

CAVALRY CURT;

OR,
The Wizard Scout of the Army.

By G. WALDO BROWNE,

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"HOLD UP THERE, YOU YANKEE DEVIL! WILL YOU SURRENDER!" SHOUTED THE REBEL LEADER. "NEVER!" CRIED CAVALRY CURT, DASHING MADLY ON.

CAVALRY CURT;
—OR,—
THE WIZARD OF THE ARMY.

BY G. WALDO BROWNE.

CHAPTER I.

RUNNING THE GANTLET.

“Halt! who comes there?”

Time: Daybreak on the morning of May 6th, 1864.

Scene: A wild, broken area of country in northern Georgia.

Actors: In the foreground, a horseman and a drowsy sentinel roused to a sense of his duty by the sound of the approaching rider; in the background, a score or more of Confederate cavalry—men springing from their blankets at the warning of danger.

A rifle had sprung to the shoulder of the startled sentry, and the sharp click of a lock followed his ringing challenge.

The foam-flecked steed of the on-comer was hurled back upon its haunches by the iron hold laid upon its bit.

“Who comes there?” repeated the ominous tone of the man in gray.

“A friend to the loyal,” answered the horseman.

“Advance, friend, and give the countersign.”

“Freedom!”

As the single word left the stranger’s lips, he plunged the rowels deep into his horse’s quivering flank, when like an arrow shot from a bow he bounded forward.

The movement was so sudden that before the surprised sentry could discharge his weapon the rider was upon him.

The report of his rifle followed, but the bullet flew wide of its mark, and he was hurled to the earth.

“On, Wildbird, on!” cried the reckless rider, his words drowned by the sounds of his flying steed’s iron heel.

The amazed cavalymen had gained their feet.

“Stop him, boys!” cried their leader. “’Tis one of Sherman’s scouts!”

The valley was narrow here.

Upon the right, looking south, rose abruptly the rugged heights.

On the left, a spur of the mountain range had a more gradual ascent.

The escaping horseman was forced to pause within a short distance of his enemies—so near in fact that his white face shone plainly in the starlight.

“Fire!” rang out the cavalry chief’s wild command.

A volley of bullets whistled around the fugitive’s head.

He was seen to reel in his saddle, but his flight was unchecked.

“S’ death! there he goes!” exclaimed the Confederate leader. “Quick! follow me!”

As one the twenty men sprang forward to intercept the fugitive’s flight.

Owing to a curve in the valley the horseman could not pursue a straight course.

Thus at the moment when his escape seemed certain he found his retreat cut off.

He was hemmed in.

As yet he had not fired a shot.

His assailants were now so close upon him that his rifle was useless save as a club.

If he realized his hopeless situation he did not hesitate in his headlong course.

“On, Wildbird, on!”

Like a Centaur he swept into the midst of his foes.

Some were hurled right and left.

The foremost seized the bridle of the plunging horse.

“Hold up there, you Yankee devil!”

“Never!” rang out the sharp retort, and the other was felled to the earth.

“On, Wildbird, on!”

The path was blocked.

In vain the noble brute struggled to free himself.

Three of the sentinels were clinging to its bridle and the plunging steed was stopped.

Others of the assailants were trying to pull the rider from his seat.

A few shots were fired, but the fight had come to such close quarters that firearms were of little use.

The stranger's rifle had been hurled from his grasp.

He felt himself borne down, and for a moment his struggles ceased.

"Will you surrender?" gritted the leader.

"Never!"

"On, Wildbird, on!"

Suddenly, with a herculean effort, the horseman freed his right arm.

An instant later a knife flashed in his hand.

Descrying a circle in the air it descended with lightning-like rapidity, severing at a single stroke the horse's bridle.

At the same time the assailants staggered back, leaving the wounded and maddened steed free.

With a snort of defiance it bounded forward sending the baffled men right and left.

Before they could rally, the dashing scout had cleared them.

A few shots were fired, but none seemed to take effect.

As their yells of rage rang on the air, the fugitive disappeared down the valley.

"That's a pretty go!" muttered the leader of the discomfited gang. "I should rather have lost my right arm than that he should have escaped."

"Did you recognize him, captain?" asked a tall, flaxened-hair soldier.

"He is Cavalry Curt."

"Not Phil Kearney's scout?"

"The same. I heard at headquarters yesterday that he was in these regions. His presence means us mischief."

"And his escape something worse."

"But he must not escape."

"Quick, into the saddle. We must follow him."

Three of the party were injured so that they could not join in the pursuit, and were forced to remain behind.

The others vaulted into the saddle and a few minutes later were following as rapidly as the country would permit on the trail of the fugitive.

He had only a slight start of them and they felt confident of quickly overtaking and capturing him.

In the very heart of the enemy's country his escape indeed seemed impossible.

CHAPTER II.

THE FUGITIVE SCOUT.

“Look, Mara! Do my old eyes deceive me, or is that a horseman?”

“Where, grandpa?”

“Crossing the ridge yonder.”

They presented a striking picture—one bowed beneath the weight of four-score years, his countenance shrunk and wrinkled, his long, thin lock glistening in the sunlight with the frosts of time; the other just budding into womanhood, fair as a poet’s dream, with hair that vied with the gold of the sun and eyes of a heavenly blue.

She was leaning gently on the arm of her aged companion as they stood in the doorway of their southern home, gazing upon the surrounding landscape, until his eye had caught sight of an object in the distance which had startled the foregoing dialogue.

“I see him, grandpa!” she exclaimed, as her gaze followed the direction he pointed out.

“He seems to be coming this way, Mara. Who can it be?”

“I cannot tell, grandpa. Oh, in these terrible times I tremble lest every comer be a foe.”

“Nay, child; I think we have nothing to fear. Ah, he heads more to the south. He is not coming here.”

The maiden drew a breath of relief, and as the strange rider disappeared from sight a minute later, she said:

“He is gone. I am so glad, too. But, grandpa, have you forgotten that you were to go to Hammond’s for me? You will have to start at once, while I shall have to look after my work.”

“Yes, yes, Mara, my child. But hark! Dinah is calling for you now. I never saw such a troublesome nigger.”

With the words he went into the house, leaving her still standing in the doorway.

She was about to follow her grandparent, when a moving object in the distance caught her gaze.

It looked like a man moving at the top of his speed.

“Who can it be?” she said, speaking aloud. “He is coming this way, too.”

Not a little surprised and anxious she continued to watch and wait.

“It must be the horseman grandpa and I saw on the ridge,” she mused. “And he is certainly coming here. I suppose I ought to rouse the folks, but little good that will do. Poor old grandpa is our only protection.”

The approach of the stranger was no longer a matter of doubt.

In a few minutes he was within plain view.

The maiden saw that he was young—not more than twenty-one or twenty-two. He was handsome, too. Quite tall, broad-shouldered and with a countenance that Apollo might have envied.

But there was a haggard look upon his face, and he carried his left arm in a sling. His step, too, seemed uneasy and she saw that he had gone about as far as nature would permit him.

“A northern man—an accursed Yankee!” she exclaimed under her breath, somewhat fiercely.

No one else had appeared in sight as far as she could see.

“Help, fair lady!” cried the wounded stranger, when he had come within a short distance. “I can go no further!”

She quickly sprang to his side and kindly lent her aid to his falling strength.

With her assistance he reached the doorway, where he sank upon the threshold pale and faint.

“Let me get you a glass of wine,” she said, disappearing into the house.

Gone but a minute, she placed the cordial to his lips, when he drank a strong draught.

Revived by its potent power he started up to look wildly around.

“Do you see them?” he asked, huskily.

“Who?” she questioned in surprise.

"A body of horsemen. I had a narrow escape from them. My horse was shot and after running until nearly exhausted I saw your house. I had barely strength to get here. I trust you will befriend me," and his dark eyes were turned toward her in pleading more eloquent than words.

Her eyes fell before his gaze.

"You are a Yankee!" she exclaimed in confusion.

"Yes," he answered frankly. "I am one of Sherman's scouts."

A shadow fell upon her fair countenance.

"We are rebels, here!" she faltered. "I have a brother in Johnston's army."

It was his turn to look dismayed.

"Pardon me, I could go no further. I——"

"Never mind; you seem like an honest man, though one of Abe Lincoln's hirelings. You can rest here until you regain your strength."

"Thank you. I will not stop long, for it would not be well for you to have them find me here."

"They may not come this way. Do you know whose command it was?"

"It was led by Captain Dermot."

She turned pale as he uttered the name.

"He is a bad man. But you are wounded. Forgive me for not thinking of it before."

"I do not think it is anything serious. I bandaged it so as to stop somewhat the flow of blood. It is nothing," and he smiled faintly.

"But I must insist upon seeing that it is properly cared for with your permission. I am quite a surgeon."

"Your countenance seems very familiar to me, but it can't be that we have met before."

"No; our name is Morland."

"Morland!" he repeated, excitedly. "Then you are Mara Morland?"

She started with wonder as he mentioned her name.

"Forgive me," he hastened to say, "but I have recognized you from your portrait which I have seen many times. You have a brother Harry."

"Yes; but he is in the army now."

"He and I were chums at college."

"And you are Curtis Remington?"

"The same. This is a glad surprise to me. I little dreamed of meeting you."

"I wish that Harry were here. He used to speak of you often, and he told me how you once saved his life. It seems like meeting an old friend."

"Thank you. So Harry is in the army. I have not heard from him since we left college. The war broke out soon after and I enlisted at once."

"I shall be glad when this cruel war is over," she exclaimed with a shudder. "But look! there is a body of horsemen coming this way!"

"It is Captain Dermot's company!" declared Curtis Remington. "Can it be possible they have tracked me here?"

"They are coming directly this way. They are riding fast, too."

"Then I must leave you at once. Many thanks for your kindness. Ah," he added, suppressing a groan as he staggered to his feet, "my race is almost run."

CHAPTER III.

TRACKED.

"You cannot—you must not go!" she cried, excitedly. "You will fare no worse by staying here."

"But captivity means death," he declared, quickly; "and I prefer to die as becomes a soldier. I thank you, but——"

"Surely they will not kill you."

"I shall be shot as a spy!"

"Not if I can save you. What can I do? Oh, I have it; I will secrete you where they cannot find you. Follow me."

"It will imperil your own life. I can not do it."

"No—no! Come, quick! See! they are almost here," and she caught him excitedly by the arm.

Forgetting his wounds he followed her up the stairs.

Reaching the hall she led the way into one of the adjoining apartments.

"Where can you hide?" she said. "In that trunk. Will that do?"

He shook his head.

At the same time he glanced around the room.

The walls were sheathed with boards. Some wearing apparel was hanging in one corner: otherwise they were bare.

"If I could get off one of those boards."

She comprehended his meaning.

"One of them is loose," she replied. "Grandpa promised to nail it on this morning."

While speaking she began to remove one of the boards that helped to form the partition.

"See! there is room for you to stand in and they will never think of looking there."

"But what——"

"Don't hesitate. I hear them in the yard. We have no time to lose. Go in there and leave the rest to me."

He could do no better.

"Have good courage," she said softly, "and I will answer for your safety."

Before he could reply she had replaced the board.

She had barely time to hang the garments over the place, when a loud thumping was heard at the door.

Overcoming her fears as much as possible, she hastily descended the stairs.

Captain Dermot and his squad were at the door.

"Hilloa there!" cried the Confederate leader. "I should think you were all dead or run away."

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