

MY CAPTIVE.

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"The Sun of Saratoga," Etc.

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CHAPTER I.

A TRYING SITUATION.

I looked at the prisoner, and I was vexed by doubt. With a battle on one side of him and a woman on the other what is a man to do? She returned my gaze with great, pure eyes, which seemed to say I was a villain, a monster, yet I had been doing my exact duty, that of a faithful soldier in the cause of the Continental congress and freedom, while she, a woman, a girl, had presumed to turn from the things for which God had intended her and to meddle with war. I was more than vexed—I was angry, angry at her for attempting such a task and angry at myself for being forced into a situation so full of troubles.

On the right, in the fringe of woods a quarter of a mile away, the last rifle shot had been fired, and its echo was speeding across the far hills. The powder flashed no more, and the smoke rose in lazy coils over the ground on which men had fought and some had died. The victors, the captured detail with them, were riding away. I almost fancied I could hear the beat of their horses' hoofs, and the dead, I knew, lay with their faces upturned to the sun, waiting there until the last trumpet called them to rise again. And here was I, an atom, left in the drift of the armies, out off from my comrades and alone with this girl.

The horses shifted about uneasily, stamped their feet, and once more raised his head and neighed, as if in truth he heard the beating hoofs of the galloping detachment. He knew that his comrades, too, were leaving him, though I cannot say that it was a desertion intended by either horse or man.

The girl's look of reproach turned to one of inquiry. She sat on a log, her little riding whip hanging idly in her hand. For the first time I took note of her face—the delicate but firm molding of each feature; the clear depths of her dark, blue eyes; the bronze gold of her hair, clustering in tiny curls around her forehead; the roused of her cheeks, like a flush; her lithe, strong, young figure. Why is it that when God wishes to make women especially wicked and troublesome he makes them beautiful?

"Well, you rebel," she said, "when do you purpose to set me free?"

"When you give your word of honor that you will tell Cornwallis nothing about the strength of Morgan's forces and our present movements."

"That I will not do."

"Then you remain my prisoner."

Yet I would have been a fool even to have taken her word of honor. What woman has any regard for the truth in military matters? If she could find a chance, she would certainly give information that would bring Cornwallis, as well as Tarleton, on Morgan.

"I think that it is enough for Englishmen themselves to fight us without sending their daughters against us," I said.

"My father did not send me," she said quickly. "I came of my own accord."

"So much the worse," I replied.

But nothing was to be gained by standing there and talking. Besides, it is never well for a soldier to dispute with his prisoner. It argues an insufficiency for his position. A captor should bear himself with dignity and reserve. I would show my quality.

I untied the horses and led them to the log on which she was sitting.

"Get up!" I said curtly and in a tone of command.

The natural rose flush of her cheeks deepened a little.

"You speak as if you were my master," she said.

"That is just what I am—for the present," I replied. "Mount your horse at once."

She gave me a sideways look from eyes that flashed, but she stood upon the log.

"This log is too low, and the saddle is too high," she said.

I stepped forward and held out my hand to assist her.

"Don't touch me, you rebel!" she cried and leaped lightly into the saddle. I felt hurt.

"I wish you wouldn't call me a rebel," I said.

"Why?"

"It's impolite."

I believe I swore. I was angry and alarmed, too, for this girl, with her messages and accurate news about us, was a formidable enemy, escaped, and might cause the destruction of the entire army of the south and the loss of all the southern colonies. I drew a pistol, it being my idea to kill the horse, but it was a shot that I could not risk. I thrust the pistol back in my pocket and ran after my horse. He was 30 or 40 yards away, half mad with rage and pain, his bridle swinging beside him.

I am a very good runner, but I do not claim to be as swift as a horse. Nevertheless I made speed as I ran after him, and I whistled and shouted with a vigor that must have convinced him of my intentions. I looked back once, and the girl and the horse she rode were growing smaller as they sped over the desolate and unfenced fields. My need of a horse, too, was growing more pressing. Mounted, there was hope; afoot, there was none.

I whistled all the calls that a friendly and well-trained horse should know and meantime did not neglect to run after him with the best speed that I could command. Presently he seemed to understand and to remember that I was not responsible for the blow. He slackened his pace, looked back over his shoulder at me and whinnied. I whistled encouragingly, he whinnied again, and, remembering who I was, his best friend, came to a full stop, for he was a most intelligent horse. In a half a minute I overtook him, leaped into the saddle and turned his head the other way.

"Now, old horse," I cried, "you can gallop, but you gallop my way."

I wore my spurs, and I gave him a touch of the steel. That was enough, for he was always ambitious and proud of his speed, and away we flew over the fields after the disappearing girl. She was a full quarter of a mile away, and her figure was growing dim on the horizon. Another quarter of a mile and she would be in the woods, where the concealment of the trees would enable her to elude my pursuit. Moreover, these English girls are often daring horsewomen, and even at the distance I could see that she rode like a trooper. But I knew the country, and she did not, and I hoped to secure from it some chance that would enable me to overtake her.

I encouraged my horse. I did more than encourage—I appealed to his pride and his sense of gratitude. I reminded him how I had ridden him all the way from the Hudson when I came south with Greene, how I had tended him and cared for him and fed him, often when I was compelled to go hungry myself. I appealed to him now not to let that girl escape when so much depended on her capture, when I would be eternally disgraced, and he with me, if we permitted ourselves to be tricked and outwitted at such a time by one red cheeked English girl.

He was a sensible horse, and he understood. He said nothing, not even a little snort, but his stride lengthened, and the swift and regular beat of his hoofs on the turf was music.

"Good horse, Old Put, good lad!" I said. I had named him Put after Old Put, the famous old Connecticut general, because he was so reliable and steady. He shook his ears slightly as a sign that he would do his best for me, having no time to say more, and he ran a little faster. I kept a sharp watch for stones and holes in the ground, having no mind to risk a fall which might ruin all, and nursed my comrade's strength, for on land as well as sea a stern chase is a long one.

The figure of the girl and the horse she rode was growing larger, good proof that I was gaining, which was not enough, however, for I might continue to gain, and yet she could elude me in the woods unless I was close upon her when she reached them. Her long hair had fallen down and was streaming behind her like a ribbon of spray with the sunshine on it, but I felt like giving that yellow hair a jerk just then could I have put my hands upon it.

"Steady, Put!" I said to my faithful comrade. "Do you see that girl with the yellow hair? Yes? Well, note the horse that she is riding, a common troop horse, clumsy, ill bred, no pedigree. Are you going to let yourself be beaten by him?"

His ears wagged violently, and he ran a foot to the second faster. We struck a piece of beautiful turf, evidently an old field left to itself until it could recover its fertility, and with the soft grass deadening and easing his footsteps Old Put raced for life. I could almost count the yards that we gained, and still she was not in the forest. She had not looked back until then, and it was a hasty glance, followed by a quick lashing of her mount. I judged that she, too, had noticed the gain and would now be unmerciful to her horse. I was reluctant, willing to boast of it, and I shared my feelings with Old Put.

"Notice that yellow haired girl again, Put," I said. "When we catch her this time, we will take care that she does not serve us such a trick again. If we cannot trust an Englishman, Put, how on earth can we put any faith in an English woman?"

Put had received a slight slash once from the saber of an Englishman who had offered to surrender to me and then tried to back out of it, and he knew what I meant. For the first time he uttered a slight snort, called one new muscle into play, and we steadily shortened the distance between us and the girl.

She would have got into the wood a few moments later, but she abruptly reined in her horse, turned him half about and galloped off to the left. I guessed the trouble at once. The heavy rains often wash great gullies in our South Carolina soil, and a kind providence, wishing to oblige me, had placed one of these in her way. It was equal to a gain of 200 feet without an effort, and I turned Old Put at once into the course she was taking.

"Don't you see, Put," I said, "that the Lord is on our side and she and that burnt brown cob of hers that has

passed most of his life hitched to a sutler's wagon will be delivered into our hands?"

Old Put fairly neighed, his first real expression of triumph. He was as sure of the victory now as I was, and I had confidence in the judgment of my old comrade.

"Stop, stop!" I shouted to the girl. "If you don't stop, I'll shoot!"

I had a long barreled horse pistol, which I had drawn and was flourishing magnificently. I was within hearing though not shooting range, and I trusted that I would be able to frighten her into yielding.

But she did not stop. She had worn her whip into shreds, and thin red streams of blood zigzagged across the horse's sides, but she pounded on with the stump. I felt a genuine pity for her horse, back though he was, but none for her.

CHAPTER II.

KEEPING A PRISONER.

No more gullies thrust themselves across the way, and she was within 20 feet of the wood. She took another hurried look at me, and seeing my rapid gain alarm appeared on her face. She drew a little toy pistol from the cloak she wore and leveled it at me, or at least that seemed to be her intention. I call it a toy pistol, because I, a full grown soldier, would have felt deep shame had I been caught with such a weapon in my possession. She pulled the trigger, and the bullet out the uncomplaining air somewhere, but not in my neighborhood. This bombardment cost her at least 20 feet of gain, but she thrust the terrible weapon back in her cloak and galloped on, with Old Put thundering at her heels. Then she was into the wood, and I was not far behind, shouting to her to stop; that I would surely overtake her and she was merely wasting the breath of both our horses and our own. Still she paid no heed, guiding her horse between the trees and through the bushes with considerable skill.

But, seeing the wood thicken presently, I was tempted to laugh. It was obvious now that the end of the race had come and I was the winner. The wood became so dense, the bushes clustering in thickets and the vines interlacing from tree to tree, that it formed an impenetrable wall. What I had feared would help her had been my best ally.

She stopped short and sat stiffly on her horse, her back turned to me. I wondered if she would draw out that amazing pistol again and threaten me with it, but she made no such attempt, evidently having arrived at wisdom at last. She dropped the stump of her switch on the ground and kept the back of her head toward me. Some beams of sunshine came through the tall trees and gleamed across the long curls of tawny gold, tingling them for the moment as if with fire.

I rode up by her side, and then, as she seemed to reprove me, I asked Old Put to take me around in front of her. There I could see her face. It was pale, sad and reproachful, and a tear ran down either cheek. For the moment I felt a little pity for her despite her perverse nature and all the trouble she had given me.

"I am sorry I have to do this," I said. "Sorry for what?" she asked.

I said that I had made a mistake. One should always be polite to a woman, but never apologetic.

"That I had to overtake you," I said. "Yours is the better horse," she said, wiping away the tears with an angry little brush of the hand. "I like to ride, and I always enjoy a good race. That was the reason I challenged you to it, though I did not know you had such a good horse."

This was a new view of the case, but I had a thought, or, rather, a reflection. "It was a good race," I said, "but wasn't that a false start?"

"How so?"

"Didn't you take an advantage?"

"I was entitled to it. I am a woman."

"So women expect to carry that rule even into warfare?"

"Certainly."

I was glad that I had never been forced to wage war with a woman before and hoped never to meet the necessity again. One likes to stick to the rules in military matters, and then he has some idea what to expect.

"The horses are very tired," I said. "They look like it," said she.

The poor animals were panting, and their coats were damp. I took the reins of her horse from her hand and held them firmly in mine.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"I think I'd better hold the reins of both," I said. "Will you please dismount?"

I set her a good example by jumping down myself. She could not say that the prisoner was compelled to walk while the captor rode. I stepped forward to assist her, but again she refused my help and sprang to the ground unassisted.

Old Put gazed angrily at the girl who had struck him. Then he snorted with triumph and looked contemptuously at the horse at his side. The latter seemed to be ashamed of himself, and his attitude was apologetic, but he had done his best and therefore should not have been blamed.

"Come," I said, "we will get out of this wood and walk back across the fields. Walk by my side. I will watch you, as I do not want any more treachery."

I spoke with great sternness, as the mite of pity I felt when I saw the tears had gone. She obeyed with surprising meekness and walked beside me, while I led the horses, holding both bridles in one hand. I was glad that I had been so sharp with her, and I saw now it was the proper way with rebellious women. A man has only to show toward them a stern, unyielding temper, and they submit at once. She was crushed, and again that mite of pity rose up in my breast, for nearly always

we feel a trace of sympathy for those whom we have vanquished.

Her head drooped, there was a faint appeal in her eyes, and her walk showed weariness. She seemed to have forgotten that her hair was loose down her back, for she let it hang in long curls of gold, burnished where the sunshine fell upon it, dark in the shadow.

The yellow of the sun was deepening into red, a sign that the afternoon was waning, and I was anxious about the future, for which, like a good soldier, I felt it my duty to provide. She must have seen the care in my face, for she asked:

"Are you thinking how we shall reach General Morgan?"

"General Morgan or some one else."

"Is it far to his camp?"

"I cannot say. I do not know where he is. The American camp just now is of a shifting character."

"To keep out of Tarleton's way, I suppose?"

"Either that or to find him."

Then she seemed to repent of her gibe at our running away from the British.

"But General Morgan is a brave man, I have heard," she said.

That warmed my heart.

"He is a brave man," I said, "and, what is more, he is a fine soldier and general."

"What a pity he is not on the right side!"

"Let's not quarrel about that again."

I thought I could afford to be generous. My situation was so superior to hers.

After that we walked along in silence for several minutes. The red tint of the sun deepened; faint shadows appeared in the blue velvet of the sky.

"I want to ask you one question," she said presently.

"There is nothing to prevent your asking it."

"But I want an answer, direct and correct."

"If it does not interfere with the progress of the campaign."

"I don't think it will do that."

"What is it?"

"What is your name?"

I laughed. It had never occurred to me before to tell her.

"It is true," I said, "that we have not had an introduction, though we are seeing a good deal of each other's society, but it is not too late. My name is Philip Marcell."

"Why, that sounds like French, and I thought you were an American."

"Both are true. I am an American, and the name Marcell used to be French. I am of French descent partly, and I may have British blood, too, though I shall not boast of it. There are many of us in South Carolina."

"But I thought you were northern. You said you had been serving in the northern army of the rebels."

"The patriots."

"Well, the patriots, then, under Mr. Washington?"

"Well, General Washington."

"Yes, I have been serving in the northern army of the patriots under General Washington, but he has sent me south with General Greene and the others, mostly southerners themselves, to redeem this part of the country from the British raiders. But I am a South Carolinian."

He answered in the rubbing and, every time he rubbed his nose, he was talking to me. He seemed to have forgotten the blow she had given him.

"See," she said triumphantly. "He has found a new friend, a good friend, and he knows it. He is almost as fond of me as he is of you."

I was surprised, greatly surprised. Heretofore Old Put had always proved himself to be an excellent judge of character, and now he was putting his trust in this English girl, who had shown herself to be unworthy of any trust whatever. Poor Old Put! Another masculine dupe! He was growing old; he was falling into his dotage. I felt a certain sadness at these signs of mental decay in my faithful horse. But they marched on, his silky nose pressed closely against her arm, and meanwhile the sun was sinking and the shadows were deepening and lengthening.

"I do not think it is necessary for us to walk any more," I said. "The horses are now thoroughly rested from their race and are willing to do their part, which is to carry us."

She looked at her ugly brown back in some dismay.

"He's such a rough traveler I believe I'd rather walk," she said.

He certainly had a most irregular, jumping kind of gait, which would make him an unpleasant mount for anybody, but there seemed to be no recourse. Horses were not running loose around us for me to catch.

"But we can't help it," I said. "We can ride slowly, in a walk. If he misbehaves, we can switch you have picked up."

She walked steadily on.

"Now, if he were like this one," she said, stroking Old Put's nose, "I would be glad to ride again."

"Suppose I change the saddles, then," I said, "and let you ride Old Put?"

It was a great concession for me to make, but her appreciation of my horse had touched me for the moment.

"Do you think he would let me?" she said, looking at Old Put doubtfully and timidly.

Now I was indignant. It was a slur upon the character of Old Put, one of the gentlest and best bred of horses, to insinuate that he would behave badly with a lady on his back.

"No man except myself has ridden him in years," I said. "Perhaps no woman has ever ridden him at all, but that is no reason why one should not ride him now."

"But I am afraid," she protested again in timid fashion. All her courage seemed to have gone. Again I saw you have only to be stern with a woman to keep her at your foot.

"Nonsense!" I said, a little roughly. "We'll stop talking about this and do it at once."

I halted the horses and changed the saddles, while she looked doubtfully on. Old Put submitted like an angel, and I drew the girth tight. Then I said:

"Now, if you would know what a real saddle horse is, Miss Howard, just jump up there."

"Will you help me?"

Another proof of her subdued condition.

I held out my hand in most gallant fashion. She leaned on it for a moment to give herself a support and sprang into the saddle. Then, giving Old Put a cut with the switch which she had picked up, she galloped away.

"Goodby, Mr. Marcell," she shouted. "I ride the better horse now."

She turned Old Put's nose to the southwest, and away she went at the very best speed of which my good horse was capable, and that was much. Her yellow hair flew in the wind, as before, like the streamers of a defiant battle flag, and either with or without intent the red cap she wore was set rakishly and saucily on one side of her head.

CHAPTER III.

THE MERIT OF A GOOD HORSE.

I paused, not to wear this time, but for a momentary reflection on the vanity of man and the deceitfulness of woman in taking advantage of it, and then I sprang upon the back of that old brown hack—confound him! for an army mile without the ears!—and gave chase.

I had no switch or whip, but I roweled him and kicked him in the sides until I frightened him into a greater speed than he or any one else believed to dwell within his long frame. He gave a wild snort, and we plunged after the fleet girl, rooking and swaying like a boat in a stormy sea, but even with such exertion he could not compare with Old Put. Despite the anxiety of the moment, I noted his inferiority with some pride, but then I remembered how much depended upon the success of the pursuit, and I continued to urge on my own mount.

Strive and strain as we could and ride and thump as I would with all my arms and legs, we lost ground rapidly. The girl turned her head once to look at me, and I thought I saw a look of triumph on her face, but I suppose it was my imagination which was industriously tormenting me just then.

I groaned at the certainty of her escape, and then hope seized me, for I remembered suddenly that I, too, had a trick to play. Old Put and I possessed a common language in which we often talked, with perfect understanding. I put two fingers to my lips and blew between them a long, shrill whistle, which cut the air and traveled like the scream of a life. It was a request, a command even, to him to stop and wait for me. He twisted his long neck in the manner of one listening, looking back at me to see what I meant, but he went on, though with slightly diminished speed, his manner indicating that he was uncertain what I had said.

The girl was belaboring him with the switch, for she must have noticed his decreasing gait. I whistled again, and as Old Put's pace sank to a snail's best him, fiercely with the switch. A third whistle, and Old Put was in perfect accord with me, and he stopped, not only that, but he turned back and looked at me.

"I don't know. He usually likes old friends best, but still Old Put is a horse of fine taste."

Her evident admiration of Old Put appealed to me, and I thought I would give her the little compliment. Women like such things, and again I felt as if I could afford to be generous.

She put her hand upon his nose and stroked it gently. It was a white, well shaped hand, with pretty tapering fingers. Old Put must have admired it.

He answered in the rubbing and, every time he rubbed his nose, he was talking to me. He seemed to have forgotten the blow she had given him.

"See," she said triumphantly. "He has found a new friend, a good friend, and he knows it. He is almost as fond of me as he is of you."

I was surprised, greatly surprised. Heretofore Old Put had always proved himself to be an excellent judge of character, and now he was putting his trust in this English girl, who had shown herself to be unworthy of any trust whatever. Poor Old Put! Another masculine dupe! He was growing old; he was falling into his dotage. I felt a certain sadness at these signs of mental decay in my faithful horse. But they marched on, his silky nose pressed closely against her arm, and meanwhile the sun was sinking and the shadows were deepening and lengthening.

"I do not think it is necessary for us to walk any more," I said. "The horses are now thoroughly rested from their race and are willing to do their part, which is to carry us."

She looked at her ugly brown back in some dismay.

"He's such a rough traveler I believe I'd rather walk," she said.

He certainly had a most irregular, jumping kind of gait, which would make him an unpleasant mount for anybody, but there seemed to be no recourse. Horses were not running loose around us for me to catch.

"But we can't help it," I said. "We can ride slowly, in a walk. If he misbehaves, we can switch you have picked up."

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