A Bit of Burned Paper

Two Sisters Struggle on Opposite Sides in the Civil War

By Margaret Howland

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Now that we are entering on four years of semicentennials of the civil war it is quite likely that certain secrets will come out that have lain hidden for fifty years.

Our family lived on a plantation in Virginia which our ancestors had owned for years. For a few weeks during the first year of the war our house was on debatable ground, for Confederate camps were scattered south of us and Union camps north of us. Sometimes we were inclosed in the picket line of the one and sometimes in the picket line of the other. When we were in Confederate territory our home was a rendezvous for Confederates, and when we were overlapped by the Federal forces they were equal

A FRAGMENT OF PAPER.

ly welcome. The reason for this was that on the great issue we were a divided family. My sister Carey, who was then twenty-two, favored the Confederates, while I, a girl of nineteen, favored the Union cause. We were both reasonably attractive and had plenty of attention from the officers visiting our house. Father was a colonel in the Confederate army and my brother Sam a lieutenant in the Federal army. But neither of them was fighting in our neighborhood.

Possibly we girls might have waited a long while for husbands had it not been for the great influx of soldiers into our neighborhood. The consequence of this influx was the engagement of Carey and myself soon after their coming, I to Captain Hunt, a Federal; Carey to Captain Fitzhugh a Confederate officer.

At one time when we were in the Confederate lines the general commanding rode up to the house and asked my mother if she would give him a room in which to meet some of his officers. She offered the parlor, and he sent messengers with orders for the officers to report to him there at once. Within half an hour they had assembled and were all generals. I surmised that something important was on foot and wished that I might hear what it was in order to transmit it to my friends of the other side. Underneath the parlor in which the conference was held was the cellar. I went down there, but could hear nothing. There was no other position I could take to enable me to gain my information of what was being discussed in the parlor. Besides, Carey was watching me.

When the council was ended and the generals had departed I went into the parlor and looked about, hoping to discover something—possibly a bit of paper that had been dropped—to indicate what had been the subject of discussion. There were some tiny pieces on the floor which I picked up and put together, but only figures had been put on the whole before it had been torn to scraps. I went the bits and found out afterward that they figured the strength of the different divisions of the Confederate army in that location.

But there was not enough in this to satisfy me, and I looked further. A stove in the room, owing to the condition of the negroes consequent upon the excitement of war, had not been removed for the summer. In my hunt I opened its door. Lying on the ashes of previous wood fires was a fragment of paper the rest of which was burned. Taking it out, I saw that it was memoranda written in lead pencil. But unfortunately not one-half remained. What was left of the writing was as follows:

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                                  at daylight
                                  flank
                                  lliams
                                  gham's
                                  mes next
                                  hing Williams
                                  arker's on west side
                                  stituting left flank
                                  signal of one gun fired by
                                  ries' battery. Reynor feints
                                  on enemy's right, flank then
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Whether there was anything of value in this fragment to the Union generals I did not know. I didn't think there was, but I determined to deliver it into their hands as soon as possible. Carey and I each had a horse of our own, and, going out to the barn, I told Bob, my boy for much work, to saddle him at once while I put on my riding skirt. As I was riding past the house Carey came out, with a suspicious look on her face, and called:

"Where you going, Bet?"

"For a ride."

"Want me?"

"Haven't time to wait."

With that I rode away, preventing her asking me any more questions. Coming to a crossroad, whom should I see riding toward me but Carey's fiance, Captain Fitzhugh. I knew he would see Carey in a few minutes and if I turned northward on the road he would tell her I had done so, and her suspicions that I was bent on some aid to the Federals would be confirmed. I therefore turned southward and when Fitzhugh had ridden out of sight turned and rode the other way.

My meeting Fitzhugh was unfortunate—not in his giving information of me to Carey, for when he reached the plantation he didn't find her at home, but that it delayed me, and by this delay I fell into a trap.

While riding in the open, looking sidewise, I saw a girl on horseback galloping across country and aiming for a point ahead of me. A second glance told me she was Carey, and I knew at once that she was intending to cut me off and prevent my reaching the Union camps. I urged on my horse, but it was no use. Carey jumped her animal over a snake fence, lighting in the road. When I reached her she had taken position in the middle of it and was covering me with a revolver.

"You can't go on, Bet," she said. "Turn around and ride the other way."

"Well, I like that!" I exclaimed. "Do you mean you're going to shoot your own sister?"

"These are wartimes."

I wasn't afraid of her shooting me, so I gave my horse the whip, but Carey was a splendid horsewoman and put herself in my way. Do what I could, I was unable to pass her. At last she seized my bridle rein and, leading my horse, started back toward the crossroads.

"Where were you going?" she asked.

"I don't know that I am accountable to you for where I go."

"Oh, yes, you are. I'm your older sister."

She slipped the pistol in her pocket—we had pockets in our dresses then—relying on her superior strength alone. Of course the revolver was all gammon. She wouldn't use it on anybody, especially on her sister. She kept a tight hold on my horse's rein, and it seemed to me that my object was surely thwarted when suddenly I saw a group of horsemen coming, and by the dark color of their uniform I knew they were Federals. Carey saw them too. It was too late for her to turn back with me, and there was no road by which to evade them.

When we met them and they saw a girl holding another girl's bridle rein, leading her along forcibly, they looked very much astonished.

"Please release me, gentlemen," I said. "I'm Union, and this girl is Confederate. I'm her prisoner."

The absurdity of the point didn't strike Carey or me, but the troopers burst into a laugh. Then I smiled, but Carey looked awfully savage. She knew the fortunes of war had turned against her.

Well, I told my story to the officer in command of the troops and showed him the partly burned paper. He seemed much impressed and decided to take it to his general. Considering that Carey knew something about the find and might upset the situation, he concluded to take her and me with him.

So we all rode together to the headquarters of the general commanding, and I gave him the paper. He and several of his aids undertook from their knowledge of the Confederate force confronting them to restore the burned words. This is the result of the attempt:

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                                  The men will be under arms at daylight.
                                  Reynor's division on the right flank at
                                  Crosby's crossroads. Williams next on the
                                  left on Brigham's farm. Calhoun comes
                                  next, his right wing touching Williams'
                                  left; then Barker on west side of the hill,
                                  constituting left flank. On signal of the
                                  gun fired by Wilcox battery Reynor
                                  feints on enemy's right flank then—
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There was nothing more that was legible, but nothing more was needed to show that a dawn attack was to be made and the disposition and intention of the attacking force given. What it was to take place there was nothing to show, but as Union troops were supposed to be many miles away at 1 o'clock that day in line of battle, Carey and I were detained at the Union headquarters that the Confederates might not know that the Federals had information of the intended movement. We had not long to wait, for the very next morning the Confederates attacked their enemies. They found the Federals waiting for them and, instead of gaining a victory, suffered a disastrous defeat.

I won a double victory, the one I gained for the Federals—for the Union general said that without the information I brought him he would have doubtless been taken unawares and defeated—and in the fact that, the Confederates having been driven off their ground, Carey was separated from her lover, while I was united with mine.

It is hard for me to realize that half a century has passed since those eventful days; that I, who am now a white haired, wrinkled old woman, was then a rosy cheeked girl, and of all who were enacting that particular page in the voluminous history of the civil war I alone remain. And now, as the half century anniversaries of the events of that struggle are coming around, I am living them over again, not in reality, but in fancy.

If the Dead May Return

A Victory Without a Shot

By F. A. Mitchel

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In one of the old colonial manor houses, for which Virginia is famous, a man lay dying. On the walls of his chamber hung a sword and sash, belt and pistol that had been placed there a dozen years before, when the southern Confederates had gone home to return to work and to save what they could from the wreck of war. There was no one in the house except some negroes, and they were bowed down with grief. Presently one of them entered the sick man's chamber and said breathlessly:

"She's comin', Mars Colonel."

The melancholy eye lighted, but not with pleasure. There was a hopeless look in it indicating that the invalid was preparing for an ordeal. Then came the sound of wheels on the driveway without, and in a few moments a woman, twenty years of age, perhaps, burst into the room and, rushing to the bed, fell on her knees beside it, clasping the figure in her arms.

"Oh, father!" she moaned.

"I have sent fo' yo'," the man said, speaking with difficulty, "to say that at last I have ceased to blame yo'. He did it all. I have not been able to find him, and now I must go from here. But if yo' know where he is tell him that if the dead may return he shall hear from me."

"Father, leave him to Him who shall judge us all at last."

There was no reply. The effort the man had made had taken the little strength left in him. Slower and slower came his breath; there was a rattle in his throat, and he was dead.

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"Can yo' tell me, suh, if there is a man in this town named Lawrence Edgar Lawrence, fo'me'ly from Georgia?"

The man addressed turned to the speaker and, on meeting his gaze, retreated a step or two. He saw a tall man about fifty, whose erect figure

"TELL ME IF YO' NAME IS EDGA' LAWRENCE."

and shoulders thrown back suggested that he might have been a soldier. His hair and beard were grizzly gray, and there was a singular glitter in his eye.

"Yes, sir," replied the man questioned, "there is a man by that name here."

"Can you tell me where I can find him?"

"He's generally in the Empire saloon at this time of day."

"Very much obliged to yo', suh." And the stranger walked away toward the Empire saloon.

"I'll bet my hat," said the observer to himself, "that man was in the late unpleasantness between the north and the south. Those soldier men never get over their training. They walk as if they were giving or receiving orders and walk as if they were keeping step to music. He's a queer looking old chap and no mistake. I shouldn't have told him where to find Lawrence. I'll go to saying a word with him! He'll go through the matter formally, and before he's really aware of it I'll get a bullet in his brain. I'll follow him."

The evening sun hung quite low and cast the stranger's shadow very long. While he walked on with the same measured tread as if treading with soldiers, the observer's attention was turned from him to this elongated shadow. There was something grotesque about it, as such shadows often are. Both body and legs were drawn out strangely and the legs triangulated like a pair of compasses. The stranger, reaching the saloon, turned in, and the man who was following was close behind him.

Men were standing at the bar drinking, while others were seated at tables gambling. The stranger was standing straight as an arrow looking about him. Presently a man rose from one of the tables, and, passing the newcomer, the latter asked:

"Can you tell me, suh, if Mistah Lawrence is present?"

"That's Edgar Lawrence sitting at that table over there."

"Which one?"

"The man just dealin' the cards."

The stranger inquired in a tone

Now Lawrence had been playing cards with pieces of colored bone before him. The stranger triangulated over to the group and, standing behind the dealer, touched him lightly on his shoulder with the tip of his finger.

The man jumped as if he had been acting. From force of habit perhaps his right hand went to his hip as he quickly turned and looked up into the face bent down to his. For some moments the situation was unchanged, then the stranger said:

"Pa'don me, suh, fo' interruptin' yo' game, but I should be obleeged ef yo' would tell me ef yo' name is Edgar Lawrence?"

"Yes, sir," said the man addressed, making an effort to speak in his usual voice.

"I regret, suh, to disturb you. Gentlemen, I trust yo' will excuse me fo' interrupting yo' in yo' amusement, but I have a difficulty to settle with one of yo' number, Captain Lawrence."

Every face at the table was turned upward; every eye fixed on the speaker. No such subdued gentlemanly tone had ever been heard before in that sinkhole of iniquity. A difficulty to settle with Lawrence—Captain Lawrence! No one had ever heard of Lawrence having a military title before. And why didn't Lawrence shoot him dead? Lawrence's hand was on his pistol, and the stranger's hand was not near a weapon. His close fitting coat buttoned tight to the throat showed no bulge where a weapon should be. Nevertheless, Lawrence did not draw his pistol.

"Being a stranger among you gentlemen," continued the speaker, "I would be obleeged to yo' if one of yo' number would act fo' Captain Lawrence and one fo' me. The sun has not yet set, and the twilight will be plenty long enough for us to settle our difficulty befo' dark."

Every man gazed at the speaker till one of them broke the spell by rising and offering his services to him. Then another said to Lawrence:

"Come, Ed; you'll have to gratify the old fellow, and you'd better not try any of your games. He's evidently captivated these boys, and if you shouldn't treat him fair you might get into trouble. You've done too many wicked things already."

Lawrence rose without a word. He steadied himself by resting his hand on the table. His face was very pale.

"What's the matter with you? Who is the old man?"

"I've never seen him before," was the only reply.

The six of them walked out of the saloon and down the road to a patch of level ground which had been recently cleared. The sun, a blood red ball, stood near the horizon, casting fantastic shadows of all the party. Not a word was spoken by any one. Though the day had been warm, the air was permeated by a chill. All noticed that Lawrence seemed to feel it especially, for he was shivering.

"What distance do you prefer, sir?" asked the stranger's second of him.

"That, suh, is immaterial. Leave the terms entirely with Captain Lawrence."

"Make it what you like," said Lawrence, whose teeth were chattering, much to the surprise of the rest.

The seconds measured the ground for thirty paces, then approached the principals to relieve them of their weapons and give them others. The stranger bowed and said that he had no weapon. He never went armed. Lawrence's pistol was taken from him and both he and his antagonist were given weapons borrowed from among those present. Then they were stood opposite each other.

It seemed to those in attendance that Lawrence was unable to withstand the gaze of his antagonist. The two men were placed at either end of the thirty paces, and the man who was acting for Lawrence stood ready to drop a handkerchief, at which the principals were to advance, firing. Before giving the signal he said:

"Perhaps yo', or yo' gentlemen would give up this cause of this difficulty."

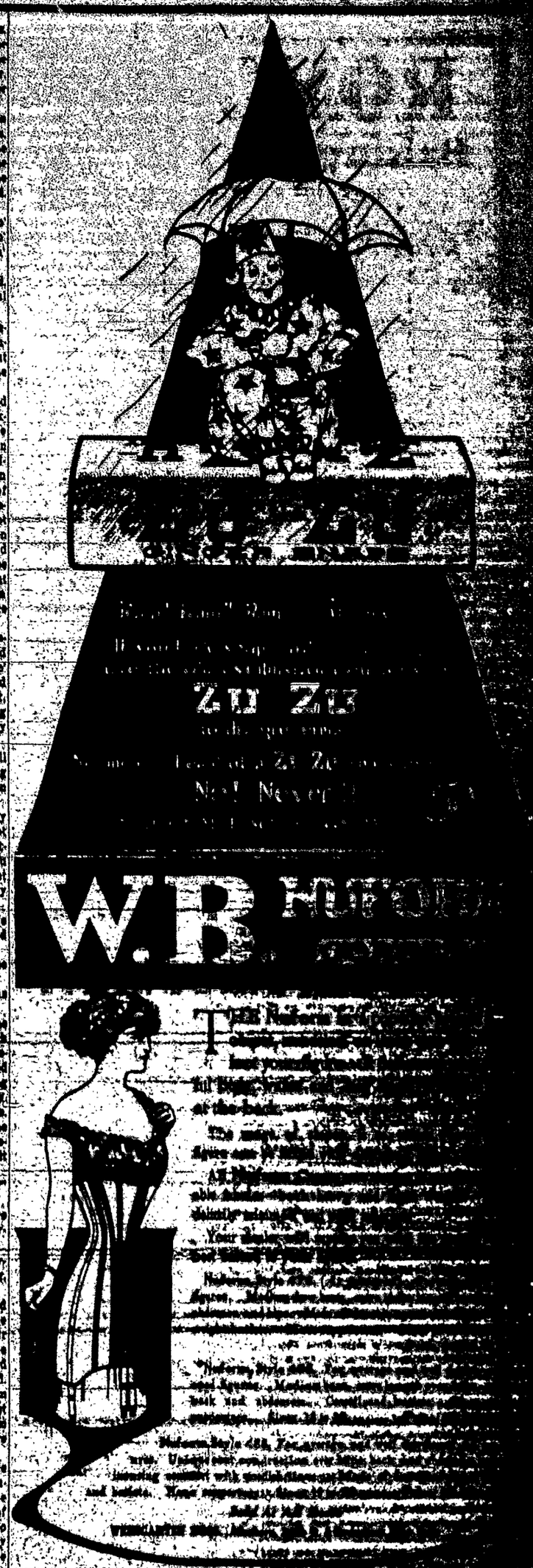
He turned to the stranger, who made no reply. He was rated on his courage. The speaker turned to Lawrence and asked him if he had anything to say by way of explanation. Lawrence paid no heed to him.

"Gentlemen, are you ready?"

There was no reply from either of the contestants.

"Fire!" and the handkerchief floated to the ground.

At a motion from Lawrence's second, both fired at once. The stranger, without a shudder, dropped his pistol and, with a movement toward his antagonist, fell to the ground. As Lawrence saw Lawrence's second and the crowd rush toward the fallen man he turned and ran. There was something so unmanly about his conduct that it took the blood of those looking on. The stranger, raised by his antagonist, gave a shriek and, springing into the air as if he had been shot, fell back into the arms of his second.

Forgetting the stranger in the weird scene, every man rushed toward Lawrence and beat over him. When they looked up the former had disappeared.

All this happened many years ago. Edgar Lawrence has long been an inmate of a lunatic asylum, and his case has from the time of his entry there been considered hopeless. There are in Virginia two graves side by side, the one of a father, the other of his daughter. The soil where they are placed is all of the old manor home grounds that remains unchanged. The mansion stands bare, gaunt and gloomy, while the grounds are dotted into little patches, waved by growths of sassafras. And whether among such a man who, without fear, could take the life of a fellow man, the only one of greater stature being Edgar Lawrence, who