

THE BATTLE-CRY

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ILLUSTRATIONS by C. D. RHODES

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CHAPTER XX.—Continued.

The little town itself lay dismal and helpless, with its shapes scattered over its broken and uneven levels. Anse looked up and spoke slowly: "I reckon it wouldn't profit ye much to harm us, Milt. We ain't armed, and I'm the only gun. Darn you all, if you'd tomorrow would bring the gun whom she now confessed to loving, though she confessed it with self-contempt, leading a force to meet that of her own people, fighting to avenge her father's name, and to avenge the country's." The ironical comment when she glanced down at the Christmas packages, seemed to hear over and over the voice of Anse Hayey saying: "I'm doing what you see asks it."

She had come to the scene of assassination, and it seemed that the effort would precipitate a holocaust.

Anse was very busy, but found time to come to her that afternoon. In the bare little hotel lobby the firelight reflected from the windows of their owners lounged about the fireplace.

And in Anse she saw once more the stern side. His face was unamusing, and in his eyes was that expression which made her realize how inflexibly he would act about the accomplishment of his thoughts and undertaken. Then, as he spoke to her, a sudden softness came into his eyes.

"God knows I'm sorry," he said, "that this thing broke just now. I don't think that ye should be eye-witness."

Jeania smiled rather wistfully. Old Milt, he told her, would soon be released. "We ain't even goin' to keep him in the jailhouse no longer than mornin'. We couldn't convict him as it would only bring on more trouble."

"What? were he arrested?" she asked blankly.

"Just to keep him out of mischief overnight," he smiled. "Even the law can be used for strategy."

"What will happen when the McBriars come back?" she demanded in a sharp, commanding tone.

He shook his head. "I can't hardly say," he replied.

But the next morning Anse Hayey came again and cautioned the two women not to leave their rooms and not to keep their shutters open. All the day the town lay like a tarpit, tight drawn across the streets. The streets were empty. Doors were locked and shutters barred. But toward evening, to the girl's bewilderment, she saw Hayey riding out of town instead of in it. Soon there were no more horses at the races. By night the place which used to be assailed to morrow seemed to have been abandoned by its defenders.

Old Milt McBriar had ridden out in the morning, freed but watchful, to meet the men who were hurrying in the direction of Bad Anse Hayey she saw often from her window, but for the most part the force of Hayey had evaporated.

Then followed another wretched night, and with forenoon the snow, wrapped town settled down to the cold silence of a cemetery, but with early afternoon the new people began to come in. A long and continuous stream of McBriar horsemen, each armed to the teeth, rode past the hotel and went straight to the courthouse.

They heard again the sound she had noticed on her first night in the mountains, only now it came from a hundred throats.

It was the McBriar yell, and after it came a scattering of rifle and pistol shots. The clan was going away again and without the town as they knew it, what had happened down there at the courthouse?

CHAPTER XXI.

Later she heard the story. The McBriars had come expecting battle. They had found every road open and the telegraph dead. The men who had gone about looking for trouble but found no one to oppose them. Then Old Milt and his son had ridden to the courthouse to demand the keys. Anse had found Judge Siderling sitting in the little office with him; quite unarmed and without escort, sat Bad Anse Hayey. When the two McBriars, backed by a score of armed men, broke fiercely into the room, the citizens massed at their backs, encircling doggedly.

Judge Siderling greeted his visitors as though no intimation had ever reached him that they were coming with "graciousness."

"Come in, Milt, and have a chat," he invited.

"I'll do that," said old Milt. "Give me the keys ter that jailhouse, an' give 'em ter me quick."

Opening the drawer of his desk as if he had been asked for a match, Judge Siderling took out the big iron key to the outer door and the smaller key to the inner door of the cell. He tossed the two across to Milt. In a matter-of-fact fashion.

Five minutes later the McBriar chief was back trembling with rage. He had found the jail empty. "If you're lookin' for Luke Thixton, Milt, you'll just have to calm down, he invited.

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