

## XII

### BACK TO KINGDOM COME

IT was the tournament that, at last, loosed Mammy's tongue. She was savage in her denunciation of Chad to Mrs. Dean—so savage and in such plain language that her mistress checked her sharply, but not before Margaret had heard, though the little girl, with an awed face, slipped quietly out of the room into the yard, while Harry stood in the doorway, troubled and silent.

"Don't let me hear you speak that way again, Mammy," said Mrs. Dean, so sternly that the old woman swept out of the room in high dudgeon. And yet she told her husband of Mammy's charge.

"I am rather surprised at Major Buford."

"Perhaps he doesn't know," said the General.

"Perhaps it isn't true."

"Nobody knows anything about the boy."

"That's true."

"Well, I cannot have my children associating with a waif."

"He seems like a nice boy."

"He uses extraordinary language. I cannot have him teaching my children mischief. Why I believe

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Margaret is really fond of him. I know Harry and Dan are." The General looked thoughtful.

"I will speak to Major Buford about him," he said; and he did—no little to that gentleman's confusion—though he defended Chad stanchly—and the two friends parted with some heat.

Thereafter, the world changed for Chad, for is there any older and truer story than that Evil has wings, while Good goes a plodding way? Chad felt the change, in the negroes, in the sneering overseer, and could not understand. The rumor reached Miss Lucy's ears and she and the Major had a spirited discussion that rather staggered Chad's kind-hearted companion. It reached the school, and a black-haired youngster, named Georgie Forbes, who had long been one of Margaret's abject slaves, and who hated Chad, brought out the terrible charge in the presence of a dozen school-children at noon-recess one day. It had been no insult in the mountains, but Chad, dazed though he was, knew it was meant for an insult, and his hard fist shot out promptly, landing in his enemy's chin and bringing him bawling to the earth. Others gave out the cry then, and the boy fought right and left like a demon. Dan stood sullenly near, taking no part, and Harry, while he stopped the unequal fight, turned away from Chad coldly, calling Margaret, who had run up toward them, away at the same time, and Chad's three friends turned



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from him then and there, while the boy, forgetting all else, stood watching them with dumb wonder and pain. The school-bell clanged, but Chad stood still—with his heart wellnigh breaking. In a few minutes the last pupil had disappeared through the school-room door, and Chad stood under a great elm—alone. But only a moment, for he turned quickly away, the tears starting to his eyes, walked rapidly through the woods, climbed the worm fence beyond, and dropped, sobbing, in the thick bluegrass.

An hour later he was walking swiftly through the fields toward the old brick house that had sheltered him. He was very quiet at supper that night, and after Miss Lucy was gone to bed and he and the Major were seated before the fire, he was so quiet that the Major looked at him anxiously.

"What's the matter, Chad? Are you sick?"

"Nothin'—no, sir."

But the Major was uneasy, and when he rose to go to bed, he went over and put his hand on the boy's head.

"Chad," he said, "if you hear of people saying mean things about you, you mustn't pay any attention to them."

"No, sir."

"You're a good boy, and I want you to live here with me. Good-night, Chad," he added, affection-

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ately. Chad nearly broke down, but he steadied himself.

"Good-by, Major," he said, brokenly. "I'm obleeged to you."

"Good-by?" repeated the Major. "Why——"

"Good-night, I mean," stammered Chad.

The Major stood inside his own door, listening to the boy's slow steps up the second flight. "I'm gettin' to love that boy," he said, wonderingly—"An' I'm damned if people who talk about him don't have me to reckon with"—and the Major shook his head from side to side. Several times he thought he could hear the boy moving around in the room above him, and while he was wondering why the lad did not go to bed, he fell asleep.

Chad was moving around. First, by the light of a candle, he laboriously dug out a short letter to the Major—scalding it with tears. Then he took off his clothes and got his old mountain-suit out of the closet—moccasins and all—and put them on. Very carefully he folded the pretty clothes he had taken off—just as Miss Lucy had taught him—and laid them on the bed. Then he picked up his old rifle in one hand and his old coonskin cap in the other, blew out the candle, slipped noiselessly down the stairs in his moccasined feet, out the unbolted door and into the starlit night. From the pike fence he turned once to look back to the dark, si-



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lent house amid the dark trees. Then he sprang down and started through the fields—his face set toward the mountains.

It so happened that mischance led General Dean to go over to see Major Buford about Chad next morning. The Major listened patiently—or tried ineffectively to listen—and when the General was through, he burst out with a vehemence that shocked and amazed his old friend.

"Damn those niggers!" he cried, in a tone that seemed to include the General in his condemnation, "that boy is the best boy I ever knew. I believe he is my own blood, he looks like that picture there"—pointing to the old portrait—"and if he is what I believe he is, by —, sir, he gets this farm and all I have. Do you understand that?"

"I believe he told you what he was."

"He did—but I don't believe he knows, and, anyhow, whatever he is, he shall have a home under this roof as long as he lives."

The General rose suddenly—stiffly.

"He must never darken my door again."

"Very well." The Major made a gesture which plainly said, "In that event, you are darkening mine too long," and the General rose, slowly descended the steps of the portico, and turned:

"Do you really mean, Cal, that you are going to

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let a little brat that you picked up in the road only yesterday stand between *you* and *me*?"

The Major softened.

"Look here," he said, whisking a sheet of paper from his coat-pocket. While the General read Chad's scrawl, the Major watched his face.

"He's gone, by —. A hint was enough for him. If he isn't the son of a gentleman, then I'm not, nor you."

"Cal," said the General, holding out his hand, "we'll talk this over again."

The bees buzzed around the honeysuckles that clambered over the porch. A crow flew overhead. The sound of a crying child came around the corner of the house from the quarters, and the General's footsteps died on the gravel-walk, but the Major heard them not. Mechanically he watched the General mount his black horse and canter toward the pike gate. The overseer called to him from the stable, but the Major dropped his eyes to the scrawl in his hand, and when Miss Lucy came out he silently handed it to her.

"I reckon you know what folks is a-sayin' about me. I tol' you myself. But I didn't know hit wus any harm, and anyways hit ain't my fault, I reckon, an' I don't see how folks can blame me. But I don' want nobody who don' want me. An' I'm leavin' 'cause I don't want to bother you. I never bring nothing but trouble nohow an' I'm goin' back



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to the mountains. Tell Miss Lucy good-by. She was mighty good to me, but I know she didn't like me. I left the hoss for you. If you don't have no use fer the saddle, I wish you'd give hit to Harry, 'cause he tuk up fer me at school when I was fight-in', though he wouldn't speak to me no more. I'm mighty sorry to leave you. I'm obleeged to you 'cause you wus so good to me an' I'm goin' to see you agin some day, if I can. Good-by."

"Left that damned old mare to pay for his clothes and his board and his schooling," muttered the Major. "By the gods"—he rose suddenly and strode away—"I beg your pardon, Lucy."

A tear was running down each of Miss Lucy's faded cheeks.

Dawn that morning found Chad springing from a bed in a haystack—ten miles from Lexington. By dusk that day, he was on the edge of the Bluegrass and that night he stayed at a farm-house, going in boldly, for he had learned now that the way-farer was as welcome in a Bluegrass farm-house as in a log-cabin in the mountains. Higher and higher grew the green swelling slopes, until, climbing one about noon next day, he saw the blue foothills of the Cumberland through the clear air—and he stopped and looked long, breathing hard from pure ecstasy. The plain-dweller never knows the fierce home hunger that the mountain-born have for hills.

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Besides, beyond those blue summits were the Turners and the school-master and Jack, waiting for him, and he forgot hunger and weariness as he trod on eagerly toward them. That night, he stayed in a mountain-cabin, and while the contrast of the dark room, the crowding children, the slovenly dress, and the coarse food was strangely disagreeable, along with the strange new shock came the thrill that all this meant hills and home. It was about three o'clock of the fourth day that, tramping up the Kentucky River, he came upon a long, even stretch of smooth water, from the upper end of which two black boulders were thrust out of the stream, and with a keener thrill he realized that he was nearing home. He recalled seeing those rocks as the raft swept down the river, and the old Squire had said that they were named after oxen—"Billy and Buck." Opposite the rocks he met a mountaineer.

"How fer is it to Uncle Joel Turner's?"

"A leetle the rise o' six miles, I reckon."

The boy was faint with weariness, and those six miles seemed a dozen. Idea of distance is vague among the mountaineers, and two hours of weary travel followed, yet nothing that he recognized was in sight. Once a bend of the river looked familiar, but when he neared it, the road turned steeply from the river and over a high bluff, and the boy started up with a groan. He meant to reach the summit



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before he stopped to rest, but in sheer pain, he dropped a dozen paces from the top and lay with his tongue, like a dog's, between his lips.

The top was warm, but a chill was rising from the fast-darkening shadows below him. The rim of the sun was about to brush the green tip of a mountain across the river, and the boy rose in a minute, dragged himself on to the point where, rounding a big rock, he dropped again with a thumping heart and a reeling brain. There it was—old Joel's cabin in the pretty valley below—old Joel's cabin—home! Smoke was rising from the chimney, and that far away it seemed that Chad could smell frying bacon. There was the old barn, and he could make out one of the boys feeding stock and another chopping wood—was that the school-master? There was the huge form of old Joel at the fence talking with a neighbor. He was gesticulating as though angry, and the old mother came to the door as the neighbor moved away with a shuffling gait that the boy knew belonged to the Dillon breed. Where was Jack? Jack! Chad sprang to his feet and went down the hill on a run. He climbed the orchard fence, breaking the top-rail in his eagerness, and as he neared the house, he gave a shrill yell. A scarlet figure flashed like a flame out of the door, with an answering cry, and the Turners followed:

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"Why, boy," roared old Joel. "Mammy, hit's Chad!"

Dolph dropped an armful of feed. The man with the axe left it stuck in a log, and each man shouted:

"Chad!"

The mountaineers are an undemonstrative race, but Mother Turner took the boy in her arms and the rest crowded around, slapping him on the back and all asking questions at once—Dolph and Rube and Tom. Yes, and there was the school-master—every face was almost tender with love for the boy. But where was Jack?

"Where's—where's Jack?" said Chad.

Old Joel changed face—looking angry; the rest were grave. Only the old mother spoke:

"Jack's all right."

"Oh," said Chad, but he looked anxious.

Melissa inside heard. He had not asked for *her*, and with the sudden choking of a nameless fear she sprang out the door to be caught by the school-master, who had gone around the corner to look for her.

"Lemme go," she said, fiercely, breaking his hold and darting away, but stopping, when she saw Chad in the doorway, looking at her with a shy smile.

"Howdye, Melissa!"

The girl stared at him mildly and made no an-



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swer, and a wave of shame and confusion swept over the boy as his thoughts flashed back to a little girl in a black cap and on a black pony, and he stood reddening and helpless. There was a halloo at the gate. It was old Squire Middleton and the circuit-rider, and old Joel went toward them with a darkening face.

"Why hello, Chad," the Squire said. "You back again?"

He turned to Joel.

"Look hyeh, Joel. Thar hain't no use o' your buckin' agin yo' neighbors and harborin' a sheep-killin' dog." Chad started and looked from one face to another—slowly but surely making out the truth.

"You never seed the dawg afore last spring. You don't know that he hain't a sheep-killer."

"It's a lie—a lie," Chad cried, hotly, but the school-master stopped him.

"Hush, Chad," he said, and he took the boy inside and told him Jack was in trouble. A Dillon sheep had been found dead on a hill-side. Daws Dillon had come upon Jack leaping out of the pasture, and Jack had come home with his muzzle bloody. Even with this overwhelming evidence, old Joel stanchly refused to believe the dog was guilty and ordered old man Dillon off the place. A neighbor had come over, then another, and another, until old Joel got livid with rage.

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"That dawg mought eat a dead sheep but he never would kill a live one, and if you kill him, by —, you've got to kill me fust."

Now there is no more unneighborly or unchristian act for a farmer than to harbor a sheep-killing dog. So the old Squire and the circuit-rider had come over to show Joel the grievous error of his selfish, obstinate course, and, so far, old Joel had refused to be shown. All of his sons sturdily upheld him and little Melissa fiercely—the old mother and the school-master alone remaining quiet and taking no part in the dissension.

"Have they got Jack?"

"No, Chad," said the school-master. "He's safe—tied up in the stable." Chad started out, and no one followed but Melissa. A joyous bark that was almost human came from the stable as Chad approached, for the dog must have known the sound of his master's footsteps, and when Chad threw open the door, Jack sprang the length of his tether to meet him and was jerked to his back. Again and again he sprang, barking, as though beside himself, while Chad stood at the door, looking sorrowfully at him.

"Down, Jack!" he said sternly, and Jack dropped obediently, looking straight at his master with honest eyes and whimpering like a child.

"Jack," said Chad, "did you kill that sheep?" This was all strange conduct for his little master,



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and Jack looked wondering and dazed, but his eyes never wavered or blinked. Chad could not long stand those honest eyes.

"No," he said, fiercely—"no, little doggie, no—no!" And Chad dropped on his knees and took Jack in his arms and hugged him to his breast.

### XIII

#### ON TRIAL FOR HIS LIFE

BY degrees the whole story was told Chad that night. Now and then the Turners would ask him about his stay in the Bluegrass, but the boy would answer as briefly as possible and come back to Jack. Before going to bed, Chad said he would bring Jack into the house:

"Somebody might pizen him," he explained, and when he came back, he startled the circle about the fire:

"Whar's Whizzer?" he asked, sharply. "Who's seen Whizzer?"

Then it developed that no one had seen the Dillon dog—since the day before the sheep was found dead near a ravine at the foot of the mountain in a back pasture. Late that afternoon Melissa had found Whizzer in that very pasture when she was driving old Betsy, the brindle, home at milking-time. Since then, no one of the Turners had seen the Dillon dog. That, however, did not prove that Whizzer was not at home. And yet,

"I'd like to know whar Whizzer is now!" said Chad, and, after, at old Joel's command, he had