dug his heels into Star's flanks. As

they shot forward, he saw the other horse rear up, pawing the air. The man--he had the reins wrapped about his arm--was yanked from his feet and sent sprawling. Tom, flat against Star's neck, with the black mane whipping his face, sped down the road--past the spot where they had met Andrews that first day of the raid, past the Widow Fry's and down the one street of Manchester at a full gallop.

"Keep it up, Star!" he urged. "Go it, Star! We're almost there, old boy. Go it, Star!" But there was little need of urging; Star's forelegs were reaching out mechanically for the road, clipping it off in huge sections. Each leap seemed like a convulsion. His neck was outstretched and his head was thrust forward as though he were devouring the road.

Tom did not look back, but he cast out short, broken sentences to console his pursuer. "Huh! Race me--on that hunk o'--dog meat. Get a--_horse_! If you want to--race me--get a--_horse_. A horse that can--_run_! We'll race--anything that--wears four legs. Won't we--Star? Huh!"

Presently he eased Star's gait, for the horse was beginning to breath too heavily. "Guess they won't bother about us," he remarked. "Wonder how much ground we covered then. Must be pretty close...."

"_Halt!_"

It was a cry that brought a yell of exultation to Tom's lips. There was no mistaking it. No civilian could say halt in that tone.

Tom pulled on the reins and Star planted his feet; they went sliding past the Sentry with his rifle glinting in the moonlight. "Halt there!" came the second warning as Star came to a stop. "Put your hands up!"

Tom dropped the reins and raised his hands. Star, almost winded, seemed propped upon his legs, rather than standing upon them. His head drooped and each breath came as a great heave.

"Who are you?" demanded the Sentry.

"Friend," answered Tom.

"Password?"

"Haven't got it. I'm...."

"Keep your hands up," interrupted the Sentry; then he bawled out: "Sergeant o' the gua-r-r-d. Post number-r _six_." The call was repeated as though by an echo.

"I'm one of the railroad raiders," continued Tom. "I'm...."

"What?" yelled the Sentry. "Are you one of _them_? Say! Put those hands down and let me shake 'em. Say!"

CHAPTER TWENTY

TOM REPORTS AT HEADQUARTERS

The Sergeant, with four men, came on the double quick, and found Tom and the Sentry standing in the middle of the road talking. The Sentry's gun stood neglected, leaning against a tree.

"What does this mean, Cummins?" demanded the Sergeant.

"Here's one of the raiders," answered the Sentry, as though that was enough to account for almost any negligence. And it was enough, for the Sergeant forgot the Sentry completely. He grabbed Tom's hand.

"That was a wonderful job you boys did down there," he said. "We've been waiting for you and watching all along the line."

"Am I the first one through?" asked Tom.

"I guess so. Are there any more behind you?"

"I don't know. I got separated from the others. There were three of us, and the other two were captured. Are you sure that none of them reached the line on the other side of Chattanooga?" he asked anxiously.

"We haven't heard of any," answered the Sergeant. "The whole country's waiting for you, and I guess we'd have heard of it if any had come through the lines. Say, when the news of the raid came out, the North just went crazy with excitement."

One of the men added: "And I guess the South did some going crazy, too."

"I have to sit down," remarked Tom suddenly. "Sorry, but my legs don't seem to be much good."

"We've got to be getting on and report to the Captain. You'd better climb on your horse," remarked the Sergeant.

"I'll walk the rest of the way, thanks," said Tom. "Star's done about enough work for one night. Wait a minute and I'll be all right."

"Have a hard time getting through?" asked one of the men.

"Oh, not so very hard," replied Tom. The memory of all the miseries of that long chase seemed dulled in his mind now. "The worst of it was that I was wet all the time, wet to the skin. Then I didn't have anything to eat for about two days. Got a little touch of the fever."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed the Sergeant. "Say, that's a good horse you've got there! Where did you find it?"

"Maybe I'll tell you after the war's over," answered Tom.

"Ah! Well, you had luck, anyhow."

"Yep," answered Tom. He put his hand into his pocket and clutched Marjorie's handkerchief. "Yep, I had luck, all right enough. I can walk now, I guess. Let's go report to the Captain."

It was daylight when they reached the headquarters of the guard. The Sentry posted before the door watched them approach, then called out: "Lo there, Serg. Got a Johnny Reb for our breakfast?"

"Reb nothing!" replied the Sergeant. "This boy's one of the raiders."

The Sentry's jaw dropped slightly. He stared for a moment, then turned and bolted through the door, yelling back over his shoulder, "I'll get the Captain out. Isn't up yet."

They entered the house, and Tom dropped into the first chair he reached. "Sergeant," he said, "have one of your men take care of my horse. He can have some water now."

"All right, Lieutenant."

"I'm no Lieutenant--I'm a private, a raw recruit."

"Huh?" grunted the Sergeant incredulously.

"That's the truth."

"Well, if you ain't a Lieutenant you ought to be and I'll bet my stripes that you will be. Hey, Max, you go out and see that the Lieutenant's horse is taken care of."

From upstairs they could hear the sound of voices and the scurrying of feet. Presently someone clattered down the stairs. The door swung open and the Captain entered, buttoning his coat.

"Glad to see you, my boy!" he exclaimed. "Don't bother about getting up. You can go, Sergeant." He drew a chair up close to Tom's; then as the Sergeant started to leave the room, he said, "Have my messenger ready to travel. Give him the fastest horse we've got in the place."

"Yes, sir."

"Now, tell me about it. In the first place, what's your name and regiment?"

"Tom Burns, private, Company B, Second Ohio," answered Tom proudly. With the Captain jotting down notes, he told the first accurate story of the raid up to the moment when they had abandoned the train; then of his own experiences in escaping. "I finally reached this side of the river on the flatboat, and swam ashore. That was yesterday morning. Let's see--was it

yesterday or the day before?" He looked back over the tangle of nights and days, and thought for a moment. "Yes, it was yesterday morning. I'm sorry that I'm so confused, but so many things have happened that I'm all mixed up."

"I understand," said the Captain.

"Then...." continued Tom. He stopped. "No, I can't tell you any more. Another person helped me. If it hadn't been for that person I would never have reached the lines. And if it ever got out they'd make a lot of trouble for...." He caught himself on the verge of saying "her," and added, "for that person."

"Well," said the Captain, "that's of no importance to us. It makes no difference. The point is that you're back again."

"It's of importance to me, I can tell you," said Tom.

"Hm-m-m, I guess so. All right, Tom Burns, I'm going to send a messenger to get this news on the wire to headquarters. You're about worn out. Sorry that there's just one bed here. That's the one I've just climbed out of, but you're welcome to it."

"Couldn't ask for anything better," replied Tom sleepily. He arose and stretched his tired muscles. "Will you make sure that my horse is being properly cared for, Captain? He's a fine horse.... Where is that bed, Captain?"

It was evening when he awoke, and he remained awake long enough to eat some food which an orderly brought for him. Then, with the intention of getting up after a few minutes, he closed his eyes again. The next thing he knew it was daylight again. He jumped out of bed and opened the door.

"Good morning," called a soldier as Tom peered out. "Have a good nap, young man?"

"What day is this, anyhow!" demanded Tom. "How long have I been sleeping?"

"Just twenty-four hours, that's all," answered the soldier.

"Hello, Burns." It was the Captain. "How are you?"

"Fine! But I'm ashamed of myself for cheating you out of your bed."

"You've earned a bed, my boy. Get some clothes on and we'll have breakfast. Can you travel today?"

"Yes."

"A message came from Mitchel at Huntsville. He wants to see you."

And so Tom, mounted upon Star and accompanied by the Captain's messenger, retraced the road to Shelbyville and followed the course of Mitchel's army

southward. All along the route, when the news spread that one of the raiders was passing through, they were surrounded by soldiers, who wanted to hear the story and to shake hands. Finally Tom begged the messenger not to tell people who he was, not to mention the raid. "We'll never get to Huntsville if this keeps up," he said.

It was noon of the third day when they reined their horses in at the outskirts of the town, and exhibited their pass to a Sentry. "Let 'em past, boys," yelled the Sentry. "Here's the raider!" They trotted into Huntsville with the soldiers yelling. And it was all that Tom could do to keep from yelling. Now, for the first time, the full exultation of being back again struck him; but he sat speechless, stroking Star's neck nervously.

They pulled up before headquarters.

"Tom!"

Tom glanced about and saw Bert running toward him.

"Bert!"

Tom jumped from Star's back, tossed the reins to the messenger and they met as though in collision. "Good work, Tom! When the word came, the company went wild. The Captain got leave for me to come up here and meet you. Go on in and report to the General. I'll be out here waiting for you." Bert thumped him on the back and started him towards the door.

Tom followed the Sergeant of the Guard into the anteroom, and stood, ill at ease, looking out of the windows into the yard, until the General could receive him. Presently the door behind him opened, and he turned, expecting to see the Sergeant. Instead, it was General Mitchel himself. Tom snapped to attention.

"Welcome back again, Private Burns," boomed the General. He approached and their hands met with a _smack!_ The General was beaming. "Glad to see you, boy. I'm proud of you. Come in here." He took Tom's arm and led him toward the private office.

"Now let's have the yarn," said the General, lighting a cigar and leaning back in his chair. Tom glanced about him and saw that the office had originally been a dining-room. The family table, which was strewn with maps, served as the General's desk, and the disorder of the chairs showed that there had been a recent meeting of the staff. On the sideboard were the remains of the General's lunch, which he had just finished.

"Am I the first one back?" asked Tom.

"Yes--the only one who has returned. I had just about given you all up as captured."

"Then you think the others are ... prisoners?"

"Afraid so--yes. When was it you captured the train--Friday or Saturday?"

"Saturday, sir."

"Hm-m-m, I thought so. That was what the reports from the South said, but I couldn't be sure. And how was it you didn't take the train on Friday, as we planned? But, perhaps, you'd better tell me the story right from the beginning."

Once again, Tom started with his departure from Murfreesboro and told in detail of the movements of the raiders. The General listened intently, scratching down occasional notes; presently he arose and spread a map before them. Then, with their chairs close together, the General and the Private traced out the course of the raiders and the progress of the locomotive race up to the point where Andrews had given the order to abandon the engine and scatter.

"Hm-m-m, if he'd only stopped to fight--at the tunnel, say...." remarked the General.

"That's what we wanted to do," answered Tom, "but he wouldn't."

"Of course," said the General, "we have to remember that Andrews was not a soldier--he was a spy, and accustomed to another way of working. Too bad.... Luck was dead against you, I'm afraid."

The General leaned back again and looked at him narrowly as he told the story of his flight from the hotel and across the Tennessee. Tom continued:

"I would have been captured surely if it hadn't been for a certain person who took care of me, and gave me a horse. The whole countryside was getting up to search the woods for me. They were bringing the dogs out. Then I got the horse; we cut through the fields ahead of them. That's all. I raced until I tumbled into the arms of a Sentry."

The General drummed on the table with his pen, and emitted great puffs of smoke. "Hm-m-m!" he said. "Hm-m-m! Not entirely successful, but a great blow at the South all the same. I'm proud of you men, Burns--mighty proud of you." He was silent for a moment, then: "I'm going to recommend you for a commission."

"Thank you, sir," gasped Tom.

"You've earned it. You can go up North for training, and join us again later--a Lieutenant. How'll you like that?"

"I'd like to have a commission, of course, but...."

"But what?"

"Why, you see, General, I'm nothing but a recruit, I've never even worn a uniform."

"What?" exclaimed the General. Tom told him how he had come to take part in

the raid, how he had been sworn into the service just before his departure. "Well," said the General at last, "that really makes no difference. You're officer caliber, and that's enough."

"All the same, General, I think I'd like to go to my company, and get some experience. Company B is in the fight now, isn't it?"

"Experience!" exclaimed the General.

"Experience as a soldier, I mean," Tom replied.

"Of course, of course," the General answered, laughing. "Yes, Company B is in the fight. All right, my boy, all right. We'll send you there--for experience!--and then North you go and learn the business of being an officer."

"Thank you, sir."

The interview was at an end. They stood up and shook hands. Tom suddenly remembered Star. "By the way, sir," he said. "A private doesn't generally have a Kentucky thoroughbred, does he?"

"Not generally."

"Well, sir, I have one, but I guess the time for Star and me to part has come. Will you take it? The person who gave Star to me is a good Northerner. The ... the person would be proud to have the horse ridden by a General."

"Do you think that _the person_"--the General smiled--"would be any prouder to have a General riding the horse than she--pardon me!--than to have you riding it?"

"I don't know, sir," replied Tom, with a grin. "But I know she'll be mighty proud just the same."

"All right, my boy." The General called one of his aides and instructed him to see that Tom reached Company B. They shook hands again and Tom walked out of the headquarters building to find Bert waiting for him. The railroad raid had ended.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THAT CERTAIN PERSON

Long years of warfare passed; then came the day when war was over, and Captain Tom Burns strolled down the avenue in Washington, linked arm in arm with Brown and Knight. Behind them sauntered the surviving members of the raiders. Each of them wore a medal of honor, which had been pinned to their

coats that afternoon.

"You're going straight home, I suppose, Tom?" asked Brown.

"No--no, I'm going to Albany. Someone I have to see there. I was home on a furlough just a few weeks ago."

"It's just about my train time," said Knight. "I'll have to be getting to the station."

"Wait a minute while we say good-bye to the boys, and I'll go with you," said Tom. They stopped while the others came up. The moment of parting had come, and silence fell over them. Some of the men had escaped from prison camps, others had been exchanged, and this meeting had been a great event in their lives. For two days they had lived their experiences once again, exchanging stories and discussing the raid.

"Good-bye, boys," said Knight, breaking the pall of silence. "You all have my address. Let me know when you're around my part of the country."

"Same goes for me," said several of them. "Don't forget, now. Good-bye, Tom. 'By, Knight. Here, let's shake that paw again. Drop me a line, eh?"

"By, boys," said Tom, untangling himself from the group. He looked back and waved.

Two days later in Albany Tom presented himself at the Mayor's office. "I've come on a peculiar errand," he explained. "One time when I was in the South, a Northern girl, who was living there, befriended me and saved me from being taken prisoner. Her name was Marjorie Landis, and she told me that she had lived here. She said she was coming back to Albany just as soon as the war was over. I want you to help me find her, if it's not asking too much."

The Mayor smiled. "You don't happen to be Tom Burns of the raiders, by any chance, do you?" he asked.

Tom jumped. "Yes--but how...." His voice dwindled off in amazement.

"I've heard a lot about you, young man. Yes, I think that if you'll go to this address"--he wrote on a slip of paper--"and ask for Miss Landis, you'll find someone who'll be very glad to see you. Don't even stop to thank me--you hurry along."

Tom needed no urging. He sped from the office, signaled a cab and gave the driver the paper. "Let that horse move his legs," he ordered.

"Yes, sir."

They pulled up presently before a big brownstone house.

"Tell Miss Landis that Captain Burns is calling," he told the servant.

"Yes, Captain. Will you come this way, sir?" He was ushered into a parlor, where he waited nervously; then he heard footsteps on the stairs.

"Tom--Tom Burns!" Marjorie bounded into the room.

"Marjorie!"

They stood looking at each other, speechless. She was the first to collect herself. "I'm so glad you've come," she said. "I've wondered and wondered about you."

"But you knew I'd come if I could, didn't you?"

"I thought so--I hoped so."

"For one thing, I have a horse and a handkerchief of yours."

"Star! Is he still alive? Oh, tell me about it. But, no--tell me about yourself first."

That evening, long after dinner, they finished their stories. Marjorie had come North six months before; the Beechams had never suspected her of having given him her horse. "The people," she said, "went mad scurrying about the country after you. I don't know what they would have done if they had suspected me. I don't like to think of it."

"I've been worrying about you ever since," answered Tom. "I could have hugged that Mayor when he told me that you were here and safe."

"Wasn't it strange that you went directly to him? He's one of our best friends."

"I couldn't think of anyone else to go to."

And he told of the battles he had fought, of his promotions and all that had befallen him. "I rode Star all through the year of '63, after I was attached to the Headquarters Staff. General Mitchel gave him back to me. He said, 'I don't suppose you'd like to have that Certain Person's horse again, would you?' I said, 'I would, but I don't dare to take a General's horse away from him.' Good old Star! When winter set in I decided that he'd seen about enough war, so I sent him home. He is in the country near Cleveland now on a furlough, waiting for his mistress to ride him again." Tom pulled out the small handkerchief. "But I'd like to keep this," he said. "It has brought me luck. I'm superstitious about it."

"Please keep it," she said. "I hope it'll always bring you luck."

He arose to go. "I'll be back just as soon as I can," he said, then he added: "to bring Star."

"Is that the only reason?"

"It isn't a reason," he replied severely. "It's an excuse."

THE END

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