

## THE PARDON OF BECKY DAY

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dows disappeared, and she motioned for the girl to take her weeping enemy away.

She did not open her eyes when the girl came back, but her lips moved and the girl bent above her.

"I know whar Jim is."

From somewhere outside came Dave's cough, and the dying woman turned her head as though she were reminded of something she had quite forgotten. Then, straightway, she forgot again.

The voice of the flood had deepened. A smile came to Becky's lips—a faint, terrible smile of triumph. The girl bent low and, with a startled face, shrank back.

*"An' I'll—git—thar—first."*

With that whisper went Becky's last breath, but the smile was there, even when her lips were cold.

## A CRISIS FOR THE GUARD

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**T**HE tutor was from New England, and he was precisely what passes, with Southerners, as typical. He was thin, he wore spectacles, he talked dreamy abstractions, and he looked clerical. Indeed, his ancestors had been clergymen for generations, and, by nature and principle, he was an apostle of peace and a non-combatant. He had just come to the Gap—a cleft in the Cumberland Mountains—to prepare two young Blue Grass Kentuckians for Harvard. The railroad was still thirty miles away, and he had travelled mule-back through mudholes, on which, as the joke ran, a traveller was supposed to leave his card before he entered and disappeared—that his successor might not un-

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knowingly press him too hard. I do know that, in those mudholes, mules were sometimes drowned. The tutor's gray mule fell over a bank with him, and he would have gone back had he not feared what was behind more than anything that was possible ahead. He was mud-bespattered, sore, tired and dispirited when he reached the Gap, but still plucky and full of business. He wanted to see his pupils at once and arrange his schedule. They came in after supper, and I had to laugh when I saw his mild eyes open. The boys were only fifteen and seventeen, but each had around him a huge revolver and a belt of cartridges, which he unbuckled and laid on the table after shaking hands. The tutor's shining glasses were raised to me for light. I gave it: my brothers had just come in from a little police duty, I explained.

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Everybody was a policeman at the Gap, I added; and, naturally, he still looked puzzled; but he began at once to question the boys about their studies, and, in an hour, he had his daily schedule mapped out and submitted to me. I had to cover my mouth with my hand when I came to one item—"Exercise: a walk of half an hour every Wednesday afternoon between five and six"—for the younger, known since at Harvard as the colonel, and known then at the Gap as the Infant of the Guard, winked most irreverently. As he had just come back from a ten-mile chase down the valley on horseback after a bad butcher, and as either was apt to have a like experience any and every day, I was not afraid they would fail to get exercise enough; so I let that item of the tutor pass.

The tutor slept in my room that night,

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and my four brothers, the eldest of whom was a lieutenant on the police guard, in a room across the hallway. I explained to the tutor that there was much lawlessness in the region; that we "foreigners" were trying to build a town, and that, to ensure law and order, we had all become volunteer policemen. He seemed to think it was most interesting.

About three o'clock in the morning a shrill whistle blew, and, from habit, I sprang out of bed. I had hardly struck the floor when four pairs of heavy boots thundered down the stairs just outside the door, and I heard a gasp from the startled tutor. He was bolt upright in bed, and his face in the moonlight was white with fear.

"Wha—wha—what's that?"

I told him that it was a police whistle and

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that the boys were answering it. Everybody jumped when he heard a whistle, I explained; for nobody in town was permitted to blow one except a policeman. I guessed there would be enough men answering that whistle without me, however, and I slipped back into bed.

"Well," he said; and when the boys lumbered upstairs again and one shouted through the door, "All right!" the tutor said again with emphasis: "Well!"

Next day there was to be a political gathering at the Gap. A Senator was trying to lift himself by his own boot-straps into the Governor's chair. He was going to make a speech, there would be a big and unruly crowd, and it would be a crucial day for the Guard. So, next morning, I suggested to the tutor that it would be unwise for him to begin work with his

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pupils that day, for the reason that he was likely to be greatly interrupted and often. He thought, however, he would like to begin. He did begin, and within half an hour Gordon, the town sergeant, thrust his head inside the door and called the colonel by name.

"Come on," he said; "they're going to try that d—n butcher." And seeing from the tutor's face that he had done something dreadful, he slammed the door in apologetic confusion. The tutor was law-abiding, and it was the law that called the colonel, and so the tutor let him go—nay, went with him and heard the case. The butcher had gone off on another man's horse—the man owed him money, he said, and the only way he could get his money was to take the horse as security. But the sergeant did not know this, and he and the

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colonel rode after him, and the colonel, having the swifter horse, but not having had time to get his own pistol, took the sergeant's and went ahead. He fired quite close to the running butcher twice, and the butcher thought it wise to halt. When he saw the child who had captured him he was speechless, and he got off his horse and cut a big switch to give the colonel a whipping, but the doughty Infant drew down on him again and made him ride, foaming with rage, back to town. The butcher was good-natured at the trial, however, and the tutor heard him say, with a great guffaw:

"An' I *do* believe the d—n little fool would 'a' shot me."

Once more the tutor looked at the pupil whom he was to lead into the classic halls of Harvard, and once more he said:

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"Well!"

People were streaming into town now, and I persuaded the tutor that there was no use for him to begin his studies again. He said he would go fishing down the river and take a swim. He would get back in time to hear the speaking in the afternoon. So I got him a horse, and he came out with a long cane fishing-pole and a pair of saddle-bags. I told him that he must watch the old nag or she would run away with him, particularly when he started homeward. The tutor was not much of a centaur. The horse started as he was throwing the wrong leg over his saddle, and the tutor clamped his rod under one arm, clutching for the reins with both hands and kicking for his stirrups with both feet. The tip of the limber pole beat the horse's flank gently as she struck

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a trot, and smartly as she struck into a lope, and so with arms, feet, saddle-pockets, and fishing-rod flapping towards different points of the compass, the tutor passed out of sight over Poplar Hill on a dead run.

As soon as he could get over a fit of laughter and catch his breath, the colonel asked:

"Do you know what he had in those saddle-pockets?"

"No."

"A bathing suit," he shouted; and he went off again.

Not even in a primeval forest, it seemed, would the modest Puritan bare his body to the mirror of limpid water and the caress of mountain air.

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The trouble had begun early that

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morning, when Gordon, the town sergeant, stepped from his door and started down the street with no little self-satisfaction. He had been arraying himself for a full hour, and after a tub-bath and a shave he stepped, spic and span, into the street with his head steadily held high, except when he bent it to look at the shine of his boots, which was the work of his own hands, and of which he was proud. As a matter of fact, the sergeant felt that he looked just as he particularly wanted to look on that day—his best. Gordon was a native of Wise, but that day a girl was coming from Lee, and he was ready for her.

Opposite the Intermont, a pistol-shot cracked from Cherokee Avenue, and from habit he started that way. Logan, the captain of the Guard—the leading lawyer in that part of the State—was ahead of

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him, however, and he called to Gordon to follow. Gordon ran in the grass along the road to keep those boots out of the dust. Somebody had fired off his pistol for fun and was making tracks for the river. As they pushed the miscreant close, he dashed into the river to wade across. It was a very cold morning, and Gordon prayed that the captain was not going to be such a fool as to follow the fellow across the river. He should have known better.

“In with you,” said the captain quietly, and the mirror of the shining boots was dimmed, and the icy water chilled the sergeant to the knees and made him so mad that he flashed his pistol and told the runaway to halt, which he did in the middle of the stream. It was Richards, the tough from “the Pocket,” and, as he paid his

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fine promptly, they had to let him go. Gordon went back, put on his everyday clothes and got his billy and his whistle and prepared to see the maid from Lee when his duty should let him. As a matter of fact, he saw her but once, and then he was not made happy.

The people had come in rapidly—giants from the Crab Orchard, mountaineers from through the Gap, and from Cracker's Neck and Thunderstruck Knob; Valley people from Little Stone Gap, from the furnace site and Bum Hollow and Wildcat, and people from Lee, from Turkey Cove, and from the Pocket—the much-dreaded Pocket—far down in the river hills.

They came on foot and on horseback, and left their horses in the bushes and crowded the streets and filled the saloon

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of one Jack Woods—who had the cackling laugh of Satan and did not like the Guard, for good reasons, and whose particular pleasure was to persuade some customer to stir up a hornet's nest of trouble. From the saloon the crowd moved up towards the big spring at the foot of Imboden Hill, where, under beautiful trunk-mottled beeches, was built the speakers' platform.

Precisely at three o'clock the local orator, much flurried, rose, ran his hand through his long hair and looked in silence over the crowd.

"Fellow citizens! There's beauty in the stars of night and in the glowin' orb of day. There's beauty in the rollin' meadow and in the quiet stream. There's beauty in the smilin' valley and in the everlastin' hills. Therefore, fellow citizens—THEREFORE, fellow citizens, allow me to intro-

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duce to you the future Governor of these United States—Senator William Bayhونه.” And he sat down with such a beatific smile of self-satisfaction that a fiend would not have had the heart to say he had not won.

Now, there are wandering minstrels yet in the Cumberland Hills. They play fiddles and go about making up “ballets” that involve local history. Sometimes they make a pretty good verse—this, for instance, about a feud:

The death of these two men  
Caused great trouble in our land.  
Caused men to leave their families  
And take the parting hand.  
Retaliation, still at war,  
May never, never cease.  
I would that I could only see  
Our land once more at peace.

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There was a minstrel out in the crowd, and pretty soon he struck up his fiddle and his lay, and he did not exactly sing the virtues of Billy Bayhونه. Evidently some partisan thought he ought, for he smote him on the thigh with the toe of his boot and raised such a stir as a rude stranger might had he smitten a troubadour in Arthur's Court. The crowd thickened and surged, and four of the Guard emerged with the fiddler and his assailant under arrest. It was as though the Valley were a sheet of water straightway and the fiddler the dropping of a stone, for the ripple of mischief started in every direction. It caught two mountaineers on the edge of the crowd, who for no particular reason thumped each other with their huge fists, and were swiftly led away by that silent Guard. The operation of a mysterious

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