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IT was strange to Chad that he should be drifting toward a new life down the river which once before had carried him to a new world. The future then was no darker than now, but he could hardly connect himself with the little fellow in coon-skin cap and moccasins who had floated down on a raft so many years ago, when at every turn of the river his eager eyes looked for a new and thrilling mystery.

They talked of the long fight, the two lads, for, in spite of the war-worn look of them, both were still nothing but boys—and they talked with no bitterness of camp life, night attacks, surprises, escapes, imprisonment, incidents of march and battle. Both spoke little of their boyhood days or of the future. The pall of defeat overhung Dan. To him the world seemed to be nearing an end, while to Chad the outlook was what he had known all his life—nothing to begin with and everything to be done. Once only Dan voiced his own trouble:

“What are you going to do, Chad—now that

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this infernal war is over? Going into the regular army?”

“No,” said Chad, decisively. About his own future Dan volunteered nothing—he only turned his head quickly to the passing woods, as though in fear that Chad might ask some similar question, but Chad was silent. And thus they glided between high cliffs and down into the lowlands until at last, through a little gorge between two swelling river hills, Dan’s eye caught sight of an orchard, a leafy woodland, and a pasture of bluegrass. With a cry he raised himself on one elbow.

“Home! I tell you, Chad, we’re getting home!” He closed his eyes and drew the sweet air in as though he were drinking it down like wine. His eyes were sparkling when he opened them again and there was a new color in his face. On they drifted until, toward noon, the black column of smoke that meant the capital loomed against the horizon. There Mrs. Dean was waiting for them, and Chad turned his face aside when the mother took her son in her arms. With a sad smile she held out her hand to Chad.

“You must come home with us,” Mrs. Dean said, with quiet decision.

“Where is Margaret, mother?” Chad almost trembled when he heard the name.

“Margaret couldn’t come. She is not very well and she is taking care of Harry.”

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The very station had tragic memories to Chad. There was the long hill which he had twice climbed—once on a lame foot and once on flying Dixie—past the armory and the graveyard. He had seen enough dead since he peered through those iron gates to fill a dozen graveyards the like in size. Going up in the train, he could see the barn where he had slept in the hayloft the first time he came to the Bluegrass, and the creek-bridge where Major Buford had taken him into his carriage. Major Buford was dead. He had almost died in prison, Mrs. Dean said, and Chad choked and could say nothing. Once, Dan began a series of eager questions about the house and farm, and the servants and the neighbors, but his mother's answers were hesitant and he stopped short. She, too, asked but few questions, and the three were quiet while the train rolled on with little more speed than Chad and Dixie had made on that long ago night-ride to save Dan and Rebel Jerry. About that ride Chad had kept Harry's lips and his own closed, for he wished no such appeal as that to go to Margaret Dean. Margaret was not at the station in Lexington. She was not well, Rufus said; so Chad would not go with them that night, but would come out next day.

"I owe my son's life to you, Captain Buford," said Mrs. Dean, with trembling lip, "and you must make our house your home while you are

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here. I bring that message to you from Harry and Margaret. I know and they know now all you have done for us and all you have tried to do."

Chad could hardly speak his thanks. He would be in the Bluegrass only a few days, he stammered, but he would go out to see them next day. That night he went to the old inn where the Major had taken him to dinner. Next day he hired a horse from the livery stable where he had bought the old brood mare, and early in the afternoon he rode out the broad turnpike in a nervous tumult of feeling that more than once made him halt in the road. He wore his uniform, which was new, and made him uncomfortable—it looked too much like waving a victorious flag in the face of a beaten enemy—but it was the only stitch of clothes he had, and that he might not explain.

It was the first of May. Just eight years before, Chad with a burning heart had watched Richard Hunt gayly dancing with Margaret, while the dead chieftain, Morgan, gayly fiddled for the merry crowd. Now the sun shone as it did then, the birds sang, the wind shook the happy leaves and trembled through the budding heads of bluegrass to show that nature had known no war and that her mood was never other than of hope and peace. But there were no fat cattle browsing in the Dean pastures now, no flocks of Southdown sheep with frisking lambs.

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The worm fences had lost their riders and were broken down here and there. The gate sagged on its hinges; the fences around yard and garden and orchard had known no whitewash for years; the paint on the noble old house was cracked and peeling, the roof of the barn was sunken in, and the cabins of the quarters were closed, for the hand of war, though unclinched, still lay heavy on the home of the Deans. Snowball came to take his horse. He was respectful, but his white teeth did not flash the welcome Chad once had known. Another horse stood at the hitching-post and on it was a cavalry saddle and a rebel army blanket, and Chad did not have to guess whose it might be. From the porch, Dan shouted and came down to meet him, and Harry hurried to the door, followed by Mrs. Dean. Margaret was not to be seen, and Chad was glad—he would have a little more time for self-control. She did not appear even when they were seated in the porch until Dan shouted for her toward the garden; and then looking toward the gate Chad saw her coming up the garden walk bareheaded, dressed in white, with flowers in her hand; and walking by her side, looking into her face and talking earnestly, was Richard Hunt. The sight of him nerved Chad at once to steel. Margaret did not lift her face until she was half-way to the porch, and then she stopped suddenly.

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“Why, there’s Major Buford,” Chad heard her say, and she came on ahead, walking rapidly. Chad felt the blood in his face again, and as he watched Margaret nearing him—pale, sweet, frank, gracious, unconscious—it seemed that he was living over again another scene in his life when he had come from the mountains to live with old Major Buford; and, with a sudden prayer that his past might now be wiped as clean as it was then, he turned from Margaret’s hand-clasp to look into the brave, searching eyes of Richard Hunt and feel his sinewy fingers in a grip that in all frankness told Chad plainly that between them, at least, one war was not quite over yet.

“I am glad to meet you, Major Buford, in these piping times of peace.”

“And I am glad to meet you, General Hunt—only in times of peace,” said Chad, smiling.

The two measured each other swiftly, calmly. Chad had a mighty admiration for Richard Hunt. Here was a man who knew no fight but to the finish, who would die as gamely in a drawing-room as on a battle-field. To think of him—a brigadier-general at twenty-seven, as undaunted, as unbeaten as when he heard the first bullet of the war whistle, and, at that moment, as good an American as Chadwick Buford or any Unionist who had given his life for his cause! Such a foe thrilled Chad, and somehow he felt that Margaret was measur-

ing them as they were measuring each other. Against such a man what chance had he?

He would have been comforted could he have known Richard Hunt's thoughts, for that gentleman had gone back to the picture of a ragged mountain boy in old Major Buford's carriage, one court day long ago, and now he was looking that same lad over from the visor of his cap down his superb length to the heels of his riding-boots. His eyes rested long on Chad's face. The change was incredible, but blood had told. The face was high-bred, clean, frank, nobly handsome; it had strength and dignity, and the scar on his cheek told a story that was as well known to foe as to friend.

"I have been wanting to thank you, not only for trying to keep us out of that infernal prison after the Ohio raid, but for trying to get us out. Harry here told me. That was generous."

"That was nothing," said Chad. "You forget, you could have killed me once and—and you didn't." Margaret was listening eagerly.

"You didn't give me time," laughed General Hunt.

"Oh, yes, I did. I saw you lift your pistol and drop it again. I have never ceased to wonder why you did that."

Richard Hunt laughed. "Perhaps I'm sorry sometimes that I did," he said, with a certain dryness.

"Oh, no, you aren't, General," said Margaret.

Thus they chatted and laughed and joked together above the sombre tide of feeling that showed in the face of each if it reached not his tongue, for, when the war was over, the hatchet in Kentucky was buried at once and buried deep. Son came back to father, brother to brother, neighbor to neighbor; political disabilities were removed and the sundered threads, unravelled by the war, were knitted together fast. That is why the post-bellum terrors of reconstruction were practically unknown in the State. The negroes scattered, to be sure, not from disloyalty so much as from a feverish desire to learn whether they really could come and go as they pleased. When they learned that they were really free, most of them drifted back to the quarters where they were born, and meanwhile the white man's hand that had wielded the sword went just as bravely to the plough, and the work of rebuilding war-shattered ruins began at once. Old Mammy appeared, by and by, shook hands with General Hunt and made Chad a curtsey of rather distant dignity. She had gone into exile with her "chile" and her "ole Mistis" and had come home with them to stay, untempted by the doubtful sweets of freedom. "Old Tom, her husband, had remained with Major Buford, was with him on his deathbed," said Margaret, "and

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was on the place still, too old, he said, to take root elsewhere."

Toward the middle of the afternoon Dan rose and suggested that they take a walk about the place. Margaret had gone in for a moment to attend to some household duty, and as Richard Hunt was going away next day he would stay, he said, with Mrs. Dean, who was tired and could not join them. The three walked toward the dismantled barn where the tournament had taken place and out into the woods. Looking back, Chad saw Margaret and General Hunt going slowly toward the garden, and he knew that some crisis was at hand between the two. He had hard work listening to Dan and Harry as they planned for the future, and recalled to each other and to him the incidents of their boyhood. Harry meant to study law, he said, and practise in Lexington; Dan would stay at home and run the farm. Neither brother mentioned that the old place was heavily mortgaged, but Chad guessed the fact and it made him heart-sick to think of the struggle that was before them and of the privations yet in store for Mrs. Dean and Margaret.

"Why don't you, Chad?"

"Do what?"

"Stay here and study law," Harry smiled.

"We'll go into partnership."

Chad shook his head. "No," he said, deci-

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sively. "I've already made up my mind. I'm going West."

"I'm sorry," said Harry, and no more; he had learned long ago how useless it was to combat any purpose of Chadwick Buford.

General Hunt and Margaret were still away when they got back to the house. In fact, the sun was sinking when they came in from the woods, still walking slowly, General Hunt talking earnestly and Margaret with her hands clasped before her and her eyes on the path. The faces of both looked pale, even that far away, but when they neared the porch, the General was joking and Margaret was smiling, nor was anything perceptible to Chad when he said good-by, except a certain tenderness in his tone and manner toward Margaret, and one fleeting look of distress in her clear eyes. He was on his horse now, and was lifting his cap.

"Good-by, Major," he said. "I'm glad you got through the war alive. Perhaps I'll tell you some day why I didn't shoot you that morning." And then he rode away, a gallant, knightly figure, across the pasture. At the gate he waved his cap and at a gallop was gone.

After supper, a heaven-born chance led Mrs. Dean to stroll out into the lovely night. Margaret rose to go too, and Chad followed. The same chance, perhaps, led old Mammy to come out on

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the porch and call Mrs. Dean back. Chad and Margaret walked on toward the stiles where still hung Margaret's weather-beaten Stars and Bars. The girl smiled and touched the flag.

"That was very nice of you to salute me that morning. I never felt so bitter against Yankees after that day. I'll take it down now," and she detached it and rolled it tenderly about the slender staff.

"That was not my doing," said Chad, "though if I had been Grant, and there with the whole Union army, I would have had it salute you. I was under orders, but I went back for help. May I carry it for you?"

"Yes," said Margaret, handing it to him. Chad had started toward the garden, but Margaret turned him toward the stile and they walked now down through the pasture toward the creek that ran like a wind-shaken ribbon of silver under the moon.

"Won't you tell me something about Major Buford? I've been wanting to ask, but I simply hadn't the heart. Can't we go over there to-night? I want to see the old place, and I must leave to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" said Margaret. "Why—I—I was going to take you over there to-morrow, for I—but, of course, you must go to-night if it is to be your only chance."

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And so, as they walked along, Margaret told Chad of the old Major's last days, after he was released from prison, and came home to die. She went to see him every day, and she was at his bedside when he breathed his last. He had mortgaged his farm to help the Confederate cause and to pay indemnity for a guerilla raid, and Jerome Connors held his notes for large amounts.

"The lawyer told me that he believed some of the notes were forged, but he couldn't prove it. He says it is doubtful if more than the house and a few acres will be left." A light broke in on Chad's brain.

"He told you?"

Margaret blushed. "He left all he had to me," she said, simply.

"I'm so glad," said Chad.

"Except a horse which belongs to you. The old mare is dead."

"Dear old Major!"

At the stone fence Margaret reached for the flag.

"We'll leave it here until we come back," she said, dropping it in a shadow. Somehow the talk of Major Buford seemed to bring them nearer together—so near that once Chad started to call her by her first name and stopped when it had half passed his lips. Margaret smiled.

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"The war is over," she said, and Chad spoke eagerly:

"And you'll call me——"

"Yes, Chad."

The very leaves over Chad's head danced suddenly, and yet the girl was so simple and frank and kind that the springing hope in his breast was as quickly chilled.

"Did he ever speak of me except about business matters?"

"Never at all at first," said Margaret, blushing again incomprehensively, "but he forgave you before he died."

"Thank God for that!"

"And you will see what he did for you—the last thing of his life."

They were crossing the field now.

"I have seen Melissa," said Margaret, suddenly. Chad was so startled that he stopped in the path.

"She came all the way from the mountains to ask if you were dead, and to tell me about—about your mother. She had just learned it, she said, and she did not know that you knew. And I never let her know that I knew, since I supposed you had some reason for not wanting her to know."

"I did," said Chad, sadly, but he did not tell his reason. Melissa would never have learned

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the one thing from him as Margaret would not learn the other now.

"She came on foot to ask about you and to defend you against—against me. And she went back afoot. She disappeared one morning before we got up. She seemed very ill, too, and unhappy. She was coughing all the time, and I wakened one night and heard her sobbing, but she was so sullen and fierce that I was almost afraid of her. Next morning she was gone. I would have taken her part of the way home myself. Poor thing!" Chad was walking with his head bent.

"I'm going down to see her before I go West."

"You are going West—to live?"

"Yes."

They had reached the yard gate now which creaked on rusty hinges when Chad pulled it open. The yard was running wild with plantains, the gravelled walk was overgrown, the house was closed, shuttered, and dark, and the spirit of desolation overhung the place, but the ruin looked gentle in the moonlight. Chad's throat hurt and his eyes filled.

"I want to show you now the last thing he did," said Margaret. Her eyes lighted with tenderness and she led him wondering down through the tangled garden to the old family graveyard.

"Climb over and look, Chad," she said, leaning over the wall.

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There was the grave of the Major's father which he knew so well; next that, to the left, was a new mound under which rested the Major himself. To the right was a stone marked "Chadwick Buford, born in Virginia, 1750, died in Kentucky"—and then another stone marked simply:

Mary Buford.

"He had both brought from the mountains," said Margaret, softly, "and the last time he was out of the house was when he leaned here to watch them buried there. He said there would always be a place next your mother for you. 'Tell the boy that,' he said." Chad put his arms around the tombstone and then sank on one knee by his mother's grave. It was strewn with withered violets.

"You—you did that, Margaret?"

Margaret nodded through her tears.

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The wonder of it! They stood very still, looking for a long time into each other's eyes. Could the veil of the hereafter have been lifted for them at that moment and they have seen themselves walking that same garden path, hand in hand, their faces seamed with age to other eyes, but changed in not a line to them, the vision would not have added a jot to their perfect faith. They

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would have nodded to each other and smiled—"Yes, we know, we know!" The night, the rushing earth, the star-swept spaces of the infinite held no greater wonder than was theirs—they held no wonder at all. The moon shone, that night, for them; the wind whispered, leaves danced, flowers nodded, and crickets chirped from the grass for them; the farthest star kept eternal lids apart just for them and beyond, the Maker himself looked down, that night, just to bless them.

Back they went through the old garden, hand in hand. No caress had ever passed between these two. That any man could ever dare even to dream of touching her sacred lips had been beyond the boy's imaginings—such was the reverence in his love for her—and his very soul shook when, at the gate, Margaret's eyes dropped from his to the sabre cut on his cheek and she suddenly lifted her face.

"I know how you got that, Chad," she said, and with her lips she gently touched the scar. Almost timidly the boy drew her to him. Again her lips were lifted in sweet surrender, and every wound that he had known in his life was healed.

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"I'll show you your horse, Chad."

They did not waken old Tom, but went around to the stable and Chad led out a handsome colt,

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his satiny coat shining in the moonlight like silver. He lifted his proud head, when he saw Margaret, and whinnied.

"He knows his mistress, Margaret—and he's yours."

"Oh, no, Chad."

"Yes," said Chad, "I've still got Dixie."

"Do you still call her Dixie?"

"All through the war."

Homeward they went through the dewy fields.

"I wish I could have seen the Major before he died. If he could only have known how I suffered at causing him so much sorrow. And if you could have known——"

"He did know and so did I—later. All that is over now."

They had reached the stone wall and Chad picked up the flag again.

"This is the only time I have ever carried this flag, unless I—unless it had been captured."

"You had captured it, Chad."

"There?" Chad pointed to the stile and Margaret nodded.

"There—here—everywhere."

Seated on the porch, Mrs. Dean and Harry and Dan saw them coming across the field and Mrs. Dean sighed.

"Father would not say a word against it, mother," said the elder boy, "if he were here."

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"No," said Dan, "not a word."

"Listen, mother," said Harry, and he told the two about Chad's ride for Dan from Frankfort to Lexington. "He asked me not to tell. He did not wish Margaret to know. And listen again, mother. In a skirmish one day we were fighting hand to hand. I saw one man with his pistol levelled at me and another with his sabre lifted on Chad. He saw them both. My pistol was empty, and do you know what he did? He shot the man who was about to shoot me instead of his own assailant. That is how he got that scar. I did tell Margaret that."

"Yes, you must go down in the mountains first," Margaret was saying, "and see if there is anything you can do for the people who were so good to you—and to see Melissa. I am worried about her."

"And then I must come back to you?"

"Yes, you must come back to see me once more, if you can. And then some day you will come again and buy back the Major's farm"—she stopped, blushing. "I think that was his wish, Chad, that you and I—but I would never let him say it."

"And if that should take too long?"

"I will come to you, Chad," said Margaret.

Old Mammy came out on the porch as they were climbing the stile.

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"Ole Miss," she said, indignantly, "my Tom say that he can't get nary a triffin' nigger to come out hyeh to wuk, an' ef that cawnfiel' ain't ploughed mighty soon, it's gwine to bu'n up."

"How many horses are there on the place, Mammy?" asked Dan.

"Hosses!" sniffed the old woman. "They ain't nary a hoss—nothin' but two ole broken-down mules."

"Well, I'll take one and start a plough myself," said Harry.

"And I'll take the other," said Dan.

Mammy groaned.

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And still the wonder of that night to Chad and Margaret!

"It was General Hunt who taught me to understand—and forgive. Do you know what he said? That every man, on both sides, was right—who did his duty."

"God bless him," said Chad.

XXXI

THE WESTWARD WAY

MOTHER TURNER was sitting in the porch with old Jack at her feet when Chad and Dixie came to the gate—her bonnet off, her eyes turned toward the West. The stillness of death lay over the place, and over the strong old face some preternatural sorrow. She did not rise when she saw Chad, she did not speak when he spoke. She turned merely and looked at him with a look of helpless suffering. She knew the question that was on his lips, for she dumbly motioned toward the door and then put her trembling hands on the railing of the porch and bent her face down on them. With sickening fear, Chad stepped on the threshold—cap in hand—and old Jack followed, whimpering. As his eyes grew accustomed to the dark interior, he could see a sheeted form on a bed in the corner and, on the pillow, a white face.

"Melissa!" he called, brokenly. A groan from the porch answered him, and, as Chad dropped to his knees, the old woman sobbed aloud.

In low tones, as though in fear they might dis-