

## XXVI

### BROTHER AGAINST BROTHER AT LAST

IT was the first warm day of spring and the sunshine was very soothing to Melissa as she sat on the old porch early in the afternoon. Perhaps it was a memory of childhood, perhaps she was thinking of the happy days she and Chad had spent on the river bank long ago, and perhaps it was the sudden thought that, with the little they had to eat in the house and that little the same three times a day, week in and week out, Mother Turner, who had been ailing, would like to have some fish; perhaps it was the primitive hunting instinct that, on such a day, sets a country boy's fingers itching for a squirrel rifle or a cane fishing-pole, but she sprang from her seat, leaving old Jack to doze on the porch, and, in half an hour, was crouched down behind a boulder below the river bend, dropping a wriggling worm into a dark, still pool. As she sat there, contented and luckless, the sun grew so warm that she got drowsy and dozed—how long she did not know—but she awoke with a start and with a frightened sense that someone was near her, though she could hear

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no sound. But she lay still—her heart beating high—and so sure that her instinct was true that she was not even surprised when she heard a voice in the thicket above—a low voice, but one she knew perfectly well:

"I tell you he's a-comin' up the river now. He's a-goin' to stay with ole Ham Blake ter-night over the mountain an' he'll be a-comin' through Hurricane Gap 'bout daylight ter-morrer or next day, shore. He's got a lot o' men, but we can layway 'em in the Gap an' git away all right." It was Tad Dillon speaking—Daws Dillon, his brother, answered:

"I don't want to kill anybody but that damned Chad—Captain Chad *Buford*, he calls hisself."

"Well, we can git him all right. I heerd that they was a-lookin' fer us an' was goin' to ketch us if they could."

"I wish I knowed that was so," said Daws with an oath. "Nary a one of 'em would git away alive if I just knowed it was so. But we'll git *Captain Chad Buford*, shore as hell! You go tell the boys to guard the Gap ter-night. They mought come through afore day." And then the noise of their footsteps faded out of hearing and Melissa rose and sped back to the house.

From behind a clump of bushes above where she had sat, rose the gigantic figure of Rebel Jerry Dillon. He looked after the flying girl with a

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grim smile and then dropped his great bulk down on the bed of moss where he had been listening to the plan of his enemies and kinsmen. Jerry had made many expeditions over from Virginia lately and each time he had gone back with a new notch on the murderous knife that he carried in his belt. He had but two personal enemies alive now—Daws Dillon, who had tried to have him shot, and his own brother, Yankee Jake. This was the second time he had been over for Daws, and after his first trip he had persuaded Dan to ask permission from General Morgan to take a company into Kentucky and destroy Daws and his band, and Morgan had given him leave, for Federals and Confederates were chasing down these guerillas now—sometimes even joining forces to further their common purpose. Jerry had been slipping through the woods after Daws, meaning to crawl close enough to kill him and, perhaps, Tad Dillon, too, if necessary, but after hearing their plan he had let them go, for a bigger chance might be at hand. If Chad Buford was in the mountains looking for Daws, Yankee Jake was with him. If he killed Daws now, Chad and his men would hear of his death and would go back, most likely—and that was the thought that checked his finger on the trigger of his pistol. Another thought now lifted him to his feet with surprising quickness and sent him on a run down the river where his horse was

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hitched in the bushes. He would go over the mountain for Dan. He could lead Dan and his men to Hurricane Gap by daylight. Chad Buford could fight it out with Daws and his gang, and he and Dan would fight it out with the men who won—no matter whether Yankees or guerillas. And a grim smile stayed on Rebel Jerry's face as he climbed.

On the porch of the Turner cabin sat Melissa with her hands clinched and old Jack's head in her lap. There was no use worrying Mother Turner—she feared even to tell her—but what should she do? She might boldly cross the mountain now, for she was known to be a rebel, but the Dillons knowing, too, how close Chad had once been to the Turners might suspect and stop her. No, if she went at all, she must go after nightfall—but how would she get away from Mother Turner, and how could she make her way, undetected, through Hurricane Gap? The cliffs were so steep and close together in one place that she could hardly pass more than forty feet from the road on either side and she could not pass that close to pickets and not be heard. Her brain ached with planning and she was so absorbed as night came on that several times old Mother Turner querulously asked what was ailing her and why she did not pay more heed to her work, and the girl answered her patiently and went on with her plan-

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ning. Before dark, she knew what she would do, and after the old mother was asleep, she rose softly and slipped out the door without awakening even old Jack, and went to the barn, where she got the sheep-bell that old Beelzebub used to wear and with the clapper caught in one hand, to keep the bell from tinkling, she went swiftly down the road toward Hurricane Gap. Several times she had to dart into the bushes while men on horseback rode by her, and once she came near being caught by three men on foot—all hurrying at Daws Dillon's order to the Gap through which she must go. When the road turned from the river, she went slowly along the edge of it, so that if discovered, she could leap with one spring into the bushes. It was raining—a cold drizzle that began to chill her and set her to coughing so that she was half afraid that she might disclose herself. At the mouth of the Gap she saw a fire on one side of the road and could hear talking, but she had no difficulty passing it, on the other side. But on, where the Gap narrowed—there was the trouble. It must have been an hour before midnight when she tremblingly neared the narrow defile. The rain had ceased, and as she crept around a boulder she could see, by the light of the moon between two black clouds, two sentinels beyond. The crisis was at hand now. She slipped to one side of the road, climbed the cliff as high as she could and

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crept about it. She was past one picket now, and in her eagerness one foot slipped and she half fell. She almost held her breath and lay still.

"I hear somethin' up thar in the bresh," shouted the second picket. "Halt!"

Melissa tinkled the sheep-bell and pushed a bush to and fro as though a sheep or a cow might be rubbing itself, and the picket she had passed laughed aloud.

"Goin' to shoot ole Sally Perkins's cow, air you?" he said, jeeringly. "Yes, I heerd her," he added, lying; for, being up all the night before, he had drowsed at his post. A moment later, Melissa moved on, making considerable noise and tinkling her bell constantly. She was near the top now and when she peered out through the bushes, no one was in sight and she leaped into the road and fled down the mountain. At the foot of the spur another ringing cry smote the darkness in front of her:

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"Don't shoot!" she cried, weakly. "It's only me."

"Advance, 'Me,'" said the picket, astonished to hear a woman's voice. And then into the light of his fire stepped a shepherdess with a sheep-bell in her hand, with a beautiful, pale, distressed face, a wet, clinging dress, and masses of yellow hair surging out of the shawl over her head. The

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startled picket dropped the butt of his musket to the ground and stared.

"I want to see Ch—, your captain," she said, timidly.

"All right," said the soldier, courteously. "He's just below there and I guess he's up. We are getting ready to start now. Come along."

"Oh, no!" said Melissa, hurriedly. "I can't go down there." It had just struck her that Chad must not see her; but the picket thought she naturally did not wish to face a lot of soldiers in her bedraggled and torn dress, and he said quickly:

"All right. Give me your message and I'll take it to him." He smiled. "You can wait here and stand guard."

Melissa told him hurriedly how she had come over the mountain and what was going on over there, and the picket with a low whistle started down toward his camp without another word.

Chad could not doubt the accuracy of the information—the picket had names and facts.

"A girl, you say?"

"Yes, sir"—the soldier hesitated—"and a very pretty one, too. She came over the mountain alone and on foot through this darkness. She passed the pickets on the other side—pretending to be a sheep. She had a bell in her hand." Chad smiled—he knew that trick.

"Where is she?"

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"She's standing guard for me."

The picket turned at a gesture from Chad and led the way. They found no Melissa. She had heard Chad's voice and fled up the mountain. Before daybreak she was descending the mountain on the other side, along the same way, tinkling her sheep-bell and creeping past the pickets. It was raining again now and her cold had grown worse. Several times she had to muffle her face into her shawl to keep her cough from betraying her. As she passed the ford below the Turner cabin, she heard the splash of many horses crossing the river and she ran on, frightened and wondering. Before day broke she had slipped into her bed without arousing Mother Turner, and she did not get up that day, but lay ill abed.

The splashing of those many horses was made by Captain Daniel Dean and his men, guided by Rebel Jerry. High on the mountain side they hid their horses in a ravine and crept toward the Gap on foot—so that while Daws with his gang waited for Chad, the rebels lay in the brush waiting for him. Dan was merry over the prospect:

"We will just let them fight it out," he said, "and then we'll dash in and gobble 'em both up. That was a fine scheme of yours, Jerry."

Rebel Jerry smiled: there was one thing he had not told his captain—who those rebels were. Purposely he had kept that fact hidden. He had seen

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Dan purposely refrain from killing Chad Buford once and he feared that Dan might think his brother Harry was among the Yankees. All this Rebel Jerry failed to understand, and he wanted nothing known now that might stay anybody's hand. Dawn broke and nothing happened. Not a shot rang out and only the smoke of the guerillas' fire showed in the peaceful mouth of the Gap. Dan wanted to attack the guerillas, but Jerry persuaded him to wait until he could learn how the land lay, and disappeared in the bushes. At noon he came back.

"The Yankees have found out Daws is thar in the Gap," he said, "an' they are goin' to slip over before day ter-morrer and s'prise *him*. Hit don't make no difference to us, which s'prises which—does it?"

So the rebels kept hid through the day in the bushes on the mountain side, and when Chad slipped through the Gap next morning, before day, and took up the guerilla pickets, Dan had moved into the same Gap from the other side, and was lying in the bushes with his men, near the guerillas' fire, waiting for the Yankees to make their attack. He had not long to wait. At the first white streak of dawn overhead, a shout rang through the woods from the Yankees to the startled guerillas.

"Surrender!" A fusillade followed. Again:

"Surrender!" and there was a short silence,

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broken by low curses from the guerillas, and one stern Yankee voice giving short, quick orders. The guerillas had given up. Rebel Jerry moved restlessly at Dan's side and Dan cautioned him.

"Wait! Let them have time to disarm the prisoners," he whispered.

"Now," he added, a little while later—"creep quietly, boys."

Forward they went like snakes, creeping to the edge of the brush whence they could see the sullen guerillas grouped on one side of the fire—their arms stacked, while a tall figure in blue moved here and there, and gave orders in a voice that all at once seemed strangely familiar to Dan.

"Now, boys," he said, half aloud, "give 'em a volley and charge."

At his word there was a rattling fusillade, and then the rebels leaped from the bushes and dashed on the astonished Yankees and their prisoners. It was pistol to pistol at first and then they closed to knife thrust and musket butt, hand to hand—in a cloud of smoke. At the first fire from the rebels Chad saw his prisoner, Daws Dillon, leap for the stacked arms and disappear. A moment later, as he was emptying his pistol at his charging foes, he felt a bullet clip a lock of hair from the back of his head and he turned to see Daws on the farthest edge of the firelight levelling his pistol for another shot before he ran. Like lightning he

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wheeled and when his finger pulled the trigger, Daws sank limply, his grinning, malignant face sickening as he fell.

The tall fellow in blue snapped his pistol at Dan, and as Dan, whose pistol, too, was empty, sprang forward and closed with him, he heard a triumphant yell behind him and Rebel Jerry's huge figure flashed past him. With the same glance he saw among the Yankees another giant—who looked like another Jerry—saw his face grow ghastly with fear when Jerry's yell rose, and then grow taut with ferocity as he tugged at his sheath to meet the murderous knife flashing toward him. The terrible Dillon twins were come together at last, and Dan shuddered, but he saw no more, for he was busy with the lithe Yankee in whose arms he was closed. As they struggled, Dan tried to get his knife and the Yankee tugged for his second pistol—each claspings the other's wrist. Not a sound did they make nor could either see the other's face, for Dan had his chin in his opponent's breast and was striving to bend him backward. He had clutched the Yankee's right hand, as it went back for his pistol, just as the Yankee had caught his right in front, feeling for his knife. The advantage would have been all Dan's, except that the Yankee suddenly loosed his wrist and gripped him tight about the body in an underhold, so that Dan could not whirl

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him round; but he could twist that wrist and twist it he did, with both hands and all his strength. Once the Yankee gave a smothered groan of pain and Dan heard him grit his teeth to keep it back. The smoke had lifted now, and, when they fell, it was in the light of the fire. The Yankee had thrown him with a knee-trick that Harry used to try on him when they were boys, but something about the Yankee snapped, as they fell, and he groaned aloud. Clutching him by the throat, Dan threw him off—he could get at his knife now.

"Surrender!" he said, hoarsely.

His answer was a convulsive struggle and then the Yankee lay still.

"Surrender!" said Dan again, lifting his knife above the Yankee's breast, "or, damn you, I'll—" The Yankee had turned his face weakly toward the fire, and Dan, with a cry of horror, threw his knife away and sprang to his feet. Straightway the Yankee's closed eyes opened and he smiled faintly.

"Why, Dan, is that you?" he asked. "I thought it would come," he added, quietly, and then Harry Dean lapsed into unconsciousness.

Thus, at its best, this fratricidal war was being fought out that daybreak in one little hollow of the Kentucky mountains and thus, at its worst, it was being fought out in another little hollow scarcely twenty yards away, where the giant twins—Rebel Jerry and Yankee Jake—who did know they were

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brothers, sought each other's lives in mutual misconception and mutual hate.

There were a dozen dead Federals and guerillas around the fire, and among them was Daws Dillon with the pallor of death on his face and the hate that life had written there still clinging to it like a shadow. As Dan bent tenderly over his brother Harry, two soldiers brought in a huge body from the bushes, and he turned to see Rebel Jerry Dillon. There were a half a dozen rents in his uniform and a fearful slash under his chin—but he was breathing still. Chad Buford had escaped, and so had Yankee Jake.

## XXVII

### AT THE HOSPITAL OF MORGAN'S MEN

**I**N May, Grant simply said—Forward! The day he crossed the Rapidan, he said it to Sherman down in Georgia. After the battle of the Wilderness he said it again, and the last brutal resort of hammering down the northern buttress and sea-wall of the rebellion—old Virginia—and Atlanta, the keystone of the Confederate arch, was well under way. Throughout those bloody days Chad was with Grant and Harry Dean was with Sherman on his terrible trisecting march to the sea. For, after the fight between Rebels and Yankees and Daws Dillon's guerilla band, over in Kentucky, Dan, coming back from another raid into the Bluegrass, had found his brother gone. Harry had refused to accept a parole and had escaped. Not a man, Dan was told, fired a shot at him, as he ran. One soldier raised his musket, but Renfrew the Silent struck the muzzle upward.

In September, Atlanta fell and, in that same month, Dan saw his great leader, John Morgan, dead in Tennessee. In December, the Confederacy toppled at the west under Thomas's blows