



THE DOCKADE-BREAKER

CHAPTER I. CONTINUED.

"You are a spy." "He is not," Miss Clay's voice rang out clear and defiant.

"And are you also?" The young general rose gracefully as he addressed the speaker with curiosity that had some admiration mixed with it.

"I am not, sir. I am a non-combatant, a Virginia lady on her way to her aunt's home, arrested and dragged here without cause or excuse for the outrage."

"The general's eyes again inventoried the speaker with curiosity that had some admiration mixed with it, but he answered, calmly."

"Uml you seem familiar with the articles of war. Did you study them at your aunt's, or in camp. What is your name?"

"Carrie Fauntleroy—my first cousin, sir." Evan broke in, quickly, his eye catching the papers on the table, before the girl could reply.

"Is that true?" The federal general questioned the man, but his gaze never left the face of the woman turned defiantly upon him.

"My cousin is a Virginian, sir," she answered for him, as he had done for her. "We are never ashamed of our names."

A quick glance sent her Evan's thanks that she had caught his meaning—that her own name was too well known along the border to be faked in this manner.

"It is a strange hour and strange company for you to be found in, miss. No, I am not doubting your statement."

"Stopping her intent to speak by a gesture—but shall ask proof for it. Major, question the general who brought them in point of capture and all details. Send the guide to me, sir."

"As the major bustled out of the tent, Miss Clay said, rather anxiously: "I can give you all the details now, sir. The troopers will prove my statement."

"Uml doubtless," the general answered, slowly. "Will they also disclose to me what was in"—he turned on Evan like a flash—"that paper you swallowed?"

"Fine cut, sir," the boy answered, quickly but meekly; and even the gravity of his peril could not restrain the twinkle in his eye as he grimaced with affected nausea.

A challenge without a low reply, and the orderly stood in the entrance, saluting.

"The guide, sir." "Send him in at once."

A tall figure, wrapped in a long cloak, that showed beneath it only muddy riding boots, entered the tent. The plain felt hat he removed showed fine black hair on his broad white forehead.

"MY COUSIN IS A VIRGINIAN, SIR." "But the slim hand that smoothed it carefully betrayed its roots stained by the red track of a recent bullet."

The newcomer saluted, as the general asked, quickly: "Do you know any Fauntleroy hereabouts, sir?"

The guide raised his eyes, meeting full the mingled surprise, contempt and hatred shot into them by the blazing glance of Carolyn Clay. And even her best-trained tact lost itself in the cry: "Peyton Fitzhugh!"

The man's tanned face grew almost purple in its flush, and his eyes fell before hers; but, equally surprised as herself, he exclaimed: "Carolyn Clay!"

venture—the most dangerous, so far, that all her risky essays as a blockade-breaker had forced upon her.

In all her previous tramps along the Potomac trail—as in her "hair-breadth 'scapes" from patrol gunboats in crossing the well-watched river—Miss Clay had escaped capture. Indeed, had the opera-tina been written then, she had certainly gained the sobriquet of "The Mascotte," from her good fortune.

But now, added to the danger of suspicion for a spy was the trial of a darling brother, loved beyond expression of words, whose chances in his struggle for life or death would be lessened by her delay.

In the rapidly-forming coils rose pictures of a narrow cot in a hospital ward, a fever-buried boy tossing restlessly upon it, and a stately form, worn by washing and anxiety to semblance of itself, leaning tenderly over him.

Quickly, unconsciously, memory's camera had changed its slide, and in the coils before her the picture was of a gay ball-room of the previous year. It was New Year night, the roof, frost, and Richmond's best and fairest were there—her bravest and her tenderest.

To a dim nook, a stairway half hidden from the throng, came subdued hum of distant voices, softened music of a waltz. She heard the very notes—low, sweet and tremulous—and her breathing kept time to the strain, Lanner's "Romantic."

Then a groan burst from her quivering lips. The cheeks that glowed—spite of captivity and peril, spite of watching mother and fevered bairn—suddenly paled, and the lips, thin-curved by scorn, pressed tightly on each other.

For now memory whispered of that gray, bitter gloaming at headquarters when the hints of men became certainty. Rumor—coming as the wind comes, whence no man listeth—crept through the camps that he—Peyton Fitzhugh, the pride and boast, though but three months returned from Europe to serve his state—had ridden out of the lines without leave and was heard of no more!

Then—worse than news of capture—of death itself—that he, flower of Virginia chivalry, had deserted.

Oh! the shame, the hidden horror of it! None dreamed of his plight; he, of her half-plighted troth; but Carolyn Clay came of a line to whom their own disapproval was keenest of all reproach.

And her heart hardened itself, even as Pharaoh's of old, against the man who had betrayed her—worse, himself—worst of all, his country!

Nor was room left for doubt. Rumors, strange doubts, crept in at first, then came stories of disloyal work with raiding federals; and, last, Capt. Stuart reported that, riding with a gay party from a farmhouse frolic, he himself had seen the traitor by the federal officer who had ambushed them.

Charlton had fired, in his flight, and saw the tall deserter reel in his saddle, blood streaming from his brow, as his Kentucky hunter cleared the road and disappeared. And when this formal report was made at headquarters, with name and date given, the fair, frank face of Gen. Stuart had grown black as night.

Twice he advanced on Charlton, ready to speak. Twice, by supreme effort, he controlled himself, striking his fist upon the table at last, and thundering out: "From this hour, let no man dare to breathe the name of Peyton Fitzhugh in my command! Gentlemen, so instruct your troops. Remember, this is not a request, but an order. See that it is obeyed!"

So the grave of oblivion had closed over the memory of him who had been Stuart's chosen soldier, his knight-exemplar. For Job Stuart's word was law, sealed by the love of his men; and for months Peyton Fitzhugh had been as dead to his old comrades as though his body actually festered in the grave, with the stink of superstition driven through it.

Thus the fair girl sat and thought the night away, its minutes gliding swiftly on, as though her fancies had been sweet; the snow falling without, faster, deeper, more silently; the thud of the sentry's footfall less and less distinct.

And the fire-flame flickered, grew dull, the brush-branches falling into coals, fast graying into ash. But she never moved, only the change of feeling over her features telling that she still walked and thought and suffered, even while the fertile brain formed plan after plan for escape, each quick dismissed as hopeless.

Out in the dim, misty edge of the snowdrifts, cut by a clump of trees some dozen yards away from the hut, a shadow lurked. Once—again it moved, dim, noiseless, flitting as a ghost. Then, as the sentry turned away, beating his arms and shifting his carbine to keep down the snow-crump, the shadow glided forth into the hazy light. Swift, noiseless, direct it sped upon the trooper's track. Nearer it drew—nearer still; a sudden spring, and an iron arm had encircled his throat, a sudden wrench had torn the carbine from his grasp.

Deadly still, but in deadly strain, the two strong men tugged some seconds. Then the shadow's arm relaxed; the trooper—limp, inert, helpless—slid from that death-like grip and sank motionless upon the snow.

The hinges of the crazy old door creaked ominously, as Carolyn Clay turned her head. An instant later she stood erect, defiant, as the smoldering

CHAPTER IV. ACCUSATION. The snowflakes sifted down noiselessly but larger and faster; the tread of the sentry was softened almost into silence; and the fire, now crackling merrily on the old hearth, whirled the sparks up the cracked chimney in dizzy dance.

Carolyn Clay sat like a statue, her chin resting on her hand, and her face, now pale, swept by light or shadow, as busy memory sent each from her brain.

Then the voice died away on the night wind, leaving the snow-muffled tramp of the sentry for sole companion to the girl's thoughts.

to hollow she scarce recalled it. "Betray yourself by any noise, and we both are lost. I come." "Fitzhugh! leave me this instant, or I call the guard!" She drew up to her full height, pointing to the door with arm-sweep of a queen.

"Your very presence would be insult to any Virginian woman; to me it is disgrace!" "Listen!" the man answered, in a hoarse whisper. "Think what you will, but, for God's sake, hear me. I have just left the general. He is angered, vengeful. He knows all—your real name, your attachment to Stuart, your mission to the river—"

"And you told him?" The scorn in her voice was infinite. "You?" "I come to save you," he answered, rapidly, the great effort to be calm only betrayed by heaving chest, and nails that dug into his clinched hands.

"Vilify, despise me as you must in thought, forget no more than men like me. Then I swear to serve you to the death. Stop! I know what you would say; the gulf between us—the shame—the horror! Oh, God! Carolyn, do not stop for that! You life—your honor—my worthless life not counted—all rest on one single instant now! Come; you are free!"

"Something in the strong, low-spoken words, a will hers could not combat, forced the girl to listen, even while she shuddered and shook her head. Then, as the man eagerly, pleadingly, held out his hand, she drew back, her old self came more."

"Keep back!" she cried, with flashing eyes. "You are lying to me—lying for your revenge! He who would betray his country would not scruple to betray a helpless woman."

A shadow of agony unspeakable swept the man's face, and his lips opened as if to speak. But a mighty effort closed them again; and he answered only with pleading gesture to the door.

"Leave me!" the woman said, low but imperiously. "Go! or I call the guard!" "Bitter, hard as you are," the man answered, calmly, but with laboring breast, "your pride will ruin all. Miss Clay, by every memory of the past—by the grave of my dead mother—I swear I speak the truth. In the cope render stands my horse. The sentry is—powerless. An hour's ride brings you to roads you know; sunrise sees you safe with confederate cavalry. By my soul, I swear I speak only truth."

"And did I trust you?" "Yes, I know," he interrupted, eagerly, almost happily. "If you do, it is not that you hate—despite me less, but that you must use such vile means for the cause! Will you come?"

Again he extended his hand, entreating. Again the woman drew back with a shudder. "Oh, God! Dare I trust this man?" burst from her lips in half sob.

"You can!" he whispered, eagerly. "You can trust me as you could Evan, for your own sake—for your cause—for little Fairfax!"

"Yes, I know," he hesitated an instant, adding, almost fiercely: "It is my business—the traitor—to know all. Poor little Fairfax"—again his voice softened to infinite tenderness—"he will die—you will murder him—unless you use these means to save. An hour's ride, and you are free, safe among friends."

With something like a sob he finished, raising his hand to push the damp hair back from his forehead. The embers flickered into blaze again, throwing full light upon his face, and the woman,—hesitant till then—again drew back, shuddering.

"An omen!" she cried. "That scar—Cain's brand upon your forehead—warns me not to trust the traitor!"

He stared at her wondering. Then she answered to the look, "I too know all—the swift confederate brand upon you—Capt. Charlton's bullet marked—"

A great amazement made his face blank an instant. Then the name passed his lips, low, vengeful as a curse. His breast rose and fell, as he dashed his hat to his head, striding one step towards her.

"Obstinate, relentless!" he said, rapidly, in hollow voice. "Will you prove selfish as well? Carolyn Clay, I have said what man dares say. Did I say one word more,—did I criticize you,—then I should despise myself as you despise me! I have solemnly sworn to save you, at risk of all that is left to me,—at risk of losing what a girl like you could never dream! A moment more, the relief comes, and all is lost; for I swear I will leave this but alone! No, do not answer; there is no time. If your own honor is risked,—if your mother's heart is broken,—if little Fairfax dies for want of remedies his piteous sister might have won him,—then I call God to witness that the sin is on your head!"

The woman's bosom rose and fell; words rushing to her lips died upon them; she heard her own heart beating thunderous in her throat.

"Come! For the sake of all dear to you,—cause, mother, brother,—come!" the man pleaded. "Vile, despicable as I am in your eyes, let me alone in part, by saving you—and Fairfax."

The sob so close to Carolyn Clay's lips burst through them. A great joy gleamed in the deep eyes of the traitor Virginian; and again—with observation piteous in its meekness—he held out his hand.

With bowed head, but quick gesture of dissent, the woman withdrew her own hand, half extended to take it; but she pointed to the door, without a word.

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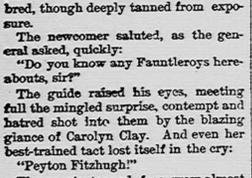
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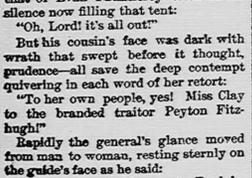
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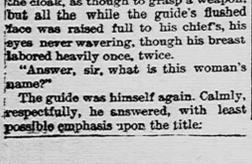
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