

**THE KNIGHT OF THE DIXIE WILDS**

# THE KNIGHT OF THE DIXIE WILDS

BY

WALTER E. TAYLOR

A TEXAS RECONSTRUCTION  
STORY



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*To my friend*

*who as a boy, defied adversity, struggled through college and reached the meridian of his chosen profession; the son of a Confederate soldier, with unshakable patriotism for his country and reverence for Christianity; my congenial and invaluable comrade on many camp hunts in the wild woods; he, whose assistance and encouragement made it possible for me to write and publish this story; to him, Doctor R. J. Hall, and the other children of Dixie, I dedicate this book.*



## INTRODUCTION

Keen observation during the War between the States, and long service with the Home Defenders, while struggling against Free-Negro-domination and military oppression in the Southern States, gave me a storehouse of facts that never found light in the pages of history.

In response to repeated requests by old Confederate veterans, Daughters of the Southern Confederacy, and many friends, to write a book on reconstruction days and early times in Texas, I have decided to make the effort.

As truth must be naked, I will steer clear of flights in fiction, and reveal facts that I saw, felt, and heard; indulging in slight embellishment of the climaxes. If I succeed in wielding the pen as successfully as I did the rifle and lariat, sixty years ago, this story will find favor.

No period in the history of the United States of America forms a field so rich with chivalry, romance and drama as the years between 1865 and 1870, the so-called days of the reconstruction of the South, during which period the Nation was born again and started on its climb to the top rung of power among the nations of the world.

The heroism of the overpowered South during that time was strangely slighted by historians, and for more than sixty years has remained practically unknown, except to a few survivors of that day who saw and remember. Having struggled for life and existence through those bloody years, I have only to close my eyes and open my memory, to vision again the thrilling and gripping scenes that occurred all over Dixie, and are recorded only in lost leaves of history.

When the sons and daughters of Dixie, and all others who believe in truth and justice, have read this book, and learned from it the true history of the reconstruction of the South, and

the matchless heroism of our forefathers and mothers, the KNIGHT OF THE DIXIE WILDS, yet living, and nearing his four score years, will feel that his work is finished.

THE AUTHOR.

# The Knight of the Dixie Wilds

## CHAPTER I.

Colonel Tyler, broken in health and worn from hard life in the trenches, returned from the War at its close in the spring of 1865.

He had been a wealthy planter, owning two large plantations and many slaves. His home was near Pearl River, sixteen miles above Jackson in the state of Mississippi. Before the War, his place was one of the beauty spots in Dixie. The country was one of tall trees, crooked rivers, clear creeks, and fertile lands. In the springtime, when magnolia, dogwood, woodbine and wild plum trees were in bloom, the forest was one continuous bouquet of beauty. Blackberries, grapes and wild cherries were abundant in the summer. The fall, with its hickory nuts, beech nuts and ripe persimmons was no less attractive than the other seasons.

The Colonel's eldest son, who was destined to lead a picturesque life and become the hero of this story, had not yet reached his teens. Because of his habit of rambling in the woods in search of game and other wild adventures, he had been nicknamed "Buck." Strenuous out-of-door life had given him strength and endurance equal to that of a wild Indian.

His almost constant companion was a Negro boy named King. King was about Buck's size, was two years older and of stocky build. Although he had been a slave all his life, the two boys had been boon playfellows ever since they could remember. Through Buck's influence with his father, King had often been spared punishment and had obtained favors which the other Negroes never enjoyed.

While Colonel Tyler was in the War, the two boys explored

every thicket on the hills and every jungle in the swamps for miles around. They spent nearly all of the days and much of the nights in the woods. They kept a pack of dogs which they had trained to hunt the many kinds of wild animals that were to be found in the wild sections of that country.

Like thousands of other once wealthy slave owners, their sudden misfortune was too much for their pride. Furthermore, there appeared to be nothing ahead of them in the war swept country but starvation. They decided to sell out what little they had left and leave the desolate scenes of their reverses forever. The question was, where should they go? The Colonel wanted some place far removed from all that would remind him of the past, to start all over again in some frontier country where land was cheap and where he could reasonably hope for better opportunities for his children.

Australia, South America, and the frontier of Texas were considered. After a lengthy consideration, they decided on Texas. There were many broken up families in the community that held similar views. They, too, were anxious to hide their poverty and broken pride from the eyes of gloating enemies. From these, the Colonel selected a dozen families whom he induced to venture forth on the hazardous trail toward the west. They turned what little property they had into cash at less than half its worth and purchased wagons, teams, guns, ammunition, tools, and camping outfits.

As the day of departure came near, Buck grew distressed over the thought of being separated from his life-long play-fellow, King. It had been decided that none of the Negroes would be taken along, but after long and earnest pleading by Buck, the Colonel relented and agreed to let King go.

King was an orphan, and while the other Negroes had no control over him, they strongly opposed his being taken away to a country unknown to them. They used all of their power to keep King from agreeing to go. They told him that hostile wild Indians would kill and scalp him if he went with the Boss to Texas; but King was determined to go wherever Buck went, regardless of results.

He declared that he was not afraid to go anywhere as long

as Buck and the Boss were with him. He pointed to the fact that the Yankees had been trying to kill the Boss for four years, but had failed, and he felt sure that Indians were no better fighters than the Yankees.

## CHAPTER II.

Preparations for the long journey completed, they hitched the teams to their canvas covered wagons and began saying farewell to the large assembly of kindred and friends. This was a sad hour to all. Women wept in each other's arms, while strong men trembled with speechless emotion when they gripped hands, as they believed, for the last time in this world. They were leaving forever the land of their forefathers, the graves of departed loved ones, the dear scenes of happy childhood, the peerless Pearl River, shaded by wide spreading beech and magnolia trees. Tear-stained handkerchiefs waved until the moving caravan was lost to view on the winding road.

On reaching the ferry on Pearl River, they were joined by several more families and the refuges were on the first leg of the long journey to an as yet unknown country. Progress was painfully slow. Much of the road was all but impassable. Washed out bridges and high water in the large creeks and rivers caused long delays. After nearly three months on the road, they found themselves on what appeared to be boundless prairies, west of the Brazos River in Texas. As far as the eye could see, there was nothing but the monotony of a treeless country. They made a temporary camp and examined the surroundings for several days. They assembled in camp one morning and held a council. Thomas Ratliff, the oldest man in the party, expressed himself as follows:

"I have examined this land carefully and find it to be as rich as any in the world, and it is so near level that it will never wash away. The price of it is almost nothing. The boundless range of fine grass is sufficient for all of our stock the year round. The few settlers we have met are neighborly and hospitable. If we settle here, we will, in the course of a few years, grow rich with the development of this matchless

country. I believe it will take us but a short time to regain our lost fortunes here."

All of the other men, except Colonel Tyler, were of Ratliff's opinion and decided to settle there.

"Perhaps all of you are right in your opinions of this country," replied the Colonel, "but I differ with you. There is no timber here for building fences. No logs or lumber with which to build houses. There is but little fire-wood and no running water.

"There is not a post-office, grist mill, or a doctor within fifty miles of this place. No railroad market nearer than a hundred miles. I can not subject my family to the hardships that will follow if I should settle here.

"I am going to head back eastward and travel until I find more timber and some marks of civilization. When I locate, I will write and give a full description of what I find, so that in case you decide later to move from this part, you can follow me, if I have found a better one."

Pathetic farewells were exchanged the next morning, and Colonel Tyler and his family drove back toward the rising sun.\*

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\*Three sons and three daughters of Thomas Ratliff are still living at this date, March 4, 1929. Westley, the elder son, who soldiered through the War of '61-65, lives at San Diego, California. He is 86 years of age. Emma, now Mrs. Emma Carson, and Louisa, now Mrs. Lou McClellan, live in the town of Coleman, Texas. Emma is 88 and Louisa is 82 years of age. Jesse is 76 and lives at Odessa, Texas. Sam B. lives in San Angelo, Texas, and is 74. Louisa was a schoolmate of the writer during the Civil War. These old comrades verify many of the facts set out in this story.

## CHAPTER III.

Three days' travel on the old San Antonio and Nacogdoches road brought them to the Bazos River near the site where once flourished the town of Washington, early Capital of Texas. This region during an early period had been the scene of numerous battles between the whites and Indians, and also between Texans and Mexicans during the war between the two republics.

They found the river nearly level with its banks, and rising. The old ferry cable, during the previous night, had broken from pressure of large drifts of floating brush and timber. In consequence of this, the ferry-boat had been swept down stream by the flood waters. Not knowing when the ferry would be made passable, the Tylers went into camp. After dinner, the boys gathered in wood for the night and fed the oxen. They had brought two of their hunting dogs all the way from Mississippi. Seeing that the brushy country up the river looked wild and good for game, Buck and King whistled up their dogs and struck out in the woods for a hunt.

Soon, old Jeff and Sound were barking on a warm trail, followed closely by the boys. When dogs tree a varmint, their barking changes from a long sound to one that is short and fierce. When the boys heard the fierce barking of the dogs, they became joyously excited and hurried on. When they came in sight, they saw the dogs baying around the open end of a large, hollow cottonwood log. The boys quickly built a fire in the open end of the log, then chopped a smaller hole in the log farther up. When the smoke began to fog out of the small hole, a large wildcat sprang out. Before he hit the ground, the dogs tied onto him. The fight that followed was terrific. Seeing that the cat was getting the best of the battle, King dashed in and dealt it a death blow with the axe.

The boys skinned the cat while the dogs were taking a



needed rest. This done, the boys sat down to view the strange scenes in the new country. Suddenly, a strange looking character appeared from behind a nearby thicket. His clothes were ragged. He had long hair and a thick beard. Everything about him appeared dilapidated except his two big pistols. They were in perfect condition.

"What are you doing here?" he asked in a gruff tone. "Where did you come from?"

"From Mississippi," Buck replied.

"Where you living now?" the stranger asked.

"We ain't livin'," King interjected. "We is jist camped down by de ferry. 'We wuz gwyne east tel' we foun' dat de high watah had broke de rope at de ferry an let de boat git away. De Boss an' ole Mistice wid de Chillum is down dar in camp."

"Was your Boss a soldier?"

"Yasah," answered King, "he fit de Yankees foah years."

The face of the stranger, that up to this point had been sullen, now relaxed and mellowed into a smile. After a moment's study, he said to Buck, "Go back to camp and tell your Daddy to slip away and come up here: that a Confederate soldier wants to warn him against a danger. What I want to tell him is very important and he must lose no time in coming here."

The boys hurried back to camp and delivered the message. After studying the matter over carefully, the Colonel shouldered his gun and walked stealthily through the woods towards the place where the boys had left the stranger.

When he saw him, he slowed his gait and approached cautiously. After greeting the Colonel cordially, the stranger said, "There is a band of outlaws camped a short distance below the ferry. They claim to be lawfully commissioned scouts of the military, while in fact they are nothing but scalawags that were kicked out of the Yankee army about the close of the War last spring. They are still wearing the Yankee uniforms for the sake of appearance. When it suits their purpose, they disguise as ex-rebels and rob men and caravans that travel the public road. If you have money, hide it well, soon after

dark, because, during the night, a bunch of them disguised as outlaws will rob you; then in the morning, clothed in their uniforms, they will pretend to search the country for the robbers.

"I am an ex-Confederate soldier. They robbed me of what little I had and ordered me to leave the country, or they would scalp me the next time we met. They were in disguise at the time but I recognized several of them. A good friend of mine fought them to save his money. They killed him and took what he had. I am going to ambush around here until I kill three of them that I have recognized and then leave the country. Don't fight them, there are too many of them for that."

The Colonel read honesty in the strange face. He thanked him for the warning, shook his hand in a brotherly way, and returned to his camp. He told no one about his talk with the stranger until about ten o'clock that night, at which time he called Buck to one side and told him of the probable attack that he was expecting a little later.

"Take this and hide it," he said to his son as he handed him his roll of bills. "Use your own judgment as to the place of concealment. I do not want to know the place you hide it, because they may torture me to make me tell. They will never suspect a boy knowing anything about money matters. Remember that if they come to rob us, they will search the wagons and every piece of our baggage. I will not distress your mother with knowledge of this matter now, because it is possible that they will not make the attack. If they do come and I should be killed in self-defense, get the money from where you hide it at the proper time and give it to your mother as soon as you are sure that it is safe to do so."

The Colonel left Buck there to study up a safe hiding place for the money. Buck thought of the middle of the sack of flour, the bottom of the unused coffee-pot and the ox-bell and passed them all up as unsafe. "Ah! I have it," he whispered to himself. The coupling pole of the large wagon was made of three inch gas pipe with the rear end open. He went to the wagon, took the money, sixty \$50 bills in greenbacks, twisted them into a close roll and shoved it eighteen inches back into

the pipe. Behind the money, he pushed in a quart of stiff mud. This done, he walked nonchalantly back to the camp-fire and joined the others in a discussion of the new country.

It was now bedtime. All retired and all except the Boss, and Buck soon fell asleep. Anticipation of coming events kept these two wide awake. Shortly after eleven o'clock, four masked men, one with a small torch in his hand, noiselessly entered the tent and commanded silence. The Queen woke and her half uttered scream of fright blended into a low spoken prayer. The leader of the robbers ordered all of the adults to stand up and raise their hands. When this was obeyed, he ordered the Colonel to surrender all of his money. The latter declared that he was broke except for a few dollars in his pants pocket and asked that they not take all of it, as he had no other resources on which to continue his travel.

Answering, the leader said, "You have more money somewhere. Get it and be fast about it."

"No," returned the Colonel, "I have no more money."

At this juncture, the Colonel gave the leader a Masonic sign, to which the robber replied, "I understand that, but it don't go with me now. I do not belong just now and never expect to any more."

While one of them kept the little group covered with a pistol, the other three broke open all of the trunks and searched each one thoroughly. They ripped open the mattress and feather-beds. They examined the linings of wearing apparel, tore open the sack of flour and emptied the provision box. When they started to examine the night-wear that Mrs. Tyler had on, Buck, who had been watching their every movement from behind a roll of bedding, sprang out with his father's gun in hand. Before he could use it, he was knocked down, disarmed, and kicked out of the tent.

"You are a game little rooster," remarked the man that kicked him, "but you had better remain where you are or I will clip your comb the next time."

After they had exhausted their search for the money and found none, the leader said to the Colonel, "Old man! You have money buried or hidden around here and you had better

get it now. We are going to keep a sharp watch on you and when you bring it out, we will kill every one of you and take the money. If you get it now, we'll let you keep one-fourth of it and let you go. It will be better for you to keep one-fourth of it and live, than to die with none of it."

The Colonel maintained that he had no more money, and the robbers, after a round of cursing, disappeared in the night. Galloping up to the tent early the next morning, six men in blue uniforms greeted the Colonel. Their spokesman said that he had seen a light moving about in the tent late in the night and figured that someone was seriously sick or in trouble. Colonel Tyler explained to him that four disguised men had come into his tent and robbed him of what little money he had and had threatened to kill him and his family if he did not produce more money.

The soldiers appeared to become excited and angry. The leader declared that there was a band of ex-rebel robbers operating in that section and he was sure that it was they who robbed the Colonel. He further declared that he and his men would find and kill them. He said that the leader of the robber band was a dirty, long-haired thief who wore a heavy black beard. He advised the Colonel to shoot him if he ever met him.

On seeing King, the leader asked the Colonel what he was doing with that Negro boy in his camp. The Boss explained that the boy belonged to him when he was freed and wanted to remain with him—that he was an orphan with no one to take care of him. "If you have papers showing that a lawful court has given you the right to hold him, show them to me," the leader commanded. "Otherwise, I will take him in charge."

The Colonel admitted that he possessed no such papers. King, with his eyes full of distress, came forward to explain.

"Please, sah, Mr. Cap'en, doan take me away. De Boss and my Misses has raised me an I wants to stay wid dem. I wants to stay wid Buck an he wants me." "You are a little fool," returned the leader. "All this Boss of yours wants is to work hell out of you. Come along with me. We need you to make fires at our camp and to feed our horses." Despite King's

pitiful pleading and the appeals of the entire family, they took King away to their camp, which was situated about a half mile away.

The Tylers broke camp the next morning and moved about one-half mile down the river and made camp. The Colonel and Buck worked all day and far into the night, building a raft. They notched large, dry cottonwood logs and connected them at the four corners with wooden pins. Across these, they laid a floor of smaller logs and connected them to the frame with wooden pins. The structure was 14 feet wide and 30 feet long. The raft was completed shortly before dark on the second day and the Tylers prepared to cross the river as early as possible and travel all night so as to evade the robbers in case they should discover their movements and give chase.

The enemy were apparently paying little attention to them. They felt sure that the Tylers would have to travel back westward, if they tried to escape, and in that event they would be seen. Buck was so anxious about King that, while they were waiting for dark to come, he slipped away and stole to a point near the robbers' camp. Concealed by a bunch of bushes, he waited for a glimpse of King. He knew his game was a risky one, but he could not go away without making a last desperate effort to recover his playfellow. A keen-eyed survey proved to him that there were no soldiers in the camp.

In a short time, he was thrilled by the sight of King leading a horse into camp and tethering him to a tree. Buck imitated the quail call. This was one of their signals when hunting. He saw King halt suddenly, turn his head to one side, and listen. Buck repeated the call. Recognizing the sound, King came on a run toward the spot from which the signal came. When Buck stepped from behind the bushes, King rushed up, threw his arms around him, and blubbered with joy.

Buck cautioned him to be very quiet, then in a low tone said, "In a little while, we are going to cross the river on a raft that we have built. You can not go with us at first, because if the soldiers should return to camp and miss you, which they are liable to do at any minute, they would rush to our camp and prevent all of us from crossing the river. Go

back to their camp now, and as soon as dark comes, slip away and go to a point on the river 300 yards below where we are now camped. Hide in the bushes and wait. When we reach the east bank of the river, I will find a big, dry, cottonwood log about twelve feet long, trim it smooth, roll it into the river and ride it across to this side. Both of us will ride it back to the east side.

"Do not weary in waiting because it will take me some time to get back over here. I will launch my log at least 300 yards above here so as to make a long slant across the current. If I did not do that, I would land too far below you. The Boss said if we make it, we will hitch up and travel all night. It will probably take the soldiers several days to get the ferry-boat back up here and by that time we will be out of their reach."

"I believed all de time dat you would fix some way to git me away fum dem Yankees," King exclaimed as his worshipping gaze rested on his former young master. "Dar ain't no body ceptin you an me whut kin do things like dis. I sho' is gwine ter be down dar waitin fur you, an dis daylight can't git away fast ernouf fur me."

Returning to the raft, Buck and the Boss slid it into the river. With difficulty, they drove the ox-drawn wagons onto it. They tied a long rope to a tree on the bank and carried the rest of the big coil onto the raft. After difficult steering and a long spell of hard paddling, they reached the east bank of the river safely. Again, on dry land, with the deep flood waters between them and the band of robbers, they felt measurably safe.

After arranging camp and building a fire, with suppressed anxiety, the Colonel addressed Buck, saying, "Son! Is the money safe?" For answer Buck took the fire-tongs, dug out the mud stopper in the coupling pole, reached in and drew out the roll of money and handed it to the Colonel. Both the father and the mother hugged the boy close and declared him the smartest and bravest boy in Dixie. "No one would ever have found that money," the Colonel exclaimed with a glow of pride. "Our boy is imprudent, reckless, and too venture-

some," said the mother," but we have to concede that he is ahead of all of us when it comes to cunning and bravery."

Buoyed in spirit by these compliments, Buck ventured forth on his mission to recover his lost playfellow. He hastened along the river bank with axe in hand, until he found a suitable log about the length he wanted. He trimmed the limbs and knots from it, rolled it into the river, and tied it to a sapling on the bank. He tied on two spades that he had brought from camp to be used as paddles. Undaunted by the deep swift water, he launched his log and struck out for the west side. King was there, waiting impatiently when the log touched shore. The black boy quickly brought from the bushes a large bundle and tied it to the log.

"What's all that?" Buck asked.

"Oh," exclaimed King. "Dis is mah wages. Yer see, Buck, dem Yankees didn't pay me nufin faw three days wuck, so I gist collected it mah self whilst they wuzn' watching."

The bundle contained a hunting knife, a pair of cavalry boots, a cured ham, and an assortment of fish hooks.

When everything they wanted was tied on, the boys straddled the log and pushed out into the stream. As the distance between them and the west side widened, the boys became boastful and braver. "I hope de Injuns cotches ebber one uv dem Yankee sogers an sculps evah hair ofen der heads," said King. Buck agreed with King on this, and went on to say, "As soon as I get big enough, I will come back here and hunt down those blue-bellied thieves and shoot them to death, one by one." As the last word of this was uttered, they heard the sound of horses' feet, rapidly approaching the river. Convinced that it was the robbers and that they had missed King and were on the hunt for him the boys began paddling as fast and as silently as possible. Their bravery had partly vanished. They were frightened over the possibility of their capture.

They had reached near the middle of the stream, when looking back, they saw about twenty men in blue uniforms check their horses at the river's edge and level their guns on them. Above the sound of rippling water, they heard the leader's voice commanding them to return to the west bank or he would have

his men fire on them. Night was on, but a bright moon was shining. Their chance to escape looked slim, but the boys preferred to take the poor chance, to complying with the order. They leaned low and paddled for life toward the east bank. Again the order came, "Once more, I command you to return." Reading his answer in the boys' renewed effort to escape, he commanded his men to fire on them.

Two bullets struck the log and others swished the water near the boys. Holding to the log with his left hand, Buck lowered his body deeper into the water and continued paddling with his right. King slid off the rear end. Holding fast to the log with his hands, he used his feet as propellers. Thus they moved on, slowly at best, toward the east bank, while bullets from the west side continued to plug the log. Of a sudden, there came a loud report from the east bank.

"Mah Gawd, we is cotched now," ejaculated King, as an ashen hue came over his face. "They is sho gwine ter git us now, Buck. Some uv em has got across to de udder side an is shootin' at us." Raising his eyes above the water, Buck caught a glimpse of the Boss behind a clump of bushes on the east bank, firing on the robbers across the river with his long range rifle.

One robber fell limply from his horse. Another's horse collapsed beneath him. Surprised by this unaccountable attack, the robbers made a hasty retreat into the woods. The boys climbed on top of the log and soon landed on the east bank. The entire family met them there. All were elated over the boys' heroic flight and successful escape.

Eagle-eyed, the Colonel scanned the far bank for possible snipers, while the boys retired to a nearby thicket and exchanged their wet clothes for dry ones. Camp was broken, everything loaded, the teams were hitched up, and they drove up the river until they reached the road; where they turned east.

After traveling the rest of the night, the Colonel decided to hide out in the woods, off the road, until night came again, for fear the robbers would find skiffs or small boats, cross the river and follow them. Accordingly, camp was made in a



thickly wooded place one-half mile from the road. Colonel Tyler and the boys took time about on picket post while the others slept. Thus they spent the day. When night came, they began a journey that led them far into the eastern part of the state.

Here, in a heavily timbered, thinly settled country between the Trinity and Netches Rivers, Colonel Tyler and his wife decided to settle. They felt reasonably sure that the black scourge and the tyrannical military law would not find their way into this out-of-the-way quiet section. To people who had never worked at hard labor and who had been waited on by servants all of their lives, the life that they would be forced to live here, was a big undertaking, but they were game to try it.

Stimulated by the hope of recovering their lost fortunes and paving the way for the success of their children, they were eager to start all over again. Could they have known the dark and bloody siege this section was to experience during the next few years, they no doubt would have sought a different country.

## CHAPTER IV.

The back-woods people of the sparsely settled new country extended a cordial welcome to the newcomers. They wanted more neighbors, and, just then, they were eager for news of the outside world. They knew vaguely that a war between the states had been waged, but they had not heard of Lee's surrender nor the throes of reconstruction being experienced in the south-eastern states. For here were no telegraph lines, railroads or public roads. The trails that served for roads were without bridges and were never worked.

These men of the forest were still using antedated flint-lock rifles, not knowing that better guns were being made. They wore coon-skin caps and home-made shoes or buck-skin moccasins. Some of them went barefoot, summer and winter. The women and girls were unaffectedly attractive in their home-spun frocks and sun-bonnets. High heel shoes, corsets, and other whims of fashion, which were distorting and misshaping the bodies of their sisters in other sections of the country, were unknown to them. They were Nature's own fair flowers, flourishing in the wild woods there, as Nature directed. Their untrammelled swinging gait was as graceful as a bird on the wing.

The majority of the necessities of life were manufactured at home. Buzzing of the old-fashioned spinning wheel could be heard in every cabin. With lye, secured from ashes and grease, they made all of their soap.

The reap-hook, candle molds, ash hopper, boot-jack, pot-rack, and bed wrenches, all indispensable to those people, are but little known to the present generation. Matches and lamps had not made their advent into this wild section. Lights were made with torch-pine or tallow candles. All feed troughs were made out of the halves of hollow logs. None of the fences were provided with gates. Slip-bars were used instead.

The people, like those of every frontier country, were kind and generous to each other and to deserving strangers. A man's joys and sorrows were shared by all of his neighbors. The little colony was like one large family, each member looking after the interests of the others.

Their minds were not harried from worrying, nor were they possessed of mind-racking ambitions. The insatiable desire and struggle after gain, which banish smiles, harden hearts, and enslave souls, had not taken hold on these people. There was no field for speculation. The boundless unclaimed forests held meat in store for every man's table. Wild game was plentiful.

Sale of hides and furs brought money enough for the purchase of ammunition, coffee, and medicine. There was little else that these children of the forest needed or desired. They were peace-loving, contented, and happy, exercising enough to sleep well at night and to eat heartily, whenever they felt hungry.

With the exception of his best load of gunpowder or his last chew of tobacco, a man was welcome to anything his neighbor possessed. Firm and honest in their profession and practice of religion, old and young attended religious meetings regularly. Sometimes the more impulsive ones became happy and shouted for joy during the services. They read enough of the Scriptures to convince them that Christ was divine. That was enough. They believed he was the way, the truth, and the light; they followed Christ's teachings as well as they could and were happy in their religion.

They did not dance, hunt, or work on the Sabbath day. Colonel Tyler, introducing new and better methods of industry, soon became a leader in the little colony. At his suggestion, the men built a log school house, which was also used for a church.

The Colonel had arrived in the new country too late in the season to clear land for a crop. He rented some land from a neighbor, and bought a tract of wild, heavily-timbered land which was situated three miles away. It was beyond the Big Creek, which was as large as a small river. It was the richest

land in the country, and cost only one dollar per acre.

Other settlers had shied around this land because it took so much time and hard labor to clear it of heavy timber, thick switch cane, and vines. When he was not busy on the rented place, the Boss took Buck and King over to the new tract to help him clear land and prepare it for cultivation the next year.

One day, when the boys were clearing on the new place, Buck looked up from his work and discovered that his horse, that had been tethered a short distance from the clearing, had broken loose and disappeared. He set out to trail the horse which he believed he would find grazing in the nearby woods. After going some distance, he stopped as he heard the thud of horses' feet which seemed to be coming back along the trail toward him. A second look revealed a boy riding, and leading Buck's horse. Making a short turn around some bushes by the trail, he came suddenly on Buck. Quickly, he drew a pistol and leveled it at Buck. Two keen black eyes, much like those of an Indian, were fixed on him.

Seeing a look of honesty and friendliness on Buck's face, the lad returned the weapon to his belt and asked, "Your horse? I was back trailing him to find his owner."

"Yes, he belongs to me," replied Buck with a smile, "and I am glad you found and brought him back. Saved me a long walk. I thought I had met all of the few boys that live around here, but I don't remember seeing you before. You are a good-looking lad—almost too handsome for a boy."

"I am not a boy," was the sharp reply. "I am Maggie Parker. Who are you?"

"I'm Buck Tyler," he answered.

"Pardon me for calling you a boy, I should have known better. Your wearing boy's clothes is what fooled me. May I see you back to your road?"

"No," she faltered, as her piercing eyes seemed to read him through, "but I like your looks and may see you again. Good-by, Buck."

"Goodby, Maggie," he said, as she mounted her horse and galloped away.

When he returned home that evening, Buck sought out Bill Thompson, an old timer, to learn more about this athletic young girl whose erect carriage and lithe movements reminded him of an Indian. Her slightly dark skin and jet black eyes and hair were attributed to the fact, if fact it was, that her father was one-fourth Indian. Bill Thompson told him that Maggie was fourteen years old and the elder daughter of the widow Parker, who lived some four miles farther up the Creek.

He further stated that her mother depended on her almost entirely to look after their small stock of horses, cattle, and hogs. This was not a small job in those days when wild stock frequently led the home bunches away, but Maggie Parker did it well.

She was the only one of the few girls in the colony who rode a man's saddle and wore boy's attire when riding in the woods. She also was the only one that wore a belt and pistol. Every one in the colony knew her to be a good shot and an expert rider. She talked but little, though she observed and listened a great deal. She had never been known to sing, yet she had a sweet flute-like voice. Frequently, however, there rang through the forest, melodious strains, like the soft honk of the wild goose, or resonant call of the curlew. These sounds were recognized as the yodling of this peculiar half-wild girl.

Despite her lack of education and queer ways, she was loved by everyone because of her honesty, sincerity, and simple beauty. Several of the boys in the neighborhood, at one time or another, had fallen in love with her but she had promptly checked the approach of all of them as prospective suitors.

Buck gave close attention to Bill Thompson's account of the Parker girl, thanked him, and departed. Upon reaching home, he became strangely reticent. He retired early as usual, but he remained wakeful. Although his eyes were closed, he could feel through the darkness two sparkling black eyes, luminous, piercing, and mystic, fixed upon him. He could almost hear Maggie's voice re-echo through the forest as she had said: "I like you and may see you again."

## CHAPTER V.

Leaving before daylight one morning for the forest in quest of game, the Boss sent Buck and King to the new place to work. The latter carried a torch to light their way through cane-brakes and across a big foot-log that spanned a narrow place on the Big Creek.

The howling of the timber wolf, the snarl of wild cats and the growl of raccoons were the only sounds that broke the stillness of the early morning. Heavy rains had been falling intermittently for several days past, and the water in Big Creek had risen nearly to the level of the foot-log. Wide sloughs skirting the swamp were full of rising water.

Wading in water nearly knee-deep part of the time, they passed out of the swamp and reached the clearing shortly after daylight. They set to work, cutting down trees, briars, and tangled masses of vines, and piled them together so they could be burned when seasoned and dry.

They ceased their work at noon and ate their lunch, which consisted of cold cornbread, roasted potatoes, cold boiled venison, and broiled rabbit. A simple repast, perhaps; but never did a prince in his castle relish his sumptuous feast more than did these hardy, hungry boys their frugal lunch.

After resting and playing mumble-peg for a short time, they returned to work. In the mid-afternoon, dense dark clouds began to gather in the south-west. The sound of low, distant thunder reached their ears. The clouds grew darker and the rumbling nearer and more frequent. Flashes of lightning were followed by loud bursts of thunder. Small clouds were now scurrying across the heavens and joining the cloud-mountains in the south-west. An oppressive stillness, broken only by peals of deafening thunder, prevailed. The gentle breezes which had been fanning the hot earth until now, ceased, as though in awe of the terrific storm about to break in fury. Birds were

seeking shelter in the thick brush. Buzzards which the boys had observed earlier, flying overhead, had become mere specks in the sky as they circled higher and higher to get above the circling clouds. A wild-cat dashed across the clearing and disappeared toward the hills, doubtless to reach a known safe retreat. All animal nature seemed to know instinctively that a crisis in the irresistible upper elements was on and were hastening to places of safety.

This was before the days of cyclones, so called, but whirlwinds and hurricanes were frequent. The lightning had become one continuous glare. Protracted bursts of thunder shook the earth. Striking their axes into a stump, the boys started on a run toward home. They had little hope of reaching there before the storm, but they were anxious to cross the Big Creek ahead of it. They had gone only about three hundred yards, when they stopped suddenly and looked behind them. The earth was trembling under their feet, and a fearful roaring sound, growing ever nearer and more deafening, exercised a strange fascination over them.

They saw uprooted trees whirling among the clouds. A moment more, and the tornado swept into the swamp. Trees twisted from the earth were falling on every side. Giants of the forest, a hundred and fifty feet high, were sweeping the ground with their great bushy tops. It looked as though nothing alive could survive the mad storm. With the instinct born of woodcraft, the boys found a large hollow log. King crawled into it and Buck followed him in like manner. There was room enough for them to occupy a horizontal position in the log, but not enough to sit up or turn around. Rain was now falling in torrents. Inky darkness had come. The wind had quieted down. Buck could see only as a momentary electrical display illuminated the vicinity. King could see nothing at all.

In a flash of lightning, Buck saw a large fuzzy-headed animal dashing to the opening in the log. Quickly opening his pocket knife, he shouted, "Lookout, King! there—is, look—" Within an instant a large wild-cat seized Buck by the ear. A terrific fight in the dark log was on. Buck wielded his knife manfully,

stabbing the cat in the belly in the dark. The cat released its hold on Buck and forced its way past him and tied onto the black boy. A fearful struggle followed and King cried out: "Kick him, Buck, he is got me by de jaw an' won't turn loose."

Buck brought both heels into play with all the force at his command. "Quit dat, Buck!" shouted King. "You is kickin' me on de nose. Crawl outen de laug quick as you kin an I'll butt dis varmint out in front uv me."

Buck, cat and King came tumbling out. A three-cornered fight followed as frequent flashes of lightning shone upon the scene. At last, the boys were triumphant and the huge wild-cat lay dead before them.

After washing the blood from their faces, the boys crawled back into the log out of the rain, though they were already drenched by the brief exposure in the open. Another hour passed. The rain had moderated to a steady drizzle. Shivering in their wet clothes, the boys crawled out of the log into pitch darkness. The water, which now covered the entire bottom, was rising rapidly. It already was knee deep where they stood. They knew that the wide slough between them and the clearing whence they had come was ten or twelve feet deep by now. On the east side, they heard the roar of the Big Creek and knew it was overflowing its banks.

The hollow log which had served them as a refuge began floating slowly with the current. The boys climbed on, determined to ride it until morning if possible. The roaring of the fast rising waters sounded almost as threatening as the storm earlier in the evening. The tense soul-trying hours of the night dragged on. Above the thunder of rushing waters, the boys shuddered as they heard the maniacal scream of the swamp owl and the raucous howling of wolves that had been driven from the swamp by the flood waters.

A little before daybreak the log, which had been easy to ride at the outset, began to move more swiftly and to bump with greater force against trees that stood in their route. Of a sudden, the log would turn over, spin around and around, then plunge on, sometimes under water, sometimes above it.

Drifting at length into the cross current of a slough, it was



carried into the swift current of the Big Creek. To the weary youths, it seemed that the log, now tossed about like a splinter in the raging waters, was more often on top of them than they on top of it. They were fagged out by the long struggle. Their endurance was nearly ended.

"King, it looks like we're not going to get out of this alive," Buck said hoarsely. "We had better tell God about all the bad things we've done in our lives and ask him to forgive and save us, at least save—our souls."

"Das alright, Buck. You do de prayin' while I keeps dis laug fum turnin' ovah fauty times a minit."

Plunging suddenly into a bluff bank which jutted out into the water, the log came to an abrupt stop, except that the rear end was slowly swinging around. The limbs of a large elm tree reached out low and horizontally over the water at this point. The boys gripped onto these tightly. Clinging to the limbs and climbing cautiously, they soon found themselves on high, solid ground. Three little wild-cats climbed from the log onto the elm tree. It was now plain why the old mother cat had fought the boys to her death. That log was her home and her children were in it.

Weakened almost beyond endurance, the boys staggered slowly on toward the hills. They knew that they were on the south bank of the creek next to home, but how far below, they had little idea. Faintly, the sound of a hunter's horn came to their ears. They felt a thrill of joy as they recognized the lost-call. The lost-call in that wild woods country at that time was two long blasts of the hunter's horn, a moment's pause, then two more long blasts. Three long blasts in succession was the answer made by the lost. If the lost one had no horn, the answer was given by means of three loud whoops. The rescuer's signal that the lost was found, was three blasts in succession, a moment's pause, then one long blast.

Eager as he was to answer the lost call, Buck found that he was too hoarse to emit a sound above a whisper. King, whose throat was in a little better condition, gave three whoops that spread out at the last like the frazzled end of a rope. No answer came back. Apparently, the rescue party had not heard

King. The boys were growing weaker. They were losing their sense of direction. Drowsiness was creeping on them; yet they scrambled on in what they thought was the direction from which the last signal of the huner's horn had been given. Then the end of endurance came. They staggered and fell into the leaves on the sunny side of a log.

Colonel Tyler and one of his stalwart neighbors, who had outdistanced the others, after many hours of searching for the lost boys, were about to start homeward for something to eat and a brief rest, when their attention was attracted by old Jeff, as he came bounding toward them out of the bushes, barking and prancing about them.

"I believe old Jeff knows something," the Boss said. "Let's follow him."

Buck was awakened by a soft soothing application to his face while the dog's tail was wagging across King's face. King opened his eyes, sat up with a start, and exclaimed: "Look a har, Jefferson Davis! You is a mitey good daug, but you is also mitey reckluss. You come close to gitin' yo' tail snatched off, cause I wuz dreamin dat wile cat wuz atter me agin." A few moments later, the Boss and his comrade were on the spot.

"Thank God, we've found them before it is too late," the Boss exclaimed. "They are still alive."

Raising his horn to his lips, he blew the blast that notified the other searchers that the lost boys were found. The three blasts, followed by a long one, reverberated through the forest, until the last faint echo resounded back from sections miles away.

The men and boys of the little settlement had spent the entire night hunting for the lost ones. None of them had been able to cross the high waters to the other side of the bottom where it was feared they had been killed in the storm or drowned in the flood waters. It had required all the power of several women neighbors who had gathered at the Tyler home, to restrain the Queen from going into the storm and dark, to join in the search. When the signal that meant the

lost were found came ringing in relays from the forest, the mother's pitiful wails gave place to shouts of joy.

Their clothes rough-dry, the hungry, cat-gnawed boys were brought on horseback to the Tyler place, where a general rejoicing took place. Silently, the men shook hands while the women hugged each other in their joy. Buck's mother kissed him on his swollen face and ears and insisted that he was the smartest and bravest boy in Dixie. They slapped King fondly on the back and told him that he was the bulliest Negro boy in Texas. All were happy over the rescue.

"I know that the Lord answered my prayers and saved these boys from death in that terrible storm," said the Queen.

"Yes, Mother," Buck replied. "You taught me to pray and told me, whenever I was in trouble, to ask the Lord to help me. Last night, I did not see how any one except the Lord could save us, so I asked him three times to help us out. While I was asking him the third time, our log struck the bank and we knew that we were safe, at least safe from drowning."

"Thank the Lord," the God-loving little group uttered in chorus. Turning to King, Mrs. Tyler asked, "And did you trust in the Lord too?"

"Yassum, I did a part ob de time," replied King, "but I wuz trustin' dat laug when we wuz in de swif' watab, cause I knowed if dat laug gits away fum us, we sho would dround, an I wuz pendin' mosely on Buck in dat wild-cat fight, cause I knowed Buck wuz game, and I done sed to myself, dat de Laud dont want no truck wid dat fitein wild-cat. Yassum, I is a ligous Nigger an pends on de Lawd."

At this juncture, the joy over the rescue was interrupted by a query from Bill Thompson: "Where is Maggie Parker? She has not returned. I haven't seen her for hours."

Three men and two boys hurriedly remounted their horses to begin another search. They had proceeded only a few steps, however, when they stopped to listen. Faintly, in the distance, there came to them the mellow notes of the curlew yodel. "She is returning and she is all right," Mollie Thompson exclaimed. "She never turns loose that wild sweet song except when she

is in good spirits. No doubt, she heard the signal that means the lost is found and is trailing you in."

Riding up to the group some minutes later, Maggie dismounted, beamed silently on her friends, then walked over to Buck. Scrutinizing him keenly from head to foot, she said in her usual frank manner, "You're too badly scratched to look like much, but I like you anyhow. You are the only animal I know of that could have gotten out of the swamp alive."

Without further comment she mounted her horse and rode away toward her stock range. It was learned later that Maggie, quietly and alone, had searched the forest all night for the missing boys.

## CHAPTER VI.

Out of the smoldering ruins of towns; away from the weed-choked plantations, fleeing the scenes of indignities, poverty, and sorrows, the old South was moving Westward. Train after train of canvas-covered wagons from Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi were following the new made trails to the unclaimed forests of Texas.

There was scarcely a home in the Southland that was not mourning for its lost wearer of the gray—father, brother, son or husband. They were resenting the loss of their slaves and lands, when new and terrible conditions were forced upon them; the so-called reconstruction of the South was forced upon them.

On the one hand, was the unbending pride of the intelligent ex-slave-owners. On the other, the proverbial ignorance and superstition of the lately freed Negroes. To reconcile these two extremes; to bring these whites and these blacks to a semblance of equality, was the impossible task to which the victorious North set itself, in its program for restoring the seceded states to the Union. The oath of allegiance, exacting, humiliating, imputing treachery to all who had taken up arms in defense of the South, stuck in the throats of the white men and could not be swallowed.

Practically all of the so-called rebel states had been placed under military law. White officers from the Union army with companies of Negro soldiers were stationed at county seats and other towns of importance. Their purpose was to suppress race riots and to force the proud-spirited Southerners into perfect submission, and to emphasize their order that the Negroes were in every way equal to the white people.

In the majority of cases, the white officers endeavored to act justly and to do their duty, but it was beyond their power, to control the great hordes of Negroes that had become half-crazed and bestial in their first flush of freedom. Do not under-

stand the writer to say that all of the Negroes were bad; for such was not the case. Some of them were sensible, industrious, and honest, only desiring an opportunity to make a living and to improve the moral and intellectual standard of their race. These were respected and befriended by the Southerners. This class, however, was very small in number and unpopular with the masses of Negroes.

Greatly outnumbering the white people in many sections of the South, the blacks, by reason of their unnumbered outrages under the protection of the military, had become a continual scourge and dread.

The Negro men harbored an insane desire to consort with white women. Ignorantly, they believed the time had come when it was their right to carry out their evil designs. To accomplish them, they would take almost any chance. Adding fuel to the iniquitous flame that burned within them, scalawags from the dross of the Northern Army assured them that they were the white people's equal in every way. They were reminded that Southern white men had made paramours of Negro women during slavery days and that they now had the right and opportunity to do the same with the white women.

These conscienceless white men, who advised and led the Negroes in these base things, were the dross of the Northern Army who had no welcome even among respectable people in the country from which they came. They were base adventurers who remained in the South after the surrender, solely for the purpose of gleaning from the Negroes what they had, and to rob the prostrate South. Encouraged by this white scum from the North, the Negroes robbed, raped, and murdered.

It was unsafe for a white woman to be left alone at any place, at any time; even the presence of white men did not always safeguard her, if the Negroes came at night with sufficient numbers.

Rendered practically helpless by military law in which Negroes served as soldiers, the white men, who had valiantly defended their beloved Southland for four long years against overpowering odds, now sternly realized that they must band

together once more for the protection of their homes and loved ones. This they must do, or submit to the shame and ignominy which the lascivious blacks were forcing on them.

Out of such conditions developed the South's necessity for combatting the menace that hourly grew more dangerous.

Like a white flame, it spread among the home-defenders, from the South-east to the timbered sections of East Texas. Swiftly, invisibly, it protected and avenged. It struck down the black ravisher and carried terror to the Negroes that were robbing and stealing to the starvation of the white people. Out of this incubator was born the Ku Klux Klan.

Out of the enveloping gloom, and seemingly from nowhere and everywhere, awe inspiring, determined, rode the Knights of the Dixie wilds.

The Ku Klux Klan\* of the late sixties was more than justifiable in its work. It was indispensable. This immortal organization was composed of the cream of Southern manhood. The sole purpose of its members was to protect themselves from robbery, murder, and the despoiling of their women.

Probably no other order in the world ever dealt more severe punishment to a member who turned traitor. It had to be so, because one traitor was more dangerous to them than a thousand known enemies. Seldom did a traitor to the Klan escape with his life. Often lenient with an enemy, the Klanmen never showed mercy to a member who betrayed them.

An applicant for membership in the order was investigated so thoroughly that it was impossible for any one except a clean, loyal Southerner to gain admission to the order. The exceeding few who were found to be traitors were men who had been offered large sums of money by the military posts to obtain and deliver lists of Klan leaders together with records

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\*There is not now, or ever has been, any connection between the Ku Klux Klan of the late sixties and the organization that is bearing the name today. There is no necessity for a secret, fighting band in these peaceful times. The old order was a necessity. The one of today is a fad of the laity and a money machine of its officers.

of their mob deeds and their plans of future operation. These failed in their purpose and paid for their perfidy with their lives.

Thousands of good and just men in the North became bitter enemies of the Klan, because of misinformation. Some of the Northern newspapers word-painted the order as a heartless band of outlaws who were murdering thousands of defenseless Negroes, as well as white men who tried to protect the Negroes.

As a matter of fact, clans have existed in all ages, in most countries. They represent secretly organized team-work. In some instances, they have saved worthy people from persecution or destruction, while in others they have been destroyers of good men and measures. Formation of a clan once saved the common people of England from peonage to a domineering tyrant and his henchmen. Oliver Cromwell was the High Cyclops of that clan. Clans of Scotland warded off English tyranny and oppression for nearly one hundred years and finally obtained for the Scots their just dues and representation in the law-making bodies of Great Britain.

It is true that some of the former slave owners were proud, haughty, and defiant, but the great majority of the Southern people had conceded their defeat and admitted their error in seceding from the Union and making war on the North, though they never would agree that they were traitors as was required of, and prescribed for, them in the prepared oath of allegiance. They still loved their country and wanted to get back into the Union honorably.

The North was not content with victory and reasonable obedience to their demands by the vanquished. Led by highly prejudiced men, such as Charles Sumner and General Benjamin Butler, they were intent upon crushing out the last spark of pride and self respect that remained in the overpowered South. If they had not encouraged and supported the Negroes in their effort to force social equality upon the Southern white people, the Ku Klux Klan never would have been organized and thousands of Negroes would have escaped punishment and, in some instances, death. The tyranny of the North over the Southern white people was wrong. It was also wrong to



lead the Negroes into the belief that they could step into the social ranks of intelligent white people.

If Butler, Sumner, and others who favored Negro equality, had been forced to eat and sleep with loud-smelling buck Negroes for a week or two, they would have changed their views and arguments.

A small per cent. of the older Negroes had sense enough to see the folly of the Northern leaders and refused to follow their lead. This class depended on their Southern friends, among whom they had been raised, for counsel and assistance, and they were seldom disappointed. It was this class that became good citizens and made the foundation for a higher standard of intelligence and morals for their race.\*

The purpose of the Clan was not to impose on the weak or to foster mob law, as many people from that day to this believed. The Clansmen were high-minded, patriotic men, and were law-abiding so long as the law protected them and their families. The law, and those in power at that time, failing to do this, they were forced to organize and protect themselves or be overwhelmed by conscienceless Negroes.

The three years reign of the Clan saved the lives of thousands of good white men. It saved many Southern women and girls from a fate worse than death.

Local Clansmen never sought to suppress bad Negroes in their own community. Had they done so, the order would have been of short life. When Negroes of a certain community, because of their outrages, became unbearable, a Brother Lodge, some twelve or fifteen miles away, was notified. Members of that Lodge would slyly gather between eleven and twelve o'clock at night, mount their horses, and steal away to an appointed place in the neighborhood of the bad Negroes.

A pilot of the local Clan, usually a shrewd boy, would meet

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\*Although the writer is a true American and strictly loyal to the United States government and laws, he never has been fully reconstructed on the race question. He is a friend to all honest Negroes and has met thousands of deserving ones, but he has never known a "cullud pusson." To him, all of them are Negroes.

the band and conduct them to the desired place. The reason they used a boy for a pilot or guide was because his absence from home, if discovered, did not create suspicion among military officers who might be scouting about.

After administering punishment to fit the crime the Clansmen broke ranks, and returned to their homes by separate routes. No two went together. This served to prevent them from being trailed by officers or Negro soldiers the next day. The penalty for unprovoked murder or rape was death. The penalty for robbery, theft, and insult to white women was a severe whipping.

Clansmen were seldom captured by soldiers, for the reason that the latter were quartered in the town and did not venture out at night. It would have been foolish for them to do so because the Negroes' mortal fear of the Clansmen kept them from leaving their quarters at night and the white officers knew but little about the trails and dim roads, and were not woodsmen. On the other hand, the Clansmen knew every mile of the country.

## CHAPTER VII.

So accustomed had Buck and King become to covered wagons, which almost daily were seen moving wearily along the now well-defined dirt road that led near the Tyler Farm, that they paid little attention to them.

More and more of that part of East Texas was being settled by emigrants from the Southern states—hardy, industrious, fearless men and beautiful women with the tan and glow of health in their cheeks. Inward they came from the war-scarred hills of Tennessee and Georgia, and the poverty-stricken sections of Alabama and Mississippi, seeking homes in the unmolested new country of Texas.

Buck ceased his labor for a moment and rested his chin upon hands that clasped the end of his hoe-handle. It was spring-time—a day for dreamers and lovers of nature. Field and forest presented a scene that would inspire poets and painters. The balmy air and mellow sunshine, impregnated with romance, and stimulants of sex emotions, so strong in the temperate zones of Dixie, prevailed in all animal and vegetable nature. Gentle breezes caressed the bluebonnets that undulated like the waves of a vast azure sea. Hundreds of songbirds warbled in the green foliage of the trees, and the low droning of honey bees made a mellow bass to the bird song.

A sigh escaped Buck's lips. A melody rose from King's throat as he continued to chop grass. He was looking forward to Saturday afternoon off, when he would go fishing. Buck was thinking of Maggie Parker. No wonder the one dreamed, the other sang.

Suddenly, Buck hurled his hoe to one side. His muscles contracted as his eyes fastened on a caravan of covered wagons approaching from the East. He saw the horses of the outriders rearing and plunging as if in great fear, while the drivers of the teams drew rein abruptly.

Glancing into the woods beyond, Buck discovered the cause of the excitement. Marching in single file, their rifles held loosely under their arms, about twenty Indians were wending their way along a forest path toward the wagons. Grasping the situation at once, Buck rushed to the road. Approaching a tall young man who appeared to be the leader of the caravan, he shouted: "Don't shoot! Let me tell you about these Indians. They are friends to us white people. They are only on march to their hunting grounds. You see, I know them well." Buck then held his hand high in token of greeting to the Indians, who were now only a short distance away.

Glodock, the Indian leader, halted a moment, solemnly returned the greeting and then continued his course through the woods.

Reassured by this action, the leader of the caravan dismounted from his horse, smiled, and extended his hand to Buck, saying, "Graham is my name; we have you to thank for keeping us out of trouble. We have been hearing frightful stories about hostile Indians so often since we crossed the line into Texas that we were looking for them all the time. We thought our time had come when we saw those Indians a while ago.

"To further introduce myself, I will say that my father was Senator John B. Graham. He was killed while fighting in the Southern Army. Practically all of our vast fortune was swept from us by the War. My war-widowed sister Anna, my younger sister Kate, and I are all that are left of our once large and happy family. We intend to try our fortune in this new country. We intend to forget as far as possible our days of luxury, lay aside our gloves, and work hard with our bare hands. In this wonderful new country, with its probable rich future, we hope and expect to regain our lost fortune."

All of the men of the caravan, having somewhat recovered from their fright, gathered about Emmet Graham and Buck, listening intently to Buck's description of the surrounding country and the history of the unusual Indian band which had just disappeared into the forest.

Briefly, Buck told them what he knew about the friendly

red men who had maintained their little village near the town of Livingston in Polk County, Texas, no one knows how long before the coming of the earliest settlers in the state.

He told of their unrivalled skill in hunting and their strict compliance with their promises and their honest dealing. He told of their wonderful cunning and their peculiar tribal laws and customs. He stated that there were about four hundred of them and, so far as any one knew, they had never affiliated with any other tribe of Indians, and had always been friendly with white people.

## CHAPTER VIII.

At a close of the war, in the spring of 1865, when pioneers from the East began to settle in the country between the Trinity and Netches Rivers, the once abundant wild game began slowly to decrease. Consequently, the Indians of Polk County found it necessary to extend their hunting range. The place that was being improved by the Tylers was about sixty miles north of the Indian village.

In the spring of 1867, small hunting squads of Indians established a temporary hunting camp on Mustang Creek about two miles from the Tyler place. It became a custom of the Indians to establish camps and use them a few weeks in early spring and again in the fall. They had a circuit of them scattered through the country and would drift from one to the other during the hunting seasons.

Colonel Tyler offered no objection to their hunting and camping so near him. In fact, he had much sympathy and good will for these simple children of the forest. Buck formed a close friendship with the Indians and it was fully reciprocated by them. Buck's fondness for wild life and his natural leaning toward the inclinations of primitive man brought him close to the Indians' views of life. Often in the evening after supper, Buck slipped away to their camp, carrying tobacco and other things to his Indian friends.\*

He was never more happy than when listening to them tell of their thrilling hunting experiences and long rambles in the manless wild forests; and the Indians never tired of hearing him tell about his fight with the wild-cat in the hollow log.

Buck's father said he believed the Indians of North America had sprung from a venturesome band of a Mongolian race that had crossed Behring's Strait at some prehistoric date into this country and drifted southward, and that usage, climate, and environment during centuries were accountable for their

changed appearance. King and the Indians formed a dislike for each other at the start. The Indians were too silent and cunning for King, who referred to them as yaller ghosts. The Indians made fun of King's black skin, flat nose, and kinky hair.

Buck readily answered all questions put to him by Emmet Graham and the other men grouped around him, about the country, the people, and the land. He told how they easily secured plenty of meat out of the forest, and as an example of the fertility of the lands, he pointed with a spark of pardonable pride to the rank growing crops in the field nearby.

The men of the caravan showed great interest in Buck's description and information about the country. They shook his hand warmly as they remounted their horses, or regained their seats in the wagons, and assured him that they would strike camp not far away and look the country over. Emmet said, "I am going to take the liberty to call and see your father. I am anxious to look again into the face of an old thoroughbred, patriarchal Southern gentleman." Ox-whips cracked and the caravan moved on up the road.

With King at his heels, Buck was retracing his steps toward his work, looking back over his shoulder, when of a sudden he involuntarily checked his pace. His eyes had caught sight of the loveliest face and form he had ever beheld. Two wonderful blue eyes were looking into his. Then still more bewitching, a rich crimson mounted into her cheeks. Her lips parted—perhaps in token of friendship, but the wagons, nearing the end of their long journey, as though in weariness, groaned and creaked as the oxen were urged on. The rear flap of the wagon in which he had seen the angelic face was drawn down

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\*If any one who reads this book, doubts the existence of the little strange tribe of Indians that I have described, he should write to any county officer of Polk County, Texas, enclosing a stamped envelope and the facts will be given as I have stated them. There were about 400 of these Indians at the close of the War between the States, but they have slowly decreased, until there are less than 300 of them at the present time, March, 1929.

and the never-to-be-forgotten vision of loveliness had passed from Buck's view.

The first question that came into his mind was, "Is she prettier than Maggie?" His verdict was: "No, not prettier, but more attractive. More intelligent, more charming. She is irresistible." He said to himself, "I will locate their camp next Sunday and in some way manage to see her."



## CHAPTER IX.

As a pilot or guide for the Clan, Buck on a recent occasion had gone with the local Clan to the Elkhart community, fifteen miles away. His part was to hold horses and to fight only in case of emergencies. While the Clansmen were punishing some bad Negroes, they made an unexpected resistance. One Clansman was slightly wounded before the Negroes were subdued. At the report of a gun, the horses that Buck was holding became frightened and dragged him roughly among the bushes, which tore off his mask. When a Negro attempted to take one of the horses on which to make his escape, Buck shot him down. In the darkness Buck failed to find his mask and left without it.

It was near daylight when the Clansmen completed their work and hurried homeward through the woods. The military officers at the county seat were notified of the affair the next morning. They marshalled their forces and reached the scene of the tragedy about noon and trailed some of the Clansmen to their home neighborhood, where, as usual, they lost the trail. Negroes who were present at the assault told the officers of a boy who was with the Clansmen and that they could identify him if brought before them because he had lost his mask and they had seen his face. The purpose of the officers, now, was to capture the boy and force him to tell who the men with him were.

King, whose ears were ever open for gossip among the Negroes, learned that Buck had been spotted and he lost no time in carrying the news to Buck and the Boss. Buck immediately sought refuge in the swamp, a short distance from his home. The officers and Negro soldiers hunted for him daily and finally crowded him so close that it was decided he must leave the neighborhood.

Slipping away on his horse at midnight, by an unfrequented

trail, he planned to ford the Trinity River to Madison County and report to a Clan Lodge who would conceal him until the excitement was calmed or forgotten in consequence of new, and perhaps more serious, troubles which were frequently occurring. When he reached the river at about daylight the next morning, he found it nearly level with its banks. He could not afford to stop and make camp there, for it was more than likely that he was already being trailed by the Negro soldiers.

After studying the matter over, he decided to disguise himself as a Negro boy, go to a ferry three miles up the river, and risk crossing unrecognized. He took from his small pack a black sheepskin wig and arranged it with the kinky wool on the outside. With charcoal and water he blacked his face and hands. Then he went to the ferry, rode into the ferry boat, and asked to be put across. On reaching mid stream, he observed a squad of Negro soldiers on the west bank and asked the Negro ferryman what they were doing there. "They is sogers," replied the ferryman. "They is watchin' fur dat Ku Klux boy what killed Mose Blanton las' week an got away."

Buck feared that his disguise would be discovered and he captured, if he landed on the west side. He thought of forcing the ferryman at the point of his pistol to turn the boat and land him back on the east side, then he thought of the fact that the Negro soldiers who were already watching him would know that something was wrong and fire on him. He quickly came to a decision. He spurred his horse overboard on the down stream side of the boat and struck out diagonally across the current for a point far down on the west bank.

The soldiers, lined up on the west bank, fired several shots and yelled to him to come ashore and surrender. Apparently the shots were fired to frighten him into surrendering, and went wide of their mark. Buck made a safe landing some three hundred yards below on the west bank and rode into a thicket to rest his horse and wring the water from his clothes. The soldiers had to ride nearly one mile west to find a crossing on a creek that emptied into the river just below the ferry on the west side. This delay gave Buck time to wring the water from his clothes and put them back on. The soldiers soon

reached the vicinity. After discovering horse tracks leading into the thicket and none coming out at any point around it, they surrounded the thicket. They had heard of the boy's skill with his guns and they knew that he was armed. They decided, therefore, that a charge into the thicket would be dangerous. They circled around near the edge of the bushes, while the leader thundered his order to the boy, to surrender and come out.

Being well hidden and feeling almost certain that the Negroes would not risk a charge, Buck made no answer. For nearly an hour the Negroes cursed and threatened to charge into the thicket. Failing to start their quarry, they began firing at random into the thicket. One of their bullets came dangerously near Buck, whose hope of holding them off until dark, under the cover of which he might make his escape, began to fade. Another volley came and a bullet struck his horse in the flank. Seeing no further hope in delay, Buck mounted his crippled horse and made a dash for liberty.

After a chase of a mile through the open forest, he saw clearly that his horse was too weak from his long swim and loss of blood, to outrun the soldiers' fresh horses, so he did the only wise thing left. He halted, raised his hands, and surrendered. With shouts of triumph, the Negroes gathered around him. They tore off his wig and had him wash the charcoal black from his hands and face. "Haw! Haw!" laughed one of the negroes. "You wuz a purty nigger, but you is a ugly white boy." Not content with placing handcuffs on the boy, they tied his feet together. A bottle of whiskey was produced from a saddle pocket and all of the Negroes took a drink to celebrate the daring capture of the much wanted boy-clansman. After the last drink had been drained from the bottle, a burly Negro broke it on the boy's head, leaving a long gash reaching near the skull. The boy reeled from the shock but did not cry out. Blood ran down and filled his eyes.

"You is a stubborn young rooster," quoth a big, pop-eyed Negro, "but I is gwyne to mak you cry and beg." He delivered a terrible open-hand slap on the boy's face and shouted, "Yo'

ole Daddy uster make Cullud Getmen call him Master. Now de bottom rail is on top. You call me Master!"

When Buck refused to do this, he was cuffed on the head until blood ran from his mouth and nose. In this condition, he was tied on a horse and carried to headquarters on the east side of the river. All along the way, he was exhibited to jeering crowds of gloating Negroes.

## CHAPTER X.

Buck was duly charged with murder and the day of his trial by courtmartial was set.

The Post commander was not so anxious for the conviction and punishment of the boy as he was to learn facts about the Clan which was the terror of the military. He was keenly anxious to know who the Clan leaders were, and their future plans. To find out these things would bring promotion and a large reward to him. Accordingly, the next day he went to prison and took Buck into a private office. Through threats and abuse, he tried to scare the boy into giving him the desired information.

To his chagrin and amazement, the boy sternly refused to answer any of his questions and defied him to the last. He seemed to be without care or fear. He could force him into nothing. Changing his tactics to kindness and alluring offers, he said, "Young man, you are too fine a specimen of young manhood to remain in your present, unprofitable and unpleasant surroundings. You are worthy of better things. There are great opportunities ahead of you, if you will only see and accept them. You are naturally a genius and a commander. Join me and answer the questions I asked you a while ago, and I will give you a captain's commission and a captain's uniform. You will have little to do then, but lead your company and draw your salary. It will also place you in line for early promotion. Girls will flock about you and you will have a good time."

With an expression of scorn, the boy answered, "You haven't enough, and never will have enough, money, positions, or gifts to make a traitor of me. I would not stoop to mingle with you and your crooked filthy bunch."

The commandant was dumfounded at this reply. He could not understand it. With a more respectful voice he said to

the boy, "Your loyalty to your people is admirable. Your pluck and principles are high and strong, but let me tell you that your judgment is not so good. This may be your last chance to escape a firing squad. You have no influential friend to help you in your trial. A thousand Negro soldiers are clamoring for your death. The cards are stacked against you. You can confess and live, or refuse and die. Do you still refuse my offer?"

The boy's face showed no change in expression and he disdained a reply.

Buck's friends feared that he would be convicted and shot if they did not in some way effect his escape. News of his capture had reached every Clan in the district.

Delegations from more than twenty Lodges met in called session. After a long deliberation and discussion of the case, it was decided to send a detachment of Clansmen to the east side of the county and stir up so much trouble among the Negroes of that section, that a large force of the soldiers stationed at the county seat would be sent to their relief, then the Clansmen in full force could storm the guard house and rescue the boy. The appointed band of Clansmen went to the east side of the county the next night as scheduled.

On the third day, couriers came from the Netches River section with the news that a large force of Clansmen were storming the Negro quarters of that section at night and beating and killing the Negroes. This news had the expected effect on the military. Two-thirds of the military force quartered at the county seat were dispatched to the scene of the reported trouble. The Clansmen who had already gathered in the woods near the guard-house, charged the remaining military force. After one exchange of shots, the soldiers retreated into the guard-house. The Clan forces quickly surrounded the prison and demanded the surrender of Buck.

The white officer commanding the Negro soldiers requested a parley. When this was agreed to, he came to the door of the guard-house and said, "You came upon us unawares. Our force is too small to fight you, but I warn you that if you force your way into this prison to rescue your comrade, you

will find him dead. I have given my men orders to shoot him the minute you start toward this door, then take our chance in flight. If you go quietly away, he will live to stand trial and we pledge our lives that it shall be a fair one."

Some of the Clansmen were for storming the prison and killing every soldier in it if they found Buck dead. The Colonel, who was with the Clansmen, was afraid to risk his son's life by this plan, and prevailed on his comrades to retire and hold another council. This was agreed to. In the council that followed, it was decided to wait until night, then capture some of the military leaders, and demand Buck in exchange or kill the prisoners.

The large force of soldiers that went to the Netches country, found that the trouble had been much over-rated and that they had been the victims of a ruse. They knew now that it had been arranged by the Clansmen for a purpose. They hurried back to town, and reached there a few minutes before the Clansmen were ready for the second attack. Too late, the Clansmen realized that they had waited too long. Eighty men could not hope to prevail against 300, out in the open. They withdrew to the forest for another council, in which they decided to let the case come to trial. They would remain quiet, as though they had given up hope of a rescue. In case Buck was convicted, however, they would mobilize their entire forces, storm the prison at night, and carry him away.

The country for many miles around was on edge. While there was no demonstration, everything that moved near hidden places, was closely watched. The soldiers knew from past experiences that when the Clansmen were quiet, some terror was brewing. The guard about the prison was doubled day and night.

Knowing the fondness of the chief officers for money, the Colonel decided to make a secret effort to bribe them. Disguised as an old ragged farmer, he went to town. Following this visit, he appeared less worried.

The day of the trial came. The courthouse was crowded with Negroes. A few white people were grouped near the front. All except the officers and soldiers were relieved of their

fire-arms before they entered the courtroom. After court was organized and the prisoner brought in, the Judge questioned Buck as to his age, name, and calling. After these were answered, the Judge continued, "Buck Tyler, you are charged here by indictment with the murder of Mose Brown on the fourth night of last month. Are you guilty? or not guilty?" Colonel Tyler rose and said, "I represent the defendant, and we plead not guilty."



## CHAPTER XL

Ominous mutterings came from all parts of the court room as the Negroes leaned forward, the better to hear the evidence and arguments. The prosecuting attorney attacked Buck's practice and character with the strongest language at his command. He pictured him as the most hardened and dangerous outlaw in the South. He called him a menace to any civilized country. He demanded that the court find him guilty of murder in the first degree and sentence him to be shot by a military firing squad. He declared that this would not only rid the country of a vile traitor, but would serve as an example that would put fear in the hearts of other traitors. His speech was cheered lustily by the Negroes.

When the prosecutor was through, Colonel Tyler rose to address the court. His stately pose, fearless expression, and natural dignity, characteristic of the older generation of Southerners, held the respectful attention of all present. He said, "Your Honor, we frankly admit that my son, Buck, took part in the punishment of some lawless Negroes, the night of the fourth day of this month, when Mose Brown was killed. We also know and will prove that the defendant was only a pilot for those who assailed the Negroes, and that Mose Brown was rushing upon him with a cocked rifle in his hand when the boy fired.

"We claim that a man or boy is justified in defending himself and his people against the outrages that are being imposed on us daily by conscienceless Negroes. You may domineer and abuse a proud spirited Southerner, but you can never subdue him. Like the Spartans of old, they will fight to the death for liberty and justice. Has the day come when our once free America, when white men of noble blood are no longer allowed to defend their virtuous women against rape and murder?" His voice growing louder as he warmed to his subject, he con-

tinued, "Could you, sir, with your Caucasian blood and racial pride stand quietly by, without protest or resistance, while your wife or daughters were being forced to entertain bestial, two-legged apes? Could you remain inert night after night while your children were being robbed of the necessities of life? We will not. We now warn all who are pushing this unjust charge, that if this boy should be convicted and shot by your beastly Negro soldiers, it will be worse for those who bring it about than it will be for the boy. He has been in constant danger for so long that the worst you can do will hold no terror for him. On the other hand, his cowardly enemies are afraid to fight where there is danger and afraid to die. Should the boy be convicted, every man connected with it will bite the dust of a horrible death in less than three months. So sure am I of this that in my mind's eye I can see the fearless band to which he belongs, trailing you to the end of the world, bringing you to bay in some dark swamp close to the gate of hell, hang you there and hand your cowardly body over to the Devil."

This terrible word-picture made every Negro present show the whites of his eyes and become very restless. Continuing, the Colonel said, "Officers of your command have offered this boy immunity from all charges against him, if he would turn traitor to his own people. Was there ever an offer so low, so sneaking, and so despicable, made to a boy or man of honor and principle?"

"Like a man, this boy refused this offer and all of the professed bribes. There are not enough Negro soldiers in Texas to force him to inform against his people. As a high-minded son of Dixie, he refuses to accept Negroes as the social equal of his mother and sisters, and by the eternal God of the Caucasian race, he never will.

"I would not mislead you with false promises. I know that the boy before you is determined to continue defending the person and honor of his mother and sisters until the present warped law is repealed and justice is again in the saddle. The woods around here are alive with men, tried and true, who will live and die with him for this cause. If he is given justice

and a fair deal, he will continue to help and protect all honest Negroes as he has done in the past. Your Honor, I am through."

The white officers were visibly affected by this speech. The Negroes balanced between fright and rage. They clamored for the arrest of the Colonel on a charge of sedition and the conviction of Buck for murder.

The Judge rapped loudly for order, and after some minutes, quiet was restored. White scalawags and pop-eyed Negroes pushed forward to hear the verdict and gloat over the expected conviction of the boy. The well manufactured Negro testimony had appeared clear and corroborative, but it was not sufficient to outweigh twelve hundred dollars that had mysteriously found its way into the hands of the court.

For a moment, the Judge appeared nervous. He apparently was afraid to announce the verdict. As a matter of safety, he called several of his white officers and had them gather near him. At last, the low spoken verdict came, "NOT GUILTY."

Following a moment of quiet, a woman's voice rose softly, clearly, reaching each recess of the stilled court-room, "Praise the Lord. Again, he has heard and answered my prayers. Lord, we thank thee from the depth of our hearts for this blessing. Forgive those who have sinned and care for those who deserve thy blessings. Blot out all hatred that exists between us and our Northern brethren, and bring back to us the peace and understanding of old."

It was Buck's mother who had spoken. After a scorching reprimand and a lecture to change his ways, Buck was released.

Under the pretense of having some important military business to transact, the Judge ordered all of the Negro soldiers to remain in the court-house. By his further order, the white people departed under escort of the white officers, which served to prevent an attack on them by the mob of disappointed Negroes who were waiting in the court yard. Hurrying away, they were met, about one mile from the court house, by more than a hundred Clansmen who rode out of the woods at that point. They had been awaiting news of the verdict.

Had it been conviction, they were ready to storm the town and rescue their people. It was discovered later that the Judge was aware of this fact.

## CHAPTER XII.

A young man by the name of H. B. Woods came into the Tyler neighborhood at about this time. He gave it out that he had gotten into serious trouble with some overbearing Negroes in Hines County, Mississippi, and to escape further trouble he had run away and come to Texas. He mildly intimated that he had killed several men and was a dangerous man when aroused.

His hair was a rich blond and curly. He wore fine clothes, pulled a sweet bow on the violin, and appeared to be well educated. He was above medium height and, barring a slight tendency to be corpulent below the belt, he had an attractive figure. He had a handsome face and a pleasant address. He was genteel, a good entertainer, and spent money rather freely, considering the hard times. The older people looked upon him with a degree of suspicion. Some of them believed him to be a disguised military agent who had been sent to spy on the home-defenders. His good looks and pleasant manners soon gained for him entrée into the little society circle.

A majority of the girls and some of the young married women became more or less fascinated by him. He frequently took the boys' sweethearts away from them at a dance or play-party. He did this in such a seemingly careless and good natured way that the boys could not take offence.

Woods owned and rode the finest horse in the country. It was a stallion of the pure bred copper-bottom stock; high metalled and frisky. He kept this horse as immaculately groomed as he did himself. Nothing pleased him so much as to see people admiring his horse.

One evening he rode the horse to a church gathering and hitched him in a conspicuous place, near and in front of the church house. Shortly after singing had been started, the horse took a spell of neighing and squealing, which worried the

little gathering and made it difficult for the people to hear. Buck had taken a chance that morning and had slipped out of the swamp and to the church gathering to see his mother.

In order to keep an eye out for his enemies, he did not go inside the church, but stood on the outside near the door. Mrs. Tyler went to where he was standing and asked him to move Woods' noisy horse farther away. She would have requested Woods to do it, but he was leading the singing and she did not want to disturb him. Buck untied the horse, led him fifty yards away and tied him to another tree. When Woods, who kept his eyes almost constantly on his horse, saw Buck leading him away, he excused himself and hurried out. White with anger, he exclaimed, "Who gave you permission to handle this horse? Don't you dare to put your dirty hands on him again."

Buck had heard of Woods and had seen him a few times, but had never met him directly. Several sensations ran through him as a result of Woods' outburst. At first, there was surprise; next, amusement; then slight anger. Replying to Woods, he said, "My mother asked me to do it, but I had already decided to move the horse anyway. He was disturbing the service and you knew he would do it when you hitched him there. I warn you not to do it again. That horse is not so much anyhow. I'll bet you a yearling against a fat shoat that my horse can outrun him a half mile."

"Who are you?" demanded Woods, as he trembled with rage.

"I am Buck Tyler," was the reply. "Every one around here knows me, except you, and you are going to know me better soon, if you do not stop trying to play big Ike around here. You had better tell the truth about who you are and where you came from before you try to cut such a wide swath." Buck did not know at this time, how near his implied accusations were to the truth.

"Yes," shouted Woods as he stepped closer to Buck, "I know you now as much as I ever care to. I've heard a lot about your low-down sneaking work. Being a boy, saves your hide

just now. If you were a man, I would thrash you as you deserve."

Buck, in turn, walked up to Woods and replied, "Listen! old Sissy-gall you're figuring on a load you can't toat. Take back what you said quick, or there will be a dude about your size that will go sobbing to his Mammy and begging her to let him hide under her apron. That horse or yours and your impudence are going to get you into serious trouble."

This was more than Woods could stand. He clinched his fists, but hesitated as he saw a dangerous light in the boy's eyes, and thought of the reckless name he bore. Their threatening attitude was observed by the little group in the church and broke up the meeting. They ran out and gathered around the threatening pair.

"Let 'em fight it out," one of the men exclaimed. "No, not here at the church," another put in. "It's not fair for a big man to fight a boy," broke in Tom Stamford; "let him fight a man of his size. I'll take the boy's place." "Aw, let the boy fight the dude," Mose Porter urged. "I'll bet my spurs agin' a good stake-rope that the boy kin whip him. Turn your big man loose."

The women and children, a bit frightened, gathered in small groups. The Queen came forward and persuaded Buck to go a part of the way home with her, then on to his hide-out in the swamp.

"I'll get you for this," Woods shouted after Buck as he was leaving. "I will teach a swamp rat like you not to interfere with a gentleman's affairs. We will meet again."

## CHAPTER XIII.

The next spring brought a squad of the Polk County Indians back to the Tyler Settlement. They came for Buck to go with them on a hunt, but the Colonel was afraid to risk his leaving his hiding place in the swamp, where he had been driven again by the Negro Soldiers. The Indians left, disappointed, saying they would return in the fall for Buck.

Buck, notwithstanding the hard life he was forced to lead, as scout and guide for the several Clans, had grown almost to man's size. His endurance seemed endless. He had passed from an apprentice to a full fledged Clansman with all of its privileges and responsibilities. His cunning and disregard of danger made him indispensable to the Clan.

The military forces had singled him out and were following his trail as close as they could, day and night. He found it unsafe to rest or sleep except when hid away in the cane-brakes where, on account of fear of an ambush, the enemy would not follow.

The anxiety to capture the outlaw boy had caused the military to concentrate their forces in the Tyler settlement. In a council of the Clansmen, it was decided that Buck should leave the neighborhood for a spell, in order to relieve the settlement of his objectionable pursuers and to throw them off his trail. Fortunately, a party of six Indian hunters, headed by Glodoc, appeared at the Tyler place, and through the Colonel, invited Buck to join them in a hunt in the Whiterock Creek country some twenty-five miles away. The invitation was gladly accepted by Buck, and the Indians joined him at an appointed place in the blue jungles, some four miles away.

When it was learned that a half company of Negro Soldiers led by a white officer had recently been assigned to service in the Whiterock country, the hunting party changed their route and went into the Elkhart Creek country which lay farther to



the North. This place was not far from the spot where Buck had killed Mose Brown and lost his mask, more than two years before. Some of the Negroes that lived there then, no doubt were still there. Buck had some scruples about venturing there. He told Goldoc of this problem and asked for his opinion. He knew that even the severest torture would not make the old Indian divulge a secret.

After hearing Buck's story in silence, Glodoc placed a hand on his shoulder and said, "No danger, boy. Him grow. Nig, know him? No. Nig, heap big coward? Yes. Him fight? No."

After traveling through woods that were isolated from roads or settlements for a day and a half, they pitched camp on the west fork of Elkhart Creek. This was a wild place with a switch-cane-thatched swamp on the East and heavily timbered hills on the West.

Due to the Indians' training and his own cunning, Buck had become an expert hunter and a crafty woodsman. He could trail wild game with the celerity of a foxhound. A wounded deer seldom made its escape from him. He could trail by blood, tracks, broken twigs, bruised grass, dislocated pebbles, and many other signs of which the ordinary hunter knows nothing. The Indians maintained camp and hunting regulations which seldom were broken—never willingly—by any member of the band.

Each hunter left camp about daylight for the morning hunt, and returned by, or about, eleven o'clock. They left camp for their afternoon hunt at about two o'clock and returned between sundown and dark. If any one of the party failed to return within an hour of the scheduled time, one or more of his comrades would find the absent one's trail and search until he was found, and woe to the enemy that had forcibly detained their comrade. Such a condition seldom occurred, because the Indians did not become widely separated while hunting. They hunted separately, but kept each other located by signals, such as would not alarm the game and were understood by themselves only.

When occasion required, these Indians could converse by

sign or signals, even when quite a distance apart. Their signals in the daytime included the call of the hawk, crow, jay bird, and other wild inhabitants of the forest that ramble in the day time.

At night, they imitated the howl of the wolf, bark of the fox, the whoop of the swamp owl, and other sounds usually made by the night ramblers. When out at night and near each other, they employed the cheep of the night-squirrel and chirp of the katydid or cricket.

These sounds were so perfectly codified and so thoroughly understood by the Indians that they knew the meaning of each sound or signal and the right answer to both.

With our great forward strides in civilization and invention, we of the present age feel justified in the opinion that we have perfected neighborhood communication. We tell ourselves that the telegraph and telephone have solved the problem and nothing is or can be superior to them. But so far as secret communication is concerned, these simple people of the woods are far ahead of us, for the reason that no one but themselves can understand their signal language. Though several of them be separated in a forest at night, through their signal language they can assemble and trail into their camp without uttering a sound save the call of something of the wild woods.

On the third day after arranging camp, all left camp a little after daylight for the morning hunt. The Indians, with their lucky kill, returned to camp at about eleven o'clock. Buck did not come. After waiting an hour, the Indians held a council in which many grunts and gestures were given; after which, Glodoc left to find and pursue Buck's trail.

Following the course of the creek that morning, Buck discovered many fresh deer tracks when about one mile from camp. The tracks led in the direction of the Negro settlement where Buck had lost his mask. The tracks of one of the deer were the largest he had ever seen. With an extra thrill, he began to wonder if a large black-tail deer had rambled from his natural range far to the North and joined the native deer.

Trailing them for a short distance, he saw several deer browsing on some hanging moss. He saw the buck which had

left the big tracks, standing broadside, with antlered head high, sniffing the air. Buck knew that the monster had smelled him and would be bounding away in a minute or less.

The distance was too great for a safe shot, but realizing that it was his only chance, he took quick aim and fired. At the report of the rifle, all of the deer vanished. Hastening to the spot, Buck found blood and hair on the ground and near-by bushes, which was unmistakable evidence that the big deer had been hard hit. With quick step, he followed the trail of the tracks. He had seen thousands of deer in his time, but this one was the largest of them all. He figured that the hide from this buck would bring at least five dollars, and that was a lot of money in those days.

He knew, too, that Glodoc would never cease to admire it. Following the tracks a mile farther, he saw from the tracks that the uninjured deer had turned off toward the swamp, while the wounded one had gone on toward the Negro settlement in the hills. Buck felt a hesitancy in going too near that settlement because he was almost certain that some of the Negroes who had sworn vengeance on him were still there. If, by chance, they should meet and recognise him there would be trouble, and he, being alone, would be likely to get the worst of it. He had heard that they still had his mask and frequently flourished it at their mass-meetings to fire up their people.

But Buck's eagerness to secure the big deer overcame his scruples and he followed on. Some half mile further, he saw the deer jump from a thicket of bushes forty yards ahead of him and go bounding away. A quick shot from Buck's rifle dropped him dead in his tracks. Buck ran to him quickly and cut his throat so as to be sure he did not get away.

Buck was glad to find that the deer was even larger than he looked to be while running. He looked at the sun and estimated that it was about noon. No doubt the Indians had returned to camp and were becoming restless over his absence. He knew that he could not carry the deer, or even the half of it, back to camp alone, for he figured that he was more than

three miles away. However, he was determined to skin the deer and carry the hide to camp, at whatever risk.

He laid off his coat, rolled his sleeves, and began skinning the deer as fast as he could. A few moments later, he was startled by hearing the cackling of hens and barking of a dog not far away. He immediately stopped his work and climbed a sapling to look the surroundings over. To his surprise, he saw, not more than a quarter of a mile away, several small farms and log cabins.

He quickly realized that he was near the bad Negro settlement. It seemed to him now, that the big deer had deliberately lured him mile after mile, to get him into the hands of his enemies.

While debating in his mind whether he should risk an effort to finish skinning the deer or leave the place at once, two lean dogs came out of the bushes and began to eat on the partly skinned deer.

He descended from the tree and drove the dogs away, then went back to his work. He finished skinning the deer and was rolling the hide into a convenient pack for comfortable carrying, when four burly black Negroes and one yellow one came upon the scene. Before he could reach his gun, he was seized, overpowered, and his hands tied behind his back.

The yellow Negro, who seemed to be the leader, said, "Ah, huh, you white-livered devil, we has cotched yer. You is de younges one yit what has come spryin' roun' heah, tryin' ter meet one uv our gals out heah in de woods. We is gwyne ter stop yur caperin'. Who is you, an' whar you come frum?"

After the Indian fashion, Buck refused to answer any questions or to make any defense. His hope was that the Indians would find and follow his trail before the Negroes carried out their fiendish threat. The Negroes led him to a vacant log hut that stood by the road near several of the cabins in which they lived.

In a hastily organized council, they decided to charge the prisoner with kidnapping one of their girls and forcing her to live with him in the woods. They began to drill and train witnesses to testify to the crime, provided the arrangement met

with the approval of John Gale, their neighbor. Gale was a shrewd Negro who had been a tool of the military scalawags ever since the county had been placed under military law. The Clan had punished him severely once and was watching for an opportunity to get hold of him again.

Buck was thankful that none of the Negroes had recognised him so far and was hoping that they would not. Two of the Negroes guarded the prisoner while the others went after John Gale who lived three miles away. News of a white boy, captured and held prisoner by the Negroes, was heralded through the settlement, and soon the cabin was surrounded by a motley crowd of Negroes of all sizes and both sexes. Some giggled, while others made ugly faces and called bad names.

One bull-neck Negro with a ragged scar across his chin appeared to be in deep study. Buck noticed him and became uneasy, for he had already recognized him as one of the Negroes who had been punished by the Clan on the night he lost his mask, and he was wondering, with some misgivings, if the Negro was going to recognize him.

After further close scrutiny the Negro shouted: "Fo' de Lawd! Dis is dat same boy whut wuz wid dem Ku Klux year afo' las' an killed Mose Brown. He los' de kiverin off his face when some hosses he wuz holdin' drug him aroun' in de brush an' I seed his face. I also seed him good at de cote when tha' tried him an' let him sneak out of de case widout bein' shot as he orter boen. I is sho' gwyne ter see to it dat dis white face, black-hearted varment doan git away fum us dis time."

He picked up half a fence rail that was lying near, and made a rush at the prisoner, but the guards held him back, saying, "Wait tel Mr. Gale comes fo' we does any thing wid him." It was now evident that nothing would be done until Gale came.

When it was learned that Gale had gone to town that morning and would not be back before about dark, most of the crowd drifted away. At dark, however, when it was reported that Gale had returned and was on his way to the cabin in which the prisoner was held, the mob reassembled, and, leaving only the two guards at the cabin, started down the road to meet their leader. Each one wanted to have some of the

honor of being among the first to tell the startling news to Gale.

The only opening in the cabin was a small doorway with no shutter. The guards sat in this opening awaiting the return of the mob and the coming of John Gale. There was no light in the cabin. The moon shone dimly on the outside. The guards had grown weary after the excitement of the capture had abated and were nodding drowsily. They awakened for a moment occasionally when mosquitoes bit them on their thick lips, but they soon lapsed into nodding again. Everything was now quiet.

Leaning against the wall of logs, Buck felt a nail that had been driven half its length into a log. It was one of the old-fashioned nails, square in shape with sharp corners. Noiselessly, he slipped the cord that bound his hands over the nail and began sliding it to and fro. Within a few minutes the cord was severed, and his hands were free.

When he was preparing to leap over the guards, grab one of their guns, and run for his life, he heard sounds like that of two crickets at the rear of the cabin. This was answered by the chirruping of four katydids a short distance in front. His pulse beat fast with excitement and hope. He understood the signals. His Indian friends had trailed him and were at hand.

Replying to their signals, he made a low croaking sound like that of a frog when caught by a snake. One of the guards was partly awakened by this sound and muttered, "Whuts de matteh wid you, boy? Is you tryin' to die afo' yo' time comes? Doan you git in a hurry. We is gwine ter hep you outen dis wourld jes' as soon as Mr. Gale gits heah."

The Negro had scarcely finished his threat when six long shadows fell across the doorway. The guards whirled about with frightened apprehension. They were face to face with six tall motionless forms. From one of the fantastic figures came the piercing, blood-curdling howl of the timber wolf. In turn, unearthly yells escaped the lips of the Negro guards who tore down the road, yelling, "Ku Klux! Ku Klux!" as they ran.

A few hundred yards away, they met John Gale, followed by all the Negroes of the settlement. All but breathless, the guards huskily declared that the Ku Klux were after them. More than five hundred of them were about the cabin. They had seen them with their own eyes. Some of them had come up out of the ground and others had come down through the moonlight.

Ropes, guns, and clubs were dropped and forgotten as members of the mob fled in terror in every direction except toward the now deserted cabin. Old hats, scraps of rags, and kinks of hair marked the trail of their flight.

The Indians, led by Glodoc, shook hands with Buck as they hurried away toward their camp. When they reached it an hour later, all rested in silence until Glodoc looked at Buck and said, "Boy! him make heep good Indian. Him kill deer, big lack hoss. Me track him, an see him bones an horns. Nig, take him hide.

"Me tol' you. Nig! Him fight? No. Him heep big coward? Yes."

Buck was elated over his escape and at the same time was regretful over the loss of the big deer hide. There was every reason to suppose that, as soon as the Negroes recovered from their panic, they would report the capture and escape of the much wanted boy to the military and they would have soldiers hot on his trail. So they broke camp the next morning, and two days later were back at the Tyler place.

Buck and all of the Tyler family expressed their gratitude to the Indians for their brave work in effecting Buck's escape from the brutal Negro mob. They invited the Indians to come back the next fall and bid them a hearty farewell as they departed for their village.

After a brief stay with the home folks, Buck went back to his hiding place in the blue jungle.

## CHAPTER XIV.

Military officers and Negro soldiers had redoubled their efforts to catch and destroy leaders of the Clan and all others who dared to oppose their program of forcing equality of the Negroes on the white people. They believed that as the two races had to live among one another in the same country, there was no way to harmonize their differences but to place them on an equal.

They claimed that it would be impossible to make and enforce two sets of laws in the same country—one for the whites and one for the blacks. That to come under one set of criminal, civil, and social laws, it was necessary for the races to have equal privileges.

The better class of Northern white officers were opposed to these measures, but they had their orders from higher ups, and they had to carry them out or lose their commissions. They soon learned of Buck's return to the swamp, and again went to hunt for him. A squad of Negro soldiers found him in the woods one evening and pressed him so close that he was forced to ambush and fight.

He killed one and wounded two of his antagonists. Following this incident, they hunted him so continuously and so closely that he was forced to abandon all of his former hiding places and find a new one farther away and in more isolated jungles. While rambling in a new section of the wild woods one day, he discovered an old dilapidated weather-worn log cabin. He figured that it had been built many years earlier by some trapper or outlaw. The bark that had been on the logs, had rotted and fallen off. One corner of the shack had settled about one foot into the ground. A small part of the board roof had been blown off. It was literally covered with jungle vines, while thick switch cane grew on all sides and



close against the walls. It was so obscure that he came near passing it by without seeing it.

A small tunnel had been excavated from under the floor to a deep ravine about fifty feet away. This end of the tunnel was so completely covered with vines and briars as to be invisible to the casual passerby. Evidently the builder had dug this tunnel so that in case of an attack he could raise a couple of slabs of the cabin floor and escape through the tunnel.

A chimney of mud and sticks had been built at one end of the cabin. Buck classed the old hidden shack as an ideal retreat for himself. He cleaned out the inside and cleared a concealed trail to the only door to the cabin. He spent the afternoon there and when night came, he went back to the hills, secured his camp outfit and carried it to his retreat. He let no one know of this new hiding place except the Colonel and King, both of whom were cautioned to keep the secret.

It was arranged for King to make occasional visits to the retreat, under cover of darkness, to bring news and ammunition and other supplies when needed. These visits were made between midnight and daylight.

To keep his otherwise idle time occupied, Buck placed a circuit of steel traps in the dim trails made by wild animals, along the banks of small lakes. Scarcely a night passed that he did not catch a coon, otter, or wild cat. The hides and fur were carried out and sold by King. They brought money enough to buy ammunition and such common clothes as Buck needed.

The remainder of his time during the day was given over to the study of a few books which he had brought into his den. Inspecting some traps which he had set, near the foot of a hill one evening, he heard jay-birds screaming excitedly not far away. Resolving to find out the cause of their agitation, he crept forward noiselessly in that direction. Peeping through the heavy foliage, he discovered a saddled horse and some one preparing to mount it. When the form faced about, he recognised Maggie Parker.

He was shocked. What could that child be doing in this wild spot? Did she realize the danger of getting lost in the far

stretching jungle? Or falling into the hands of brutish Negroes? Although she was facing him now, and he could study her every feature, her expression was unreadable as usual. How beautiful her figure, how lithe, graceful, and perfectly proportioned! A slight rounding of the breast gave indication of approaching maturity.

Her every motion was as willowy as the tree branches that waved above her, swayed by the evening breeze. Could any eighteen year old, normal, red-blooded Southern boy resist a thrill at such a sight? Buck assuredly could not. He was not really in love with her, he knew that. Yet her radiant beauty appealed to him keenly, and aroused in him a feeling dangerously akin to affection.

As Maggie placed her foot in the stirrup to mount, Buck called in a low voice and stepped forward. Quickly the girl faced about with pistol in hand. She replaced it, however, as soon as she recognised Buck.

"What in the world brought you into the jungle, Maggie?" Buck questioned. "Do you realize that you are more than ten miles from home, and eight miles from where any one lives? Don't you know that if you were thrown from your horse, or become crippled in any other way so that you couldn't get out of here, it might be months or years before you would be found? Does any one know where you are?"

"One question at a time, Buck," the girl replied. "Yesterday, two officers ate dinner at our house and, afterwards, sat in the shade of the house and talked for an hour. I knew that all of them were after you and I wanted to know what they were saying, so I hid under the bed in mother's room. With only the thin wall separating me from them, I could hear at least a part of what they were saying.

"They talked in low tones, but I heard nearly all they said. I learned that they were planning to search both sides of the Creek, ten miles up and ten miles down, and not stop until they find and capture you. I decided that you should know this. I did not know where you were but I was confident that you were somewhere within the range they had mentioned. As soon as they left, I mounted my horse, rode into

the swamp on the other side of the Creek, and searched it out for you. Finding no trace of you, I knew that you were somewhere on this side.

"I figured that if I were in your place, I would hide in or near the old cabin that my father built some years ago. He killed the leader of a band of outlaws who robbed our house while he was away and had insulted mother. When they found out who did it, the other members of the band swore vengeance. They came several times to carry out their threat.

"Our friends notified father each time of their approach and father fortified himself in the cabin. They assailed him there twice. Father got the best of each fight, wounding two of them in their last attack. After that, they left the country and have not been seen here since.

"Knowing that you had traversed every mile of these jungles, I felt sure that you knew of the cabin, so I came in here to find you. Yes, I know that I am a long way from home, but I'm not afraid. I know these swamps well. I saw the cabin but once. That was when I was with father on a hog hunt, just a short while before he died, five years ago. He showed the cabin to me and told me why he had built it. He said I should never tell any one about it, unless it was a case of real necessity, and I have kept the secret until now.

"No, no one knows where I am. I told mother that I would probably be gone until late this evening. She has been uneasy about me since the Negro soldiers came into the hill country, and it would have worried her if she had known that I was going so far away alone. I love the silent blue jungles," the girl continued as a new light came into her eyes. "All of the wild things in here interest me a lot.

"Just before you found me a while ago, I was interested in the conduct of three jay-birds. One was a pretty hen-bird and the other two were handsome males. The males had evidently fallen out over the lady. Each wanted her for his mate, and they were fighting it out. It seemed to me that the lady-bird favored me, while one of the males resembled Hal Douglas and the other looked like you. Hal was larger,

but he was clumsy and slow, while you were quick and active."

"Tell me, Maggie," inquired Buck. "Did you have a favorite? Which whipped?"

"Of course I had a favorite," the girl replied. "Never saw a fight that I didn't have a favorite. I know the winner in this fight, too, but I won't tell you because they are almost sure to meet and fight again, and it may come out different next time—besides, I don't know yet which one cared most for the lady-bird."

"My! but I would have liked to see that fight, Maggie! You and I could talk interestedly for hours about these wonderful wild woods and the dwellers in them and never grow tired.

"It was good of you to come and tell me of my enemies and their plans, but please do not run such a risk again. Will you tell me why you did all of this for me?"

"No, I won't," was the reply.

"Well, you had a reason, didn't you?"

The girl's face flushed slightly, and her eyes no longer met his, as she responded, "No, only I did not want them to find you. I do not intend to come back here unless I have to. No one will know of my visit here today, because in case I was seen, few know me when in my riding clothes. All strangers pass me as a country cow-boy. I'm going now," she added, after a hasty look at the lengthening shadows. "By, Buck." She had mounted her horse and was riding away.

Shortly after sundown that evening, Mrs. Parker's uneasiness was lifted as she heard a familiar signal ringing through the nearby woodland, a melodious yodling, buoyant and joyous. She returned to her household work, smiling. Her daughter was safe and cheerful. She could tell this by the lilting strains that echoed and re-echoed through the resonant forest.

## CHAPTER XV.

Hurrying back from a hasty visit to his home, early one morning, Buck had just entered the edge of the swamp when he dimly saw through the early morning light, a ragged form disappear behind a fallen tree-top.

It looked like a girl or woman. He could scarcely believe his eyes. Was it possible for a woman to be so far away from the settlements at this early hour, and alone? Had he been asleep while walking and fallen into a dream? Was it a phantom, an enemy in disguise, or really a human being?

He must find out now or possibly never. Naturally, he had become suspicious of everything and anything out of the ordinary. He knew there was a large standing reward out for his capture and delivery to the military. This might be a trap set for him by his enemies. He stood still, alert, listening for some sound. Then he softly side-stepped until a clump of bushes were between him and the fallen tree-top, and advanced cautiously. Every few steps, he stopped, looked, and listened. Discovering nothing, he dropped on his hands and knees, and crawled to within a few feet of where he had seen the strange object disappear.

With finger on trigger, he rose to his feet and peeped into the tree-top. A girl made a smothered scream and fell back into the dead leaves. If this was a decoy, Buck deduced that the scream must be the signal for the plotters to close in on him. He back-stepped a few paces and closely scanned the surroundings. Not seeing or hearing anything except the usual sounds of the forest, he again walked forward and looked at the girl.

At sight of her face, his heart thrilled, even as it had that spring morning when he had first glimpsed the radiant maiden, blue-eyed, rosy cheeked, ruby lipped, in one of the covered wagons from Georgia.

It was the same girl. It was Kate—Kate Graham, sister

of the leader of the Georgia caravan who had settled in the edge of the Tyler neighborhood. He had seen her only at a distance that first morning when their eyes had met; but there had been graven in his memory the semblance of her adorable features, and often in the stillness of his hiding places, he had startled himself by breathing her name.

Could she have forgotten him? Of course she had heard of his wild life and the criminal charges against him. Would she believe him to be bad and credit the lies that his enemies had circulated about him?

There was no time to think of these things now. He must do something and at once. Her eyes were closed as she lay there half covered with leaves. She was very pale and, except for a slight trembling, she was still.

Ordinarily, Buck was resourceful. He had always known what to do in emergencies until now, but he had never seen a woman faint, and believed this girl was dying. This pretty girl—too beautiful, too young to die! Hastily, he seized his canteen, drew water from it, and began bathing her face. "Don't die, little lamb," he whispered tenderly, "Buck is your friend. I will protect you against whatever has frightened you. Wake up, girl, wake up and live."

The girl slowly opened and blinked her large blue eyes, and looked wonderingly about until they rested on Buck. Then they opened wide as she said, "Oh! O-O-Oh! it is you! Please, please, don't hurt me. You won't, will you? I am lost, I am helpless."

"No," replied Buck in surprise. "I would not injure or distress you for everything in the world. How could you imagine that I would hurt you? There is no sacrifice that I would not make for you. Tell me, how is it that you are so far out in the jungle at this hour in the morning?" His look of honesty and sympathy made the girl feel somewhat reassured. She was sitting up now, and the color was slowly returning to her face.

Then she explained: "My brother Emmet is working at the molasses mill on the Thompson place. They are working day and night and his shift is from midnight until noon. We live

about a half mile from the mill. I carried his breakfast to him about daylight this morning and had started on my way back home when I heard something behind me. On looking back, I saw two Negroes slip out of the bushes and come toward me. Oh, it frightens me yet to think of it.

"I screamed for my brother, but the noise of the mill drowned out my voice. I left the trail and started running in the hope of circling around them and getting back to the mill, but they dodged in and headed me off. When I screamed again one of the Negroes, who was very close to me, told me to shut up and not pretend that I was scared; that if I made any more noise, he would catch and choke me to death. I dodged into the thick woods and ran. Oh! it seemed to me I ran miles and miles. For a short time, I heard them close behind me. I did not know where I was going. My only thought was to get away—away from them. Briars and brush tore away my clothes and scratched my legs until I felt the blood running down my ankles into my shoes, but I was too frightened to feel any pain. When almost exhausted, I stopped a moment to catch my breath—it was then I saw you and hid in this fallen tree-top."

"Poor, tired, frightened child," mumbled Buck. "If you had only know that it was I and saved your fright."

"That—that was the trouble," the girl replied. "I did know it was you, but I have heard so many terrible stories about you that I was afraid of you too. Two white officers were looking for you yesterday, and when they stopped at the mill to make inquiries, I heard them telling how bad and desperate you were.

"They said that no one, white or black, was safe as long as you were in this country. I was awfully afraid of you; but—I am—not now. You don't look bad and you talk nice. Even if you are wild and reckless, somehow I feel that you will be my friend and won't let those Negroes catch me. Tell me, could you whip them if they should find us here?"

Proud of his new responsibility for the safety of this beautiful defenseless girl, Buck felt that he could whip a regiment of Negroes in her defense, and replied, "Yes, you may depend

on me. I will protect you against all harm, and while I do not know at present how I will do it, I will get you safely back to your people. I cannot tell when, but it will be soon."

"I believe you," replied the girl. "But what shall I do now?" she asked as tears gathered in her eyes and a look of trouble again gathered on her face. "I'd be afraid to start home, even if I knew the way, and I can't stay here; neither can I ask you to lead me home because I know it would be dangerous for you to go into the hill-country in the daytime and I could never forgive myself if I should be the cause of your capture by those heartless officers and Negro soldiers."

Buck thought of his hiding place. He wanted to take her there and have her remain until night, when he could afford to venture out and take her home to her people, but it was dangerous to let any one know of his retreat, and besides such an invitation might appear to the girl as bold and designing.

These thoughts were cut short by the appearance of the two Negroes about a hundred and fifty yards away, slowly following the girl's trail. They apparently had not seen the girl and boy yet, but, with eyes on the ground, were headed directly toward the fallen tree-top. Frightened at sight of the Negroes, the girl started to scream. Quickly, but gently, Buck placed his hand over her mouth and whispered, "Do not make a noise. Slip out on this side of the brush and run, with as little noise as possible, straight into the swamp until you reach that tall magnolia tree. There is a dense thicket around it. Go into it and remain until I come. I will attend to those two brutes that are following your trail."

"For your own sake, do not kill them," the girl pleaded. "Do not kill them if you can avoid it. I have heard that there is already a large price on your head and—I'm so afraid they will kill you." She cast one almost hopeless look over her shoulder as she sped away as lightly as a fawn.



## CHAPTER XVI.

Buck thought fast for some plan of procedure. He made up his mind and walked boldly out to meet the two Negroes—who, at sight of him, stopped short and drew their pistols. Before they had them clear of their scabbards, Buck had them covered with his gun. In compliance with his order, the Negroes reluctantly dropped their guns to the ground.

"What is your business here in the swamp?" demanded Buck.

"We is lookin faw one uv our hawks what got outen de pen an run off dis way yistidy," replied one of the Negroes.

"Did you see six Ku Klux back there on the ridge?" Buck inquired. "They are looking for two Negroes that stole four fat hogs from Bill Thompson night before last. I have located the thieves and I want to let the Klansmen know where to find them."

"No, Sah," replied the Negroes as their eyes grew wider and whiter. "We ain't seed no Klux an doan want ter see none. Is you sho dat some Klux is out dar in de hills?"

"Yes," returned Buck crossly, "I know that they are after the thieves and I know that they are hunting in these woods this morning."

The Negroes looked wildly about for a moment, then broke away in a swift run in the direction of the mill. As soon as they were out of sight, Buck picked up the pistols the Negroes left and examined them. Finding them to be cheap and common, he broke them in two on a log, then walked swiftly into the swamp.

The girl had gone so far into the thicket and was so well hidden that it took Buck quite a while to find her. By trailing her footsteps closely, he finally found her, snuggled in between two logs. "You are a regular wood nymph," he declared in a cheerful low tone. "I had to trail you step by

step. I could not afford to call to you, because even these jungles sometimes conceal the ears of my enemies. Let's hurry on into my hide-out where we will be practically out of danger of discovery; then we will plan a way for you to get back to your people."

A crimson blush suffused the girl's face as she looked at the ground and said, "I'm—I'm ashamed to stand up, because most of my clothes below my waist have been torn away." Buck had already discovered this and was trying to hide his embarrassment by pretending not to notice. Instead of replying to her, he took off his coat and handed it to her with the suggestion that she use it as a skirt, by placing the back of the coat in front and tying the sleeves around her waist. She promptly did this. Buck came forward and bunglingly buttoned up the coat in the back.

"That's good," exclaimed the girl with the first smile that had lighted her distressed face. "It fits nicely and it will keep the briars from scratching me."

She followed as Buck led the way through the jungle. They walked on logs, leaves, and drifts as much as possible so as to confuse any one who might attempt to trail them. Both were as silent as if entirely alone. The girl was still nervous from fright and miserable over the thought of the conditions that surrounded her. Would she ever be able to get home? Was it safe for her to depend on this young outlaw of whom she had heard so many awful reports? These, and many other unpleasant thoughts passed through her mind. At length, they reached Buck's camp-cabin and sat down for a much needed rest.

Never before had Buck cared for a girl as he cared for this beautiful young creature. Except for his sister and his mother, he had been in the company of women so little, that he felt awkward and bashful in the presence of the girl. He had a hesitancy in talking for fear he might not say the right things; yet he wanted to cheer and console her as much as possible. Being alone with a comparatively strange young man embarrassed the girl, too. She did not know how she should act or what she should say. Each felt a delicacy in

looking directly into the other's eyes. Sensing the girl's reserve, Buck for several minutes pretended to be looking at something in the distance; all the while he could feel that two adorable blue eyes were scanning his features—studying him. Presently, he was aware that she had turned away and, in turn, was looking far away into the jungle. Generously, he thought she was giving him an opportunity to look her over.

Buck finally broke the spell by going to a corner of the cabin and taking from an old satchel some clean rags and a small bottle of turpentine.

He carried these to the girl and said, "Take these, and while you bandage the bad scratches you got this morning, I'll go outside and try to think out a way for you to get home." Going some distance from the cabin, he sat down on a log to concentrate. One thing was certain; he must get this helpless lovely creature back to her people as soon as possible, or they would become uneasy about her and a large rescue party would be called into the woods to hunt for her. In their sweeping search, some one might discover his retreat and that would never do. It would be dangerous for him to go into the hills in the daytime and the girl would never find her way out of the swamp alone.

How strange a circumstance had enmeshed him. He who had always been free from any responsibility for women, now all of a sudden had become the defender of the loveliest girl in the world. He must deliver her safely to her people. There was only one way that he could think of. That was to scout in the woods near the foot-hills until he found some one whom he could trust to take her home. Having made up his mind to this, he returned to the cabin. Kate had finished bandaging the scratches and was standing in front of the cabin gazing in wonder at the beauty of the surrounding wildwoods. The trees were so tall and thick that only a few rays of sunlight found their way through. The wild cane was from six to fifteen feet high and thatched in places by bamboo briar and other vines. There was no approach to the cabin except a dim trail that had been made by coons and wild cats before Buck took possession of it.

"I now see how it is possible for you to live here alone," ventured Kate. "The surroundings here are bewitchingly pretty. I never saw a forest that was so beautiful. I did not know that the wild woods were so interesting and attractive. It seems to me that if my sister and brother were with me, I could live happily here always."

"Yes," Buck answered dreamily, "it is wonderful. I'm glad you like it." He dared not express the many other thoughts which were racing through his mind, and his heart beat fast in the ecstasy of the moment. In fancy, he saw this matchless girl as queen of his castle in the woods, his lady of the glen. Tearing his mind from these fanciful thoughts, he said, "I am going now to find some one that I can trust to take you back to your home and people. Believe me when I say that you are safe here for the present. In the event that I am captured, which I do not expect, you will have to get out of here alone. In that case, you must go straight east until you come to the Big Creek. Travel down it until you come to an old fallen-in bridge. Then, you will find an old timber road leading South. Follow that road until you reach the foot-hills. The first house you see to the right will be that of Joe Calhoon. He or his people will take you home. You are to do this in case I fail to return today. It is about twelve miles from here to that bridge. The route is so rough that it will take you a day to travel it. Under no conditions are you to leave the cabin until tomorrow morning. However, I intend to return with help before sundown.

"Only two others beside you and I know of my retreat here and you must not tell any one about it or me. You won't, will you? If my place of hiding should become known to my enemies, it would mean prison or worse for me."

"I promise, you may trust me," replied the girl.

Buck retraced the route they had followed to the cabin, to see if any one had tried to follow them. When he decided that all was safe on that score, he swung back into the bottom and took a course toward the Southwest, varying only when it led him too near the foot-hills where the country was more

open. His purpose and hope was to meet some one of the Clansmen of the neighborhood, station him at a given place in the swamp, then go back to the cabin and lead Kate to him and have him escort her to her home.

After walking six or seven miles and reaching a point near the hills, he sat down to rest, watch, and listen. Of a sudden, he heard the blast of hunter's horns. Many of these sounds came from far out in the hills and another chorus of them came from far down the swamp. He grasped the meaning of this at once. The girl had been missed and a rescue party had been placed on hunt of her. His first impulse was to hurry into the hills, find one of the searchers and tell him that the girl was safe. Then he thought of the chance that many of the hunters might be his enemies. Doubtless, white officers and Negro soldiers were among the searchers.

He decided to remain where he was and take a chance of seeing a friend pass in sight. The next time he heard the horns, two of them were much nearer. After another hour of waiting, he heard the sound of horse's feet. He discovered from the sound and the direction that the horses were on a trail that led within twenty feet of him, so he hastily shuffled over behind a large log to a low place in the ground.

He had scarcely gotten still when two soldiers came riding slowly along the trail, one behind the other. He heard them talking. One was saying. "I believe that outlaw boy has changed his hiding place to some other section of the county. They are wrong in their suspicion that he has stolen that girl. He is too smart to do that."

"My opinion," replied the other, "is that those Negro soldiers that passed here early this morning kidnapped that girl and took her with them to their camp on the Madison County side of the river, and I intend to have the searchers hunt in that direction tomorrow." They continued to talk, but had gone so far past that Buck could not understand what they were saying.

He was glad to know that they did not intend to look for the girl in that part of the woods. He saw several men riding in the edge of the swamp during the evening, none of whom

were his friends. Tired and disappointed, he took his back trail to the cabin. He had promised the girl that he would arrange for her to get home, and he had failed. He dreaded to meet her with his story of failure.

She was at the door when he reached the cabin. Her cheeks were wet with lately shed tears. She said nothing, but her eyes mutely asked the question: "Have you succeeded?" Buck turned from the appeal in those sorrowful eyes as he answered, "I did my best and failed. A number of men with signal horns were hunting for you in the hill country this evening. From behind trees and logs, I saw a number of them; most of them were officers and all were my enemies. I heard two of them talking and learned from their conversation that they intend to hunt for you tomorrow in the country down the creek toward the Trinity River. That will leave these woods free to me and I will be sure to find friends of mine to take you home."

Dusk was gathering over the swamp. Songbirds had ceased to sing and the stillness of the jungle was broken only by the occasional howl of a wolf and the lonesome song of the whip-poor-will. Between sobs, the girl asked, "What will become of me? I should not remain all night here with no one with me but a young man. I have nowhere to sleep."

"Please worry as little as you can," Buck advised. "I wish you would call me Buck and allow me to call you Kate. It would be easier and sound more friendly. You are not full grown and I am only a boy instead of a young man as you have been calling me. Cheer up! I will arrange things nicely. You will have my bed of blankets and moss, and the cabin all to yourself. With a pile of dry leaves and one blanket, I will make for myself a comfortable bed." Without waiting for an answer from the girl, Buck built a small fire and soon had broiled venison, coffee, cold bread, and wild honey served in tin plates.

The girl ate nothing, but drank a cup of warm coffee, after which she said, "You may call me Kate and I will call you Buck, at least for the present. You have done the best you could for me and I thank you for it. I should feel cheerful

over my escape from these Negroes and death from starvation in this jungle, but forgive me when I tell you that I am still frightened and—Oh, so miserable.”

Kate soon retired to the bed in the corner of the cabin and tried to sleep. Buck rolled up in his blanket on the dead leaves by the log, but not to sleep. His mind was too full of the happenings of the day and the probable developments of the morrow. Each time his tired body lured him into a doze, he was awakened by subdued sobs from the cabin.

The night that seemed long to both the boy and the girl finally passed. With the morning, came the cheerful warbling of hundreds of songbirds. Buck carried a large gourd of water from the small lake nearby and placed it just inside the door of the cabin, then built a fire and prepared breakfast. Kate finished bathing her tear-stained face in time to help place breakfast on the plates. Both ate heartily and in silence.

## CHAPTER XVII.

As soon as breakfast was over, Buck cautioned Kate to remain in or about the cabin until he returned, which, he assured her, would be at the earliest possible moment, and that he felt sure that he would bring good tidings.

He buckled on his guns and struck out once more for the foot-hills to the Southwest. When he had gone about two miles from the cabin, he heard a noise that sounded like that made by the feet of a horse when walking slowly. He knew that loose horses did not range in this area and horsemen seldom penetrated this part of the jungle. Whatever it was making the sound was too close at hand for him to move without the chance of being seen. He leveled his rifle on the spot where the bushes were being shaken, expecting, any second, to meet face to face with an officer or a Negro soldier.

It was a most pleasant surprise, when old Jonah, a trusted Negro friend, rode into view. Jonah was an honest old-fashioned Negro, a true friend to the Southern white people as well as to all deserving Negroes. He often admonished shiftless bad Negroes to cease their brigandry, do honest work, and gain the friendship and respect of the white people as he had done. Buck and the Colonel had befriended him many times and he was grateful for it. He was ready at any time to do anything in his power for them and theirs. He had great respect for, and confidence in Buck's mother, who had been a friend to his wife and children when they were sick or in want.

Jonah's eyes were bulging with fright as he saw Buck rise from behind a clump of bushes with his gun leveled on him. "Hi, thar, Buck!" he shouted. "Turn dat gun away afore I faints. Dat hole in de ind uv it looks as big as de moon. Pears lac I kin see a bullet comin' outen it. How come you perculatin around here in de daytime anyhow? Doan you



know dem officers is lookin fah you every whar? You better stay away back in de woods or slip outen dis country, cause dem Nigger sogers is hot on yo trail all de time. Tha offered me a good boss yistidy if I locate you and tell dem whar you is at. Tha is been lookin fer you in barns, cotton pens and even lasses barrels at de cane mill.

"Tha is offerin' big rewauds fah you; but dar is one thing dat you can pend on. Tha don't hunt fah you in de night. Tha is afraid of you an de Clux in de night but tha gits brave in de daytime when lots uv dem is togeder. Tha shadows King most ob de time, cause tha believes he goes to whar you is sometimes. I is tellin' you now, if tha gits their dirty hands on you agin, it will be all over wid you. Yo' good mudder is worried about you all de time. She fears trouble fer you. She prays fer you ever night an ever mawnin an believes, if she didn't, de officers would have you in prison or killed. I believes in prayer mah self, but I figers dat it ain't no use to pray about dem nigger sogers until one half of dem is kilt and de udder half in jail or put to honest wuck."

"All of that is true, Uncle Joe," replied Buck, "but listen to me! I am very glad to see you here this morning. It looks like a God-send. I need your help, not for myself, but for another." Buck then related the plight of the girl, how he had rescued her from the designing Negroes and hidden her away in the swamp. In conclusion he said, "I want you to take her home to her people. She is a wonderful girl and no harm shall come to her."

"Buck! did you kill dem Niggers?" the old darkey asked. "If you did I is gwine home rite now, cause hell will be turned loose when de officers finds dem dead Niggers."

"No, Uncle Joe, as much as they deserved it, I didn't kill them, but ran them out of the woods. Of course I will kill them if I ever find a safe chance."

After a moment of deep study, the old darkey said, "Look a here, Buck! You is fixin' to git ole Jonah into trouble. Spose dem Ku Klux catches me wid dat gal? Tha would sho shoot me afore I could splain. No sah, I ain't ready to die yit. No sah, not me."

"Now, Uncle Joe, haven't I always been your friend and kept you clear of trouble when I could? Don't go back on me now. Think of that poor frightened girl, alone up yonder in the swamp crying her eyes out for her home and people. There is very little danger if you do what I ask.

"I will write and give you a note that will pass you by any Clansman in Texas and no one but a Clansman can read it because it will be written in cipher. Besides this, when I get through disguising the girl, no one will know her from the average Negro girl. I am going back after her now. Remain here until I return with her."

"Awright, Buck," replied the old darkey, "I is gwine do what you says if it takes evah kink of har ofen my head. Does I know de gal?"

"Certainly you do," Buck replied. "She is Kate Graham, young sister of Emmet Graham."

"Oh, is dat de one?" answered Jonah. "Sho, I knows her. She is a innercent gal, an perty too. I seed her at de lasses mill, an I likes her big brother. He is sho' one honest an fine gentman."

After drawing from Jonah's pocket a large red handkerchief and putting it in his own pocket, Buck worked laboriously through the thick forest, back to the cabin. Not seeing Kate anywhere on the outside, he entered noiselessly, and found her sound asleep on the bed of moss and blankets. Sympathy for her welled up in his heart. Poor, tired, frightened, beautiful girl! He felt that it would be a sin to awaken her, and yet time was precious to them. She must get home before the searchers returned from the river country and began a hunt for her in these woods, and he was anxious to tell her of his lucky arrangement to get her home.

With the idea of waking her gently so she might not be frightened again, he began to sing in a very low voice:

Maxwelton's braes are bonnie,  
Wha' early fa's the dew;  
And 'twas there my Annie Laurie,  
Ga' me her promise true.

Slowly, Kate opened her eyes, sat up, and looked about her with a puzzled expression, and asked, "How long had you been singing?"

"Only a minute," Buck replied.

"Oh," said Kate, "it seems to me I have been hearing it for hours. It soothed me and I didn't want to wake for fear it would turn out to be a dream. Tell me—did Annie keep her promise. I hope she did if he was brave and true."

"I suppose she did," Buck replied, "but I cannot say for sure because it is only a song; but I am glad you feel that way about it because some day when I am grown, I want a girl to give me a promise true, but in Annie Laurie's place there will be a lovely girl that I never really knew until—" Seeing a look of distress come over Kate's face, he changed the subject and said, "I am glad to tell you that I have arranged for you to get back home. I found old Jonah, a faithful old Negro friend of mine, about two miles down the swamp and he is waiting there to take you home. It is a long way for you to walk but I could not afford to have him or any one else come here. I must keep my place of hiding a secret. You need have no fear of old Jonah. He would risk his life to carry out my orders. For a white girl to be seen coming out of the woods with a Negro would create suspicion, so we must disguise you as a Negro girl." Kate's face wreathed in a smile of joy at the good news. She readily agreed to the disguise and, girl-like, began to wonder if she would make a pretty Negress.

With some powdered charcoal and water, Buck began the task of blacking Kate's face and hands. He had never felt so nervous and exhilarated. His hands trembled a little in spite of himself as he touched here and there the girl's soft velvety skin. Though he worked slowly and tenderly, the job did not last long enough. The transformation was complete, so perfect that her appearance as a Negro girl made Buck almost wish he had not spoiled her beauty. The last touch to the disguise was tying the kerchief that he had taken from Jonah, about her head.

Looking up at him, Kate said, "I am under such strong

obligations to you that I'm afraid I never will be able to repay you. You have risked your liberty and life to help me, and you have treated me so well that I regret to leave you here all alone."

"I'm already paid," said Buck. "Your presence here has brought into my lonely life the greatest happiness I have ever known. Whatever may happen to me in the future, I can at least look back to one gloriously happy day. I realize that a change has come over me since I met you yesterday morning. I can not quite understand it but perhaps I will later on, then if I can see you, I will explain it all to you. I only know that the things that I have been glorying in, are losing some of their flavor with me. I heard my mother read in the Bible that the last shall be first and the first shall be last. I realize that I am among the last just now, but I intend to rise and be among the first. I'm going to climb and join the ranks of good and useful men some day. These ambitions have come to me today and your presence has helped to inspire them. I intend to be worthy of my people and your consideration some day. There are few, now, who believe that I will ever amount to anything more than a good woodsman, a crack marksman, and a skilled rider. Believe in me, Kate, I am going to make good."

"Those are wonderful resolutions," Kate whispered. "I never heard one so young make resolves like that before. I am happy to know that I have had some part in creating those noble thoughts. I do believe in you, and I feel sure that you are going to accomplish whatever you undertake," replied Kate. "I think that you are an unusual young man."

Buck was buoyed up. She had called him a young man. He liked that. Every one called him a boy. Her high estimate of him made him feel bigger and of more importance. With a feeling that he was the big prother protector, and she only a child, he bent over and kissed her before she realized his intention. Buck was shocked at his own presumption and blushed. Kate drew back quickly. There was a look of surprise, then resentment in her eyes which slowly filled with tears. When she found her voice, she said, "How could you

do that and spoil the regard and confidence in you that was growing so fast in me? People told me that you were common and bad. I did not believe it. My elder sister told me that nearly all young men were designing and presumptuous if allowed. After being with you since yesterday morning, I felt sure that I had found an exception to that rule. I was happy in the thought of telling my sister how splendid you were, how you had been misjudged and falsely accused. I am so sorry and disappointed in you. Accidentally, I fell under obligations to you and you have taken advantage of it."

Kate leaned her head against the wall and sobbed pitifully. Buck flushed with shame. He felt overcome with remorse. What had he done? Had he let one impulsive act blast his first real romance? He had not intended to be presumptuous. In his distress, he could think of no words of defense or explanation. At length, composing himself, he said, "Believe me when I say that I would not have offended you, for the world. My impulse to kiss you was that of a brother and protector. I realize now that I did wrong and if you will forgive me, I will yet prove worthy of the good name you were intending to give me when you talk to your sister."

Kate ceased crying but remained silent. Buck knew that she was thinking over his apology and he hoped that a little time would help her to see that his intentions were not bad. Growing restless, he left the cabin, and sat down on a log a few paces distant. A worried look played over his features. His thought was, if his mother would appear on the scene and take charge of the girl, all would be well.

He could not know that through a crack in the log-wall, Kate's eyes were resting on him; that she was studying every changing expression of his face. Intuitively, she read his thoughts and knew that he had told her the truth when he said that he had not intended to offend her. When Buck returned to the cabin, she said, "I am glad you explained in the way you did. I forgive you; let's forget it."

After a brief smile into each other's eyes, they left the cabin and walked rapidly through the swamp to the spot

where Jonah was patiently waiting. While Buck was giving the oid darkey instructions as to the route he should take the girl through the hills, Jonah grinned broadly, giggled, then laughed out loud.

"You old fool! what are you giggling about?" Buck demanded.

"Scuse me, Buck," chuckled Jonah, "but I sees smut on yo' nose. How come dat?" He looked at Kate's black face, then back to Buck's nose and giggled again. Kate hung her head as Buck thundered, "That is none of your business, you old sinner! You take this young lady home to her people and tell them you found her lost and wandering in the woods. Do not tell any one the circumstances or that I had anything to do with it."

In answer, Jonah replied, "I'll do whut you says, Buck, wid one 'ception, I is bound ter tell ole Mistis all de truf about it cause it will do her heart good. I ain't nevah kept no secrets about you from her an I ain't gwine do it now."

"All right, Uncle Joe, that goes," replied Buck.

With Kate on the horse behind him, Jonah started for the hills to deliver Kate to her people. Buck walked slowly toward his cabin, looking back at intervals until her precious form was lost to view in the distance and denseness of the tangled wildwoods.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

Thinking that Kate, after delivering Emmet's breakfast, had gone to call on some one of the neighboring girls, the Grahams did not worry about her until near noon. At that time, however, they began to look for her. At the molasses mill, they learned that the workers there had not seen her since she left there for home at about daylight that morning. A number of the neighbors gathered in and held council with the Grahams.

Some one suggested that the Negro soldiers be called into the search. Emmet opposed this, saying that the Negro soldiers were not to be trusted in matters like this. He also pointed out that if Kate had been kidnapped by Negroes, the soldiers would prevent their apprehension and punishment if they could. Kate's sister Annie became hysterical. She sent hurriedly for H. B. Woods whom Emmet had not invited to the council. Presently, Woods came dashing up on his fine horse. After hearing the story, he put on an air of great importance and declared, that his unbiassed opinion was that the girl had been kidnapped by Buck, the outlaw, and carried away into the forest, and if this proved to be true, he would never stop until he found and killed him.

Evidently, Woods believed he had found the time and place to get vengeance on Buck. He had been watching for an opportunity to do this ever since he had met the boy at the little church house, months before. "Gentlemen," he exclaimed, "I am in favor of gathering all the men we can muster, including whites, blacks, and soldiers and never stop scouting in the big jungle until we find that renegade."

A military officer who had joined the group made a motion that Woods be elected chief to lead the search party.

"No, I will lead the hunt," Emmet said, "and I believe we soon will find her. Very likely, in looking for grapes or flowers, she strayed from the trail and became lost."

No one except Woods was inclined to believe that Buck had anything to do with Kate's absence.

The men, many of them supplied with signal horns, were divided into four groups by Emmet and instructed to scout the hills thoroughly. He advanced the opinion that if Kate was lost, she would naturally turn from the swamp if she came to it.

Soon, all were away on the hunt for the girl. All through the afternoon and far into the night, signal horns of the hunters were heard far away in the hills, but the sound that meant the lost was found was never made. By daylight the following morning, every man was again in the saddle. Emmett instructed them to go down the Big Creek and hunt in the edge of the swamp and the foot-hills and to continue their search to the Negro soldiers' camp in the Trinity River bottom country.

Soon after noon, all returned and reported a fruitless search. After eating lunch and resting their horses for an hour, they were again in the saddle preparing to go up the creek and hunt in the swamp.

Just as the command to march was given, old Jonah and Kate rode up. A yell of joy from every throat rang out and echoed back from the hills. Anna took Kate into her arms and declared that she would never allow her out of the house again. Kate told her story in detail, leaving out the part in which Buck had figured. She left the impression that Jonah had found her, and at his suggestion, she had blackened her face and hands to prevent being recognised by any one they might chance to meet.

"After I escaped from the Negroes," she said, "I was hopelessly lost and I do not know what would have become of me if it had not been for this faithful old Negro."

After Kate gave a description of the two Negroes that chased her, the men started off to hunt for them, declaring that if they found the Negroes, they would leave them dead in the woods, but the two Negroes evidently had left the neighborhood, for no trace of them was ever found.

Tired and worn from worry and distress over Kate, Anna



retired to bed soon after supper. Emmet became silent and his mind preoccupied. When Kate asked him for his thoughts, he answered, "My baby sister! You have never told me a falsehood or indulged in prevarication, and I am trying to believe that all of the story you told to us about your rescue from the forest is true, but I cannot unless you can clear up some things that I have seen and said nothing about.

"You wore a coat about your waist when you came from the woods. Jonah stated that he had supplied you with it. While you said nothing, you nodded confirmation. You whisked that coat from sight quickly, but not before I recognised it. It was Buck Tyler's coat."

Kate hid her face in her apron. She could not look at her brother and make her defence. Behind a blushing face she said, "I confess it. You have caught me." She bound Emmet to secrecy and told him the true story of her adventure in the woods. How Buck had found her, rescued her from the Negroes, and arranged for her to get home. After hearing it all, Emmet declared his unconditional friendship for the young man of the forest.

As time ran on, Kate became distressed over the strained relations between Woods and Buck. In her innocence, she liked every one and she wanted all of her friends to like each other. Her sister Anna continued to urge her to encourage Woods in his attentions to her. Anna was a widow nearing middle age. She had been raised in the luxury of slavery days and she was slow in adjusting herself to the new conditions of privation and poverty, following the war between the states. She found it impossible to shake off aristocratic manners and enter into the spirit of the new order of things as Emmet and Kate had done.

She believed that Woods was wealthy and in the event of his marriage to Kate, the family would no longer be in want, and at the same time their social prestige would be raised. In a diplomatic way, she gave Woods to understand that she favored his suit for Kate and she improved every opportunity

of getting them together. There was little wonder that Kate was influenced to some extent in Woods' favor.

Kate had spent nearly all of her time since she was nine years of age, in a girls' seminary. She knew little of the wiles of society and the ways of the world. She was modest, unsophisticated, and guileless. She was beginning to care for Buck; she admired Woods. When Anna extolled Woods, Kate said nothing. When Anna spoke disparagingly of Buck, Kate mildly defended him.

Quite a number of people in the settlement admired Woods on account of his apparent gentility, polish, and cheerfulness. Others looked upon him with a degree of suspicion, and were staunch friends to Buck. It became known that there was dislike and rivalry between Woods, the man and Buck, the man-boy.

## CHAPTER XIX.

The military forces continued to inflict impositions on the so-called rebels and did it in the name of the law. They were continually trying to force the Southern white people to accept the Negroes as their social equals. They placed Negroes in front seats among white people in public gatherings and in traveling conveyances. They forced them to drink from the same vessels and eat at the same tables. They were held in check only by the brave men of the South who fought and defended their people in the teeth of the warped law.

These conditions kept Buck continually on the dodge. He sat in his cabin, more lonely than he had ever felt before in his life, on the evening following Kate's deliverance from the swamp. He could not understand the change that had come over him. Being a lover of the wilds, he had always found enough to interest him in the depth of the forest. Now he could think of nothing except the thrilling events of the day he had rescued Kate from her dastardly pursuers, and the happy hours he had spent with her in the jungle.

Was he losing his grip? Had the sight and slight acquaintance of a mere slip of a girl made him lose track of all the important matters he had on hand? Had he weakened in his determination for revenge against the murderous Negroes and scalawag oppressors of his people? Did they not still deserve death at his hand?

Up to now, he had enjoyed the rough life to which he had become accustomed, and the keen edge of danger. He had loved conquest and had not considered women a part of the game. Except for the peace of his people, he had cared but little whether peaceful days ever returned. There were a number of bad Negroes and several white men-devils whom he had intended to destroy at the first opportunity. Now he found himself wishing that reconstruction days were over so

that he could pursue the course dictated by his lately inspired ambitions.

He was now feeling a keen desire to finish his education, or at least improve it and become a worthy and useful citizen. He felt the urge to excel, to rise above a common station. He was passing from a boy's to a man's estate and to a man's way of thinking. A brief association with a pure pretty girl had stirred thoughts and touched cords that are unresponsive in boys. Running over with a desire to talk and no one to talk to, he rose to his feet and addressed the cabin wall as though talking to his other self.

"Old boy, there is no excuse for you to be a blank. You are of good stock. Your family tree trails back through distinguished families. Your forefathers were patriarchs of Virginia and their sons blazed trails to North Carolina, to Mississippi, thence to Texas. They moved in the first circles of church, statesmanship, and finance. They made creditable records. In Congress, of the colonists, they helped to frame the laws of this great nation. Others fought valiantly in the Revolutionary War and helped to secure independence for the Colonies. Still others gained distinction in the Mexican War. All moved on a plane above the common herds of men in their respective generations, and passed on, leaving the world better for their sojourn in it. The last one before you—the Colonel—bravely defended his home and people in Dixie and has lived a clean and honorable life.

"But, you, old boy! personally you have no credit for all of this. What are you, anyway? We know; you are just an ignorant ruffian, a poor boy in a poor country. You have been existing here with no more ambition than an Indian. You have made no struggle to rise above the low gauge of your environment. Do not say that you have had no opportunity. Your ancestors made their way instead of waiting for opportunities to make them. Yes, we admit that you are a good rider but there are others around here that are just as good and there is no possibility of your riding into usefulness. You are a good woodsman, but there are Indians who are superior to you in this.

"You have so conducted yourself that no one except your mother, a few friends, and perhaps two girls believe there is anything worth while in you. Even your father is doubtful of your future success. These are strong accusations, old boy, but they are true. I know what we are going to do as soon as these turbulent days are over. We are going to build a character-ladder so clean and so high that we can look down on all unworthy men and principles. Those who scorn us now, will be glad to recognise us then. Other poor boys have climbed from the valley of nothingness to the top of the hill of honor and usefulness, unaided by fortune or favorable circumstances. I am a man now. I can do anything other men have done."

These were the expressions that escaped the lips of the youth, fired with sudden zeal and ambition. But how worthily or unworthily he would grapple with the obstacles which fate was still to throw his way was yet to be seen. Would he stand firm through the scenes of bloodshed, disappointment, and sorrow? Would he stand the acid test and, in the end, find victory, peace, and happiness? Or would he weaken in the strenuous struggle ahead and fall ingloriously? Only time could tell.

## CHAPTER XX.

A call had been issued for a meeting of the Home Defenders at eleven o'clock Thursday night near the road crossing of Cat-Branch. So turbulent were the times that the organization never met in the same place twice in succession. Some wild unfrequented place in the woods was usually used as a clavern. Military scouts were ever on their trail and Negroes tried to keep a constant watch on them. Buck's presence was especially desired at this meeting. After a search by the Home Defenders, King was found and sent into the swamp with a message to his young master.

King never followed a direct course when going to Buck's den. He first went to one or two places in the hills, then to a meandering path that led into the swamp. On this occasion, he nonchalantly walked past the molasses mill where he found several other Negro boys sopping molasses from one of the nearly empty vats. One of them asked King where he was going.

"I'se hiden out fum de Ku Klux," King replied. "I heard they's ridin tonight an I'se scared they'll git me."

"You sho is a guessin right, King," one of the boys declared. "I heard my Daddy tell some sogers dis evenin, tha wuz gwine to meet some whar tonight an he tole um whar, but he tole it so low dat I didn't understan it, but de sogers knows an tha is gwine slip up on dem Klux an kill de las one uv dem afore tha no it."

King appeared to be distinterested in the news, and walked leisurely up the road. As soon as he was out of sight of the other boys, however, he turned into the woods and ran nearly all the way to Buck's cabin and told him all that he had heard.

Buck studied over the facts fast and carefully. He knew that the Klan's hour for their business session was midnight. It was now near ten o'clock and the night was dark and

would be until about eleven o'clock, at which time the moon would arise. The question on Buck's mind was, could he warn the Clansmen in time to prevent the surprise attack. He must make the effort and there was no time to be lost.

"There is more depending on me tonight, King, than there ever was before in my life," Buck said with emotion. "The lives of thirty or forty good men including the Boss will be in peril if they are not warned within the next hour and a half. The time is short but I'm going to make a run for it. If I fail to reach them in time, I will drop in on the road, waylay those Negro soldiers and shoot them as long as I have a bullet. In this case, the Clansmen will hear my gun-fire and be warned of the danger."

Buck hastily buckled on his pistols and rushed out the door.

"Wait a minit," shouted King. "I is gwine wid you."

"No," replied Buck. "I'm afraid that your legs are too short to keep up with me this time. I intend to touch the ground only in the high places. Besides, it is going to be too swift and rough for you."

"Now, Buck, I allers has stayed wid you in de tight places an I is not afeard. If tha kills you and de Boss, I doan want to live nohow."

"All right," answered Buck, "come a running."

Darkness prevented the boys from making great speed through the swamp that was beset with thick switch-cane and tangled vines, but on reaching the hill country, they traveled more swiftly. Upon reaching the molasses mill, they discovered two horses in an adjoining lot. Scouting about noiselessly, they entered the barn in search of saddles and bridles, but found none. They found two long rawhide ropes, however; tied them on the necks of the horses, made a half hitch on the horse's noses, mounted bare-back and rode like the wind toward the meeting place of the Clansmen.

Reaching the public road about three hundred yards from the branch crossing, they stopped, dismounted, and examined the road to see if there were any fresh horse tracks leading toward the meeting place of the Clansmen. There were no in-

dications that mounted soldiers had passed. They were in time. A glimpse at the moon was enough to assure Buck that it was close to midnight, the time the soldiers had set to make their attack on the Clansmen. Scarcely had another minute passed when they heard the patter of many horses' feet.

The troopers were approaching. The boys turned their horses loose in the bushes and hastily drew the raw-hide lariats across the road, drew them tight about six feet above the ground, and tied them to trees. Then they retired a few paces into the brush to await results. The soldiers, in undertones, were heard swearing and boasting about what they were going to do to the Clansmen. They had increased their pace to a lope. As they struck the ropes, the boys fired their guns into the air, while their voices rent the night like the war-cry of a tribe of Comanche Indians. Upon passing under the ropes, every horse was riderless. Those of the Negroes who were not seriously hurt fled back on the road like cattle on stampede.

The crippled ones dragged themselves into the bushes and prayed for deliverance from the Ku Klux Klan.

Convinced that the Negro soldiers were so thoroughly frightened that they could not be reorganized and induced to fight for at least several days, Buck sent King home and proceeded to locate the Clansmen.

The meeting of the Clansmen opened on schedule time, 11.30 o'clock. Pickets had been posted and the order of business taken up. Ben Beavers, who had been sent to the county seat some days previous to find out what regulations had been made for holding an election for county and district officers, reported that it had been ordered by the military, that there would be a ballot box at the county seat only and that every man desiring to vote would poll his vote there. That each man going to and coming from the ballot-box would be required to pass between two lines of Negro soldiers. At the ballot-box and before casting his vote, each would be required to take the oath of allegiance. If he refused to do this, he would not be allowed to vote.

This report brought groans of indignation. They passed a



resolution that no Clansman would be driven by a mob of ignorant impudent Negroes nor would they swallow the bitter oath which required every ex-rebel soldier or sympathiser with the Southern cause to swear that he was a reformed traitor to the government.

Colonel Tyler advised all Clansmen to stay away from the polls and avoid clashes with the military which would be sure to occur. Continuing, he said, "These rag-tag officers from the disbanded Northern army, now controlling the country, can not stand our methods much longer. I believe that the just and honest thinking men of the North are becoming ashamed of them, and are disgusted with their bigotry. The cowards now in charge are finding it personally dangerous and they will soon take what spoils they can lay their hands on and leave this country. Then we can hold a new election and place good Southern men in office."

At this juncture, the rapid firing of guns was heard a short distance up the road. Simultaneously, every Clansman sprang to his feet with gun in hand. A puzzled look was on each man's face. The disturbance was unaccountable. There were no other Clansmen on duty in that section.

Before a suggestion could be made, they heard the Clan signal in the nearby woods. The signal was promptly answered and Buck was soon with his comrades. He explained the seeming battle they had heard take place across the branch. He told them how King had found out the intention and movements of the Negro soldiers and notified him at his den in the swamp. How he and King had circumvented the enemy and sent them frightened from the woods. He was heartily cheered for his cunning work and given a sixteen shot repeating rifle. Money was promptly made up and handed to the Colonel to buy a suit of new clothes for King. After a handshaking, the gathering disbanded and started for their homes.

## CHAPTER XXI.

Reaching his lonely cabin about three o'clock in the morning, Buck felt exultant over his defeat of the military. He was very tired after his long and strenuous exertions. He should have gone to sleep, but a chain of thought kept his mind so active that he could not. Never before had such loneliness come upon him in the wild woods. At times he had felt listless, even lonely, in towns or in large gatherings, but never in nature's woods. In the past, the whooping of the swamp owl or the song of the whip-poor-will had soothed and interested him in the night time, but now they increased his loneliness.

The howl of the timber wolf that was once musical now was no more than an impudent challenge. The barking of a fox and the yowl of a catamount hardly stirred his interest. The sighing winds that gently swayed the tree-tops were like pitying voices. Long folds of gray moss, draped from limbs, swayed to and fro slowly, appeared like forest ghosts. A few friendly stars that he saw through occasional openings in the dense overhead foliage, twinkled as the eyes of familiar friends, winking knowingly over their share in an intimate secret.

Buck was thinking of some one—some one whom he had rescued in the blue jungle swamp. He was thinking of this unusual girl; wondering how much she would care that so great a change had come over him; wondering if her brother would be as careful and watchful of her as he should. How he longed to see and tell her of his new ambitions—and, yes; tell her that he loved her!

Once more he lived over in his mind the day of their meeting in the forest. When he thought of the two black Negroes who had chased her, his hand involuntarily gripped the gun in his belt. Then came sweeter musings: the tender of his

coat to cover her body that had been almost stripped by briars and brush; the nearness and dearness of her as his fingers spread on the charcoal that transformed her appearance; the thrill, the racing of fire through his veins, as at last he pressed to her lips the kiss of an elder brother. He nodded, and a smile played on his face as he dropped off to sleep.

Believing that if the President and Congress were fully informed of the oppression and tyranny over the white people of Texas by the military, they would act in their behalf, Colonel Tyler and his associates drafted a memorial to the government at Washington in which they set out the deplorable facts and earnestly requested that military law be lifted from Texas and its native people be clothed with power to hold their own elections and place in office men of their choice, in county, district, and state. This plea was signed by Colonel Tyler, Senator Throckmorton, Captain Sul Ross, and other leading men.

In the course of time, this document was taken up and considered by the President and his Cabinet at Washington. Charles Sumner and General Benjamin Butler, who were Negro lovers and bitter enemies of the South, opposed the measure. They were ever present at the Capital, serving the President as a free advisory council. They fought against the least slackening of military grip on the Southern States. At last a compromise was reached by an agreement to send General Sheridan to Texas to make a survey of conditions and report to the President.

General Sheridan came and at the end of his investigations he promised the people of Texas that he would recommend to the powers at Washington that their request be granted and that he would do all he could for them. A few months later, a curtailed power was given the people to hold their own elections.

The people, ignorant of the conditions under which the elections would be ordered held, were much elated over the concession. When an election was called it was to be held

under the following rules and regulations: All voting shall be done at the county seat of each county and shall be supervised by military officers. Each man, before voting, shall take the oath of allegiance to the union. After a man has cast his vote, he shall immediately leave and remain away from the vicinity of the polls. If his home is in the country, he must leave the town and shall not return until the election is over, the votes counted, and the winners declared.

Election day came. When the polls were opened, a company of Negro soldiers was formed around the voting box. A double line of them formed a lane in front of the box. Each voter was required to salute the head officer, who was a Negro, pass through the lane, vote; return through the lane, salute again, then leave town.

No self-respecting Southern white man with a grain of independence could submit to these humiliating requirements, hence very few votes were cast by the whites. Plundering adventurers from the North, supported by Negroes, were elected to practically every office.

Disappointed and angry, the men of Dixie began preparing for another struggle of defense. They widened the lines of their scouts and secret service men. The Clan was reorganized on a firmer basis and grew rapidly in number. Ammunition was gathered and cached in securely hidden places. Buck was notified of the new conditions and was doubly cautioned against the enemy. A large number of bad Negro leaders were secretly bumped off and never heard of again. Among these was the noted John Gale.

## CHAPTER XXII.

Bringing ammunition and some provisions to Buck one night King also brought the information that Clansmen had killed three bad Negroes in the eastern side of the county near the Netches River and were hot on the trail of others of the gang that had run a white man and his wife and children from their home at night. They had carried two of the girls away to their camp, where they had been rescued by Clan scouts after a hand-to-hand fight. News of this had drawn most of the soldiers to that section. Buck improved this opportunity to scout around and get a line on some of the bad Negroes in the west side of the county.

After two days' scouting, he discovered that the Negroes in the big bend of the Trinity River were planning to kill three white men who were residing at the edge of the swamp. The Negroes had been stealing cattle and hogs from the white men, who had caught them in the act several times and had threatened to call in a large force of the Clan to handle the Negroes. After getting the situation well in hand, Buck enlisted twelve Clansmen, all disguised as Negroes. He had each one place around his neck a yellow kerchief so as to be distinguished from Negroes. He warned the three white men who had been marked for slaughter by the Negroes of their danger and the impending clash. These men immediately gathered at the house of one of their number. The women and children were bidden in the home of a neighbor, farther up in the hills.

Buck and his twelve men concealed themselves in thick brush near the house where the three threatened men were fortified. Through spies, he had found out that the Negroes had arranged to attack the three men some time during the afternoon. He also knew that they were ignorant of the presence in the neighborhood of himself and his men.

At about four o'clock in the afternoon, three Negroes rode up to the house and halloed. One of the white men came to the door and asked what was wanted.

"We wuz drivin' a bunch uv our cattle to market," the Negro spokesman said, "an tha got scared at some camper's tents by de side uv the road an stampeded all ovah de woods. We doan no much about dese woods, so we decided to git some help. We heard that thar wuz three men here who knows dis range. We will give you gentmen five dollars a piece to hep us de rest uv the evenin'."

"Your story sounds crooked," the white men replied. "How is it that you offer us so much money to help you, when you can get all of the local Negroes you need to work for one dollar per day? Besides this, we think we know your real purpose. Clear out from here at once."

Instead of leaving, one of the Negroes gave a signal that evidently had been agreed on beforehand. Immediately, about thirty Negroes on horseback came on the scene from the nearby woods. The white men shut and barred the doors of the house. The Negro leader commanded them to open the door and surrender, or they would burn the house. This command was answered by a volley of shots from Buck and his men in the thicket. Two Negroes fell dead from their horses and three others were wounded. The rest of the Negroes fell back a short distance where they were joined by eight or ten Negro soldiers who without question had been stationed there to reinforce if necessary.

After fighting fast and holding his ground for a minute, Buck saw the superior numbers of blacks pouring in from the woods and knew that he had been outgeneraled and trapped. He knew that it would be foolish to fight longer where the odds were ten to one, so he ordered a double quick retreat. He instructed his men to scatter and make for the brushy country far out in the hills. This was to force the enemy to divide into small squads and to improve the chances of his men to escape by dodging their pursuers.

Buck was recognised by several of the Negroes and singled out as the leader by all. Soon, he was being closely pursued

by more than twenty of the enemy, each one stimulated with the hope of capturing or killing the noted young Clansman. The rest of the Negro force went on chase after the other Clansmen. The latter knew every foot of the country, every thicket and ravine. Therefore they were soon lost to sight.

Buck made straight across the hills, with the intention of abandoning his horse if he succeeded in reaching the swamp. Once in the canebrakes, he would be safe. If the enemy followed him there, he would ambush and kill every pursuer that came near.

Three of his pursuers were riding fast horses and kept almost in shooting range of him, while the others, riding inferior horses, slowly fell behind. Buck was leading the chase directly toward the molasses mill. This plant was in a small field, enclosed by a rail fence. Buck figured that if he turned to go around the field, his pursuers would cut across and gain enough to cut him off from the swamp. Rather than risk this he decided to make his horse jump the fences and go straight through the field.

He believed that the Negroes would not dare to try the fences and while they were going around the field, he could make his escape into the swamp. His horse cleared the first fence and continued his swift and even gait. Fearing to jump the fence, the Negroes fired a volley of shots at Buck as he fled across the field. Bullets spat in the earth about him but had no effect other than to make the horse increase his speed. It appeared now that he was going to make good his escape.

On reaching the other side of the field, near the molasses mill, the horse was a little too far from the fence when he rose in his jump. His front feet cleared the top rail, while his hind feet caught in the fence, tumbling him in a somersault and throwing his rider a distance of twenty feet into the woods beyond.

Emmet, Jonah, and Kate were the only ones at the mill; the other workers having taken Saturday evening off. Emmet and Jonah were washing molasses vats so they would be ready for use on Monday morning. Kate was there to get a

jug of molasses. All were attracted by the sound of hoofs as Buck came full speed across the speed.

"My God! the fool is going to take that ten-rail fence," exclaimed Emmet when he saw horse and rider within twenty feet of the hazard. No matter if he is a Negro, I'd regret to see him smashed to death in that fence." Kate hid her face in her apron to shut out the vision of the tragedy. Horse and rider were now sprawled out on the other side of the fence.

Emmet, Kate, and Jonah rushed to the spot. The horse quivered all over for a moment, then staggered to his feet, and limped off into the woods.

The rider, except for the twitching of his eye-lids and an occasional gasp, lay ominously still. Blood was trickling from nose and mouth. "De Ku Klux wuz sho' crowdin dat Nigger," Jonah exclaimed in awed tones. "Nuffin else would er made him jump his hoss into dat high fence." Emmet and Jonah dragged the unconscious form to a shed by the mill-house. When Jonah bathed his face with cool water, he began to breathe a little stronger. Emmet advised Jonah to drag him away somewhere out of sight or he would have a dead Negro on his hands when those in pursuit of him arrived.

"Wall, suh, it's too late now," Jonah declared. "Ifen he's gwinter die, he'll finish de job afo any body gits here any way. Look! dis—dis ain't no Nigger a-tall. A black sheep-skin wig done come of-en his haid an he's got straight hair. Look at dat white skin whar I wash de black off." After examining the body more closely, he said, "I believes dis is Buck."

"You are crazy," said Emmet. "You know Buck wouldn't be out here in broad daylight! He has too much sense for that."

"Yas, sah," agreed Jonah, "but I knows him better'n you does. Dat boy is li'ble to be mose any whar at mose any time. I is seed him in mo' unlikely places dan dis. Sho, dis is Buck. I knows him by dat stub finger on his right han."

When the charcoal had been washed from the youth's face



all saw that Jonah was right. It was Buck. Jonah took off the yellow kerchief and put it in his own pocket, declaring that whoever was after Buck should not recognise him by the kerchief. Jonah unbuttoned Buck's shirt and loosened his belt. Blood was still oozing from his mouth and his breathing, while improved, was still slow and labored and he had grown very pale.

"I'm afraid this is the last of Buck," Emmet said solemnly. "If it had to be, I'm glad that it was an accident that got him and not his beastly enemies. The loss will be keenly felt over all of this country. There is no one who can take his place and hold the military officers and conscienceless Negroes in check as he has done. If he is dead and they find it out, they will stop short of nothing in their oppression. He will be dead before we could get a doctor here. Besides this, the coming of a doctor would put his enemies wise and they would come and get him."

Seated on the ground beneath the shed, Kate had them place the boy's head on her lap. She gently stroked his hair which had become disheveled by his wild ride. "Poor reckless brave boy," she whispered as her head bowed and the tears fell from her eyes. "Wake up! my matchless boy, and tell me that you are going to live. My life will be so blank, lonely, and sad if you leave me. You have wished and asked a responsive word of love from me and I was too bashful and backward to breathe it. Now, it must fall on ears that cannot hear. I—I—love you, Buck; I—do love you."

"Dar, now, Miss Kate," Jonah said soothingly. "Don't you take on lac dat. Buck ain't nevah died yit, an I don't bleeve he is gwine ter now. Ah b'lieves he heard a part uv whut you said, cause ah seed his chin quiver a little when you said it. We is got to hide him somewhr's an quick, too, cause whoevah wuz atter him is sho' gwine come here lookin fer him."

At that moment, they looked up and saw three horsemen about two hundred yards away, coming around the field fence toward the mill. Quickly they placed Buck in a large empty barrel and covered it with some old saddle-blankets

and harness. "Jonah, I want you to talk to them when they arrive," Emmet said, "and answer their questions, because you are a cunning old fox and can side-track them easier than I."

"Awright, boss," Jonah replied. "I guess I'se got to talk nice to um, cause I see that tha is got guns all ovah em."

The three Negro soldiers drew rein at the mill and one of them asked if they had seen a man with a yellow kerchief about his neck?

"Yas, Sah," Jonah replied. "I seed dat Nigger make his hoss jump into de feal an when he jump out on dis side, they fell all ovah de fence an into de woods. De hoss, he got up an wobbles into de woods and de Nigger, he run inter de brush toward de hills. He mus be a mile or mo fum here by now. He wuz a bad lookin Nigger an he sho wuz a runnin when I seed him las."

Jonah's honest countenance and sincere expression was quite convincing. One of the Negro soldiers smiled and said: "You is mitey easy fooled, old man. That feller wusen't a Nigger a-tall. He wuz dat fiten Ku Klux boy, made up lac a Nigger." The three blacks laughed heartily at Jonah's ignorance. They had seen the man and horse fall over the fence and the horse's tracks leading from the broken fence and their deductions were in accordance with Jonah's statements. This made them believe Jonah's entire story. Nevertheless, they decided to look the place over. They looked on top of sheds, under piles of cane, and into all of the empty barrels except the one in which Buck was concealed. Kate was sitting on this one and indignantly refused to move when one of the Negroes started to roll it over.

After giggling once more at Jonah and impudently leering at Kate, the three Negroes again started on the supposed trail of Buck; which led them into the hills.

Unobserved by the horsemen, Jonah followed them for a short distance to make sure that they were continuing on the supposed trail. After seeing them disappear over the top of a distant hill, he returned.

The three then shaped an improvised cot out of two poles,

a blanket, and some strings and carried Buck to Jonah's cabin, which was about three hundred yards away, and placed him on a bed in the cellar. The Colonel and Mrs. Tyler were sent for and soon arrived. No one else was told of Buck's condition or of his presence in the neighborhood. On examination, they found that two of Buck's ribs were broken and there were internal injuries, but to what extent they could not tell. He continued unconscious and fever came on him the next day.

In his disconnected mumblings, he frequently called for Kate, his mother, and King. Once, he called Maggie and asked her to guard the approaches to his cabin. Sometimes, he called for his guns and tried to get out of bed. Consciousness returned to him on the third day. On the fifth day, the fever left him. On the seventh day, he was able to prop up in bed and feed himself. Thanks to careful nursing, a strong will-power and an iron constitution, he began to recover rapidly. At the end of three weeks he was back in his den in the swamp.

After hunting for Buck industriously in all parts of the country for three weeks following his disappearance, the officers and Negroes had about lost hope of ever finding him. About this time, news filtered out that he was recuperating in Jonah's cabin, so they marshaled a strong force, went to Jonah's place at midnight, and surrounded the cabin. When they demanded admittance, Jonah politely opened the door and invited them in. They came with drawn guns, only to find that their bird had flown.

When they charged Jonah with treason and harboring an outlaw, he replied, "No sah, gentmen, I wuz keepin dat boy fah you. I wuz jist a waiten te'l he got able to travel, den I wuz gwine let you know to come an git him. Fust thing I noes, he slips away fum me in de night an I ain't seed him since. I don't know which way, or whar he went."

With threats of dire punishment if the old darkey did not help them find the escaped boy, the officers left for headquarters.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

A great number of the Southern representatives in Congress had been disqualified because of their sympathies with the policies of the so-called rebel South. The few of them who smothered their feelings and choked down the nauseating oath of allegiance to the Union, so they might hold their seats, were doing all within their power to have military law lifted from the disfranchised states of the South and bring back civil law.

The people of suffering Texas had managed to elect their choice for Governor, but the powers at Washington refused to confirm the election, and sustained E. J. Davis, military appointee, for the place. Other state officers that showed the least sympathy for the Southern cause were removed from office and their places filled by aliens from the North.

The injustice of these acts served to kindle anew the flame of hatred in the hearts of the Southern people. It threatened to undo all that had been done toward peaceful reconciliation. Ominous war clouds were again hovering low and a new social and political upheaval appeared to be impending. The home defenders daily were gaining in numbers and strength. Clashes between the Whites and the Blacks were occurring almost every night.

Buck had remained inactive in his jungle retreat for several weeks in order to fully recover from his injuries. The monotony and loneliness of his life became all but unbearable. He craved action and thrill, if it were nothing more than a running fight with Negro soldiers.

Late one night King, on a meandering trail, was nearing Buck's cabin with some supplies, all unconscious of the fact that about twenty Negro soldiers were following him at a distance. He did not catch a glimpse of them until he was within a hundred yards of the cabin. As was his custom, be-

fore giving Buck the signal of his approach, he looked back on his trail. To his consternation, he discovered the soldiers not far behind him. He realized that their object was to locate Buck. Otherwise, they would have closed in on him long before.

It was too late to dodge into a thicket and try to throw them off the scent, because they were already in sight of the cabin. After all his cunning, they had outgeneraled him at last. At any rate, Buck must be warned. With bulging eyes, he gave the signal and a minute later slipped through the door and reported all to Buck.

Slipping a gun into King's hand and gripping another in his own, Buck prepared for the attack that he knew was coming. Through a crack between the logs, they saw the Negroes approach and halt about fifty yards away. Then came a shout to the boys to surrender. This order was answered by two shots from the cabin. Surprised at this prompt resistance, the Negroes retired a few paces and all became quiet.

"Whut do you make uv dat?" King asked anxiously. "Is we whipt dem already?"

"No," was Buck's whispered reply. "They are evidently holding a council and planning some scheme. We'll soon know what it is. One thing's certain; we will not surrender under any condition, because if the cowards by good promises get us to give up our guns, they'd murder us sure."

"Maybe dats so, Buck, but you know we can't whip dat big bunch uv Niggers. It mout be best to go easy wid dem."

"Never believe that," Buck said. "A bee without his stinger is helpless and nothing dreads him. We will fight to the finish. If they would get a little farther away from the end of that tunnel, we could make our escape through it. We've got to make a getaway somehow, before their reinforcements arrive. No doubt they have a runner on the trail now, for more men."

The boys discovered that the Negroes were kindling a fire. "Whut's tha makein dat fire for, Buck?" King asked. "It ain't cold out dar."

"I think they are preparing to burn the cabin, King, and when they start it, I have our course already planned."

Burning brands were already falling against the cabin wall. The Negroes were concentrating not far away in front of the door, to wait for the boys to rush out and surrender. The fire caught to the cabin and gained headway rapidly. "Suhrender an we'll git you out uv dar afore you burns up," the Negro leader shouted. "You ain't got no sho to git away dis time. Suhrender quick, or you is gwyne to be cooked alive in dat cabin."

"That's all you know about it," Buck answered. "These woods are full of Ku Klux and they will be here in a few minutes."

At the sound of these magic words, the Negroes looked wildly about for a minute, but seeing no sign of any one approaching, they stood their ground.

"Gib dem Klux de signal quick, Buck," whispered King. "I is gitin hot!"

"Shut up!" commanded Buck. "There are no Clansmen around here. I am running a bluff. I see them drifting away from near the other end of the tunnel. I am going to crawl through it, get in behind them, and give them a surprise attack. If that fails, I can dodge into the switch-cane where they cannot find me. You climb up through the chimney and get out on the back side. There is so much smoke on the front side that they cannot see you.

"When I get in behind them, I will shoot into their rear and yell like a dozen men charging them. When you hear this, open fire from the roof and yell like a band of Comanche Indians. I will shout: 'Charge them, boys!' just like I have an army with me. If this should fail to work, slide off the roof on the back side and run into the woods."

This program was carried into effect. When the Negroes heard shooting and yelling in their rear as well as on top of the cabin, they fled in wild disorder through the woods toward the hills. They believed that a large number of Clansmen were after them. A lot of blood along their trail was evidence that several of them had been wounded. The boys withdrew

a few paces into the woods and watched the cabin burn to the ground.

In the rebound of his recent fright, King appeared deeply troubled. At length he said, "I figers dat I is sho' into it now, Buck. Dem Niggers is most sho' to git me. They has foun me out at las. They knows who I is, whar I has been, an whut I is been doin. I can't fool dem no mo. I wish I wuz back in Afica, whar you said my four fathers come from. I nevah had but one Daddy dat I knows uv, but if-n I did have three mo, I wish I wuz wid dem or any place ceptin here."

Hiding a smile, Buck said, "I think you misunderstood me, King. I did not mean that you had more than one earthly father; I meant your ancestral line that came before you. Don't you worry. We will keep on fooling that bunch of fat-heads. The white men who are directing the Negro soldiers are lazy cowards and poor woodsmen. The Negroes are ignorant and superstitious. Do as I tell you and you will come out all right."

"Well, den, Buck! you tell me, cause I is gitin scared."

"All right, King; listen, you go home in a roundabout way and be sure that you get there before daylight. After letting the folks at home know the situation, put on a dress and apron. Wash dishes, sweep the floor, chew gum and otherwise play the part of a Negro girl. That will fool every Negro that goes on hunt for you. When our present troubles are over, you can discard the skirt and wear your trousers again."

After pondering this for a minute, King replied, "Dat sounds alright, Buck, but whats I gwine do when some buck Niggers comes on Sadday night tryin ter git sweet wid me? If-n tha comes pinchin roun me, I'll sho punch dem in de eyes."

When soldiers searched the Tyler place for King the next day, they found no trace of him. The troopers finally became convinced that King had become frightened and had left the country.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

Buck had saved his camp outfit from the burning cabin and camped on a knoll between two small lakes the rest of the night after King had gone home. He rambled in the jungles the next day looking for a safe hiding place. About two miles up the swamp from the burned cabin, he found a very large hollow tree with a two foot opening just above the ground line. The tree was about six feet through. The hollow was wide enough for a comfortable bed, even if it did not afford enough room to straighten out to full length.

He discovered that he could built a small fire back from the front when needed and the smoke would escape through a knot-hole near the top of the tree-trunk. Switch cane and thickly matted vines grew around the tree and completely cut off sight of the opening in the tree from any one who might happen to pass near.

Buck was well pleased with his new retreat and felt that he would be reasonably secure in it. He felt, however, that it would be dangerous to his interests for any one to visit him there, and accordingly he let no one except the Colonel know about it. He cleared the den of all rotten wood, bugs, spiders, and surplus dirt, then floored it with moss and dry leaves. On this he placed his blankets and his moss-stuffed pillow.

He obtained information, ammunition, and provisions by making occasional trips to the hills, between midnight and daylight. Sometimes, he slipped away at night and joined the Clan, taking part in some thrilling work. He had added to his woodland library three more books—a Physical Geography, The Scottish Chiefs and Grimshaw's Rome. These, he read eagerly when resting in the daytime. He never risked the danger of having a light at night.

One day, as he reclined against a tree reading, his atten-



tion was diverted to the loud chattering of squirrels about two hundred yards away. Such an alarm might have been caused by the appearance of a hawk or bobcat. It continued, however, for several minutes and Buck became suspicious. As Buck rose to his feet, he heard a twig break only a short distance away to his left. Turning quickly in that direction, he saw Maggie Parker erect and still. A smile played on her lips and her black eyes sparkled as she enjoyed the triumph of having approached so close to Buck without his knowledge. Reading the look of inquiry in his eyes and anticipating his questions, she came close to Buck and sat down.

"Something—perhaps the birds—told me that you were somewhere in the blue jungles where even your friends could not afford to visit you," she said. "I figured that you would be lonesome and maybe in need of some things you could not get. I heard it whispered at a log-rolling that the hidden cabin had been burned by your enemies and that perhaps you had been burned up in it. That news did not worry me, because I knew you were too cunning to fall into a trap like that.

"I hunted in the woods for you four different days. I purposely let two days pass between hunts in order to deceive any one who might suspect my purpose. Day before yesterday, I found two of your steel traps. I knew they were yours, because no one else ever traps this far out in the blue jungles. From the traps, I followed your dim trail through the jungle for half a mile. While sitting on a log resting and looking about, I saw a dark smoky spot around a knot-hole, high up on a large tree. It was a green tree, so I knew that the smoky spot could not have been made by fire from the outside—it had to come from a hollow—on the inside of the tree. I knew the spot was fresh, otherwise rain would have washed it off. I figured that no one but you had reason to live in a hollow tree. It was too late for me to hunt further that day, so I went home and came back this afternoon.

"I stopped and tied my horse in a clump of bushes near

the north end of Crooked Lake and walked over here. No one could ride a horse in the thickets this side of the lake. I brought a lunch for you and hung it up in a beech tree about twenty feet from that trap you set between two willow bushes on the edge of the lake. There is a strip of streaked bacon, two blackberry pies, and four apples. Go get it soon after dark, or the coons will get it. If you scold me for coming here, I—I won't come again."

"No, Maggie, I can't scold the smartest and bravest little lady in the world. I am very glad to see you. I have been hungry for you many times since I saw you last. I hope the time will come when I can repay you for your kindness and show my appreciation more fully. I have little fear that your coming here will lead my enemies to discover my retreat. You are too cunning for them, but I am afraid you will overtax your endurance on one of these long rambles, or that you will fall into the hands of some of those beastly Negroes. If such a thing should happen, I would feel like I was the cause of it. Do be careful, for I esteem your friendship more than I can tell you."

Maggie had remained silent as she listened to Buck. After gazing dreamily into the woods for a minute, she seemed to awaken. Looking straight into Buck's eyes, she said, "I've heard it whispered that you rescued a lost girl from the blue jungles last fall and that you care for her. You never told me about it. Is it true? Does she care for you? Is she prettier than I? Do you care for her?"

She directed these questions at Buck in rapid succession, then ceased suddenly. There could be no mistaking the feeling that had inspired the questions. This growing bud of the woodlands had begun to develop into a blossom and on its fresh tender petals, love was inscribing its first message. The wild flower was becoming jealous of the cultured rose.

To answer her questions truthfully would leave a scar on the tenderling. To evade the truth would be acting cowardly and disloyal to Kate. What should he do? He reached for Maggie's hand, which she withdrew out of his reach, saying: "Not until you have answered my questions."

"Yes, Maggie," he said steadily, "I did find a girl lost in the forest. I rescued her from two designing Negroes who were pursuing her, and sent her home to her people.

"I think she is grateful for what I did, but if she cares beyond that, I do not know it. I have seen her only a few times since that day. Yes, she is pretty, but not more so than you. I am too ignorant to know much about such matters. We cannot tell what time will bring. Just now, I feel that I am not worthy of any good girl."

"Stop, Buck," commanded Maggie. "You are as good as anybody and don't know it. I will change the subject and tell you about an affair that I saw in the woods this morning. The ending was sad. Two male squirrels were capering around a little lady-squirrel, showing off and vieing for her favor. This finally brought on a fight between them. One of them won the battle and the other scampered away. The victor fondled about the lady-squirrel for a time, then left her and went into another tree where he joined a new lady-squirrel whom he seemed to care for very much. The abandoned lady-squirrel climbed out on a limb to pout. Suddenly, a hawk swooped down, gathered her in his claws, and carried her away.

"I wanted to kill the libertine lover that had deceived her. He had acted dishonest. I have studied animals and birds closely and found that most of them are fair and honest in their social dealings. I believe this case was an exception; at least, I hope so. A flock of jay-birds fought the hawk so fiercely that it dropped the squirrel. The poor little wounded lady caught to a limb as she was falling and ran into a knot-hole.

"If she recovers, the scars will remain and render her unattractive for life. It depresses me to think of this tragedy. I had not believed, up to then, that my pretty little friends of the jungle would act any way except nice and honest. Tell me, Buck, do such things occur among people?"

"I never knew of such a case," replied Buck, "but I have heard of them. Forget it, Maggie. I believe that if the two-face squirrel you described could hear and understand what

you have said about him, he would never do the like again. Let's hope that the wounded one will recover and live happily. Let's talk about something else."

"All right, Buck; tell me some of the things you have learned from those old tattered books you have here. There must be something funny in them."

"No," replied Buck; "there is no fun in them, but lots of information. Before I commenced reading them, I thought the world was standing still while the sun circled around it. I have found out from one of these books that the world is round like a ball, and turns around toward the east every twenty-four hours. I have also learned that there are thousands of other worlds, as large and even larger than the one we are on. I have—"

"Stop, Buck," commanded Maggie. "Such things cannot be true. I wish you would stop reading those books. They will make you foolish. You must know that if this world was round, half of the things on it would slip off, and you know that if the world turned over like you say, all of the water would spill out of the lakes and everything except cats and other animals that have sharp claws to hang on with, would fall off. Besides, if the world turns over as fast as you say it does, don't you know that all the trees would fall flat on the ground, and when birds leave their nests to hunt food, they could never find their way back. All of us would have to lean toward the way the world was turning, or we would fall down. I do not know much, but I am not so ignorant as to believe these impossible things.

"I have read a lot in the Bible. It tells all about how the world was made. It mentions the ends of the earth, and you know there could not be an end on it if it was round. It tells about things above the earth and under the earth. That proves that it is standing still, because if it turned over all the time, there could be no under or over. It tells about the sun standing still for about three hours at one time. That means that it was moving before and after that. It tells about one world! not worlds. If there were other worlds, the Bible would have mentioned them.

"I read in the Bible about Christ coming and dying to save the world; not worlds. If there are hundreds of thousands of worlds, as you say, how could Christ go to all of them and die to save the people? There is enough here for us to learn without meddling with the business of other worlds, even if there were any. I am glad that our world is standing still so that we can drive the cows home without missing the pen a mile or two, and I am glad it is flat so we will not slip off of it. I must believe the Bible, Buck; instead of that queer book you have been reading."

Seeing that he could not win in the argument by further discussion, Buck said, "You win, Maggie. I am unable at present to prove my assertions and you have proven yours by the Bible. When both of us become wiser, we can talk on this question again."

Maggie roused up as though from a dream, and looked at the sun. Springing to her feet, she exclaimed, "Goodby, Buck, I am going." Waving aside his outstretched hand, she glided to her horse, mounted, and was gone.

Left alone to his thoughts, Buck began to try to analyze this unusual girl. Why did she ask such strange and direct questions. Why did her pertinent comparisons make him feel as though he had done or intended to do something wrong? Why did she always leave him so suddenly? He liked to be with her. Every minute with her was deeply interesting. She had had little experience and was uneducated, and yet she could read his thoughts. She even anticipated his questions.

What a tower of wisdom if she were educated! What an invaluable comrade or partner she would make! She knew wild life well and loved it. Duplicity and falsehood were incomprehensible to her. Her thoughts were as pure as snow that had never touched the ground. He must never deceive her in the least thing. She would not forgive it. It would mean the shattering of her beautiful ideals. He could not help thinking what a pity such a one must meet deception, fraud, and fiction in the years to come.

The forest solitude was making a philosopher of Buck. In the long silent watches, he had time to study life's problems.

Though still a youth, he could see that, after all, he was living in a world of chance. Here, opposing forces and unseen circumstances made many a curve when one had planned to travel in a straight and even course. He began to see life as a drama for which fate had set the stage.

Out of nowhere stepped the unknown and unexpected to lend a change and thrill to the great drama. Danger lurked in front, behind and on each side of this country youth. Death trailed his footsteps day and night, yet he met each encounter with a smile. At times he was even happy. Time and again, he had escaped miraculously from nets set for him by his enemies, and gone on in search of adventure and revenge.

Beyond the clouds which were enshrouding him, he could see with his mind's eye, success and happiness. If these desires could never be attained, he told himself philosophically, it was better to enjoy them in imagination than not at all. Unusual conditions and environment were shaping his life and he was following irresistibly the trail which fate had blazed.

Little could he know that the story of his trials would be made into a page of imperishable history of Dixie, to be handed down to coming generations of the Southland. Yet this was true. With the passing of time, his mistakes were destined to be forgotten while his virtues would be magnified. The story of his valor, daring, and cunning is still being told around countless firesides in Dixieland. The few old-timers, still living, who knew Buck and his career, are frequently called upon at gatherings to tell the story over and over again.

This they do, giving all of the details, and doubtless much embellishment. No one ever dares to dispute or question any part of the story. They cherish his memory. They call him by pet names, such as their Napoleon of the South and the Son of Cromwell, but most of them call him their Knight of the Dixie Wilds.

These old-timers declare that Buck never fought for revenge or notoriety, but only in self-defense and in defense of justice and his people. They generally wind up their story by saying: "There was never but one Buck Tyler."

## CHAPTER XXV.

In those early days, a stage line was operated between Shreveport, Louisiana, and Houston, Texas, by way of Rusk, Alto, and Crocket. A stage-stand was situated about every twenty or thirty miles along the line, where horses were replaced by fresh ones and passengers got off and on. There were very few passengers. The principal business of the line was to carry the mail and important small packages. The nearest stage-stand to the Tyler place was at Old Shilo, six miles to the south.

This place consisted of a blacksmith shop, a stage-horse stable and a four room log residence where the keeper of the stage-horses boarded and where the few travelers found meals and lodging. The stage passed through there twice a week, if not delayed by high water, washed out bridges or other causes of delay that frequently intervened in that new country. One morning, a lone passenger alighted from the stage, carrying two large traveling bags. She appeared to be about twenty years of age, was of medium height and faultlessly proportioned. She was graceful in carriage and otherwise exceptionally attractive. She was of fair complexion, and her large lazy looking blue eyes, shaded with long auburn lashes, added to her beauty.

She gave only a passing glance at the staring hill-billies who had gathered to meet the stage and to see and hear what they could in order to have something to talk about until the next stage came. The lone passenger went into the house and ordered breakfast. She asked several questions of old Lady Hallmark who was waiting on her, and who in turn had just as many questions to propound.

"Did you come from very far?" asked the old lady. "Yes," was the reply, "and to save you the trouble of a lot more questions which I can see you have on your mind, I will tell you

briefly about myself. My name is May Castle. My home is in Jackson, Mississippi. My business is writing for the popular magazines; and my hobby is the study of insects and plant life. Now, I would be pleased to have you answer some questions for me, if you know this country and the people who live in it."

"I shore can and will, Miss Castle, an' I kin tell you a heep. I has been here ever since the Mexican War. I knowed Sam Houston an—"

"Pardon me for interrupting you," broke in Miss Castle, "but I am not interested in things so far back. I want to know about the present—the people around here, what they are doing in these trying times, and what they are planning to do. I am ignorant about these things and as I intend to remain in this section for some time, naturally I would like to know them. If you will kindly answer my questions without comment, we will get along much faster, and my time is limited. Is there a place near here known as the Wildcat Ranch?"

"Yes," the old lady replied, "it is on the other side of Mustang Creek, six miles from here. The way it got that name was—"

"Never mind about that," again intervened Miss Castle. "Just answer my questions, please. Who is the leading citizen of that neighborhood?"

"Colonel Tyler," was the reply; "an' he deserves it too. He is wise and honorable."

Miss Castle's next question was, "Has he a family?"

"Yes, Miss Castle, he has a wife and six children, four boys and two girls. Every one knows his wife, the Queen we calls her, because she looks like one and knows a lot."

"Have they a grown son, Mrs. Hallmark?"

"Well, now, I can't say as he is grown, madam, but he shore can do a man's job at most things; an' then some."

"Where does this boy stay?" inquired Miss Castle.

"Now, Miss; you is axed me one question I can't answer an' I don't believe any one can. He is in different places, and it do seem sometimes that he is in more than one place at the same time. There are a lot of people that says so, anyhow."



My son Jasper says he is hidin' from the military in the blue jungles, at least most of the time."

"You do know a lot," said Miss Castle with an encouraging smile. "Only a few more questions and I will be through. Do Colonel Tyler and this unusual boy of his belong to the Ku Klux Klan."

"Now, you look ahere! young womern," shouted the old lady as her face reddened and her eyes flashed with anger. "That is none of your business an' you had better not ax that question around here if you want to be lucky. I've told you all I am a goin' to an' I know all I want to about you." Thereupon, the old lady left the room with a snort.

Miss Castle saw that she had led the inquiry too far. However, she had found out a lot that she wanted to know. She left fifty cents on the table to pay for her breakfast, walked out to the blacksmith shop, and hired a hill-billy with his woman to take her to the Tyler settlement. On reaching there, she arranged to board with the Cal Rogers family, the same place where Woods was boarding. When attending church on the following Sunday, May Castle found it unnecessary to tell the curious country people about herself, because old lady Hallmark had spread the story.

Woods and Miss Castle were formally introduced, and apparently became well acquainted quickly. As Mrs. Rogers pointed out, both were well educated and cultured, which naturally made them congenial and interesting to each other. They were seldom together in the daytime or at gatherings, but after supper each evening, they sat on one end of the front porch and talked in undertones for hours.

Miss Castle let it be generally known that in addition to her work in writing for magazines, she was going to give a lot of her time to the study of insect and plant life peculiar to that country. She stated that the study of butterflies was most interesting to her. B. H. Woods drew a rough map of the surrounding country and gave it to her as a guide. The map showed the points of the compass, the creeks, trails, lakes, and a small part of the extensive swamps, such as Woods had seen. After a brief study of this map, Miss Castle began to

take rambles in the woods whenever the weather was favorable. She frequently rode far into the woods and was absent for hours at a time.

She pleasantly declined offers of others to accompany her on these rambles, pointing out that she could study much better when alone. At first, she confined her rambles to the hill country, but a little later, she ventured short distances into the swamp lands. With her cheerfulness and friendly and attractive personality, Miss Castle became quite popular with many people of the neighborhood.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

With Buck Tyler, eternal vigilance was the price of existence. Never was he off his guard, day or night. When he desired to leave his den in the daytime, he climbed a tall tree which stood on a nearby knoll and closely surveyed the distant foothills and open glades to see if an enemy or enemies were prowling. The tree, being a little taller than those around it and with but few limbs near the top, he could view the country for a long distance in every direction. More than once, he had sat in the fork of this tree and watched small detachments of officers and Negro soldiers hunting for his trail in the woods.

About four o'clock one evening, he prepared to go forth along the banks of a lake and bait his traps. First, after climbing his lookout tree, he saw two cows grazing on some moss draped from the low limbs of a tree about three hundred yards away. Some distance to the left of these, he glimpsed a small bunch of wild hogs rooting among the leaves for acorns. Just as he had decided that the coast was clear and was about to climb down, he saw another moving object. Partly hidden by bushes at first, it slowly moved out into an opening and stopped. Dimly he discerned a figure on horseback that peered down the bottom for a moment, then turned and looked steadily in the other direction.

He could now see the figure on horseback more plainly. It was a woman, at least it was in woman's attire—and, yes, he was sure that she was riding Cal Rogers' brown horse. Perhaps it was Mrs. Rogers who had lost her way while out for a ride. He could not be sure of any of these conjectures, and it was to his interest to find out.

Once more on the ground, he buckled on his pistols and walked rapidly toward where he had seen the horse and rider. When within two hundred yards of the place he had seen

them, he checked his speed and advanced slowly and cautiously. He had been the victim of decoys and ambush too often to be led into a trap now. Concealed by bunches of switch-cane, he moved forward another hundred yards, then crept to the edge of the opening. His eyes had not deceived him, for he saw fresh horse tracks. Following the dim trail, he saw small slender shoe prints, at intervals, obliterated by the horse tracks. This proved that the person was really a woman and she was in front leading the horse.

Suddenly, he heard a slight rustling in the bushes to the left of the trail, then a young woman broke through and gave chase to a large butterfly. Her running was as graceful as that of an antelope. The butterfly circled and came straight in his direction, closely pursued by the girl. He did not have time to dodge out of sight. The butterfly rose a little higher. With hand extended, the girl leaped high in the air, lost her balance and fell sprawling at Buck's feet. Her clothes, including her embroidered underskirts, had risen in folds, high up under her arms. For the first time in his life, Buck was a little bit excited. He had never seen such a cloud of beautiful white lace before in his life. Blushing deeply, he hastily pulled down her ruffled skirts, and placed them in order. When he started to raise her to her feet, she declined his offered assistance and raised herself so that her elbow rested on the ground, and with her hand supporting her chin, her blue eyes gazed steadily at Buck as her face wreathed in a friendly smile.

"Are you hurt?" asked Buck with some anxiety.

"A little, but not seriously," she replied between quick breaths. In another moment, she sat up and said, "I am mortified over the condition in which you found me and my clothes, but it cannot be helped now. Whoever you are, you must be shocked at finding a lone girl in the woods at this late hour in the afternoon. You must be wondering who I am and what brought me here. I will be pleased to explain. My name is May Castle, lately from the East, and for the present I am staying with the Rogers family. My business is writing for magazines and studying insect life.

"I have found some wonderful specimens in these woods. The butterflies here are gorgeously beautiful. I find strange and interesting things in the forest every day that I come in here. I am peculiarly fond of the wild woods, so much so that I sometimes think that I should have been an Indian maiden to live in the forest all the time. Now, please tell me about yourself and why you are here, so far from where any one lives."

Buck did not know what to say or do. This beautiful creature had dropped across his lonely trail like a miracle. He wanted to ask her a hundred questions, but was afraid he would not say the right things at the right time. She appeared to be so confiding and dependent that he had an impulse to take her into his arms and carry her away for his own. After saner thought, he replied, "There is little or nothing for me to tell you. I am only an ignorant boy, as you can see. Unfortunate circumstances have forced me to exist alone in the jungles here. There is nothing about me that could interest one like you. Besides, it is growing late and you have but a dim trail to lead you out of the swamp. It would be dangerous for a pretty girl like you to be in these woods, unprotected after dark. Conscienceless Negro brutes range about here sometimes. You must hurry back to the hill country where there are white people. It is too late for you to hunt butterflies and you can gain nothing by remaining here longer."

"Oh!" exclaimed Miss Castle. "I see that you are anxious to be rid of me. I was hoping that you might have become as interested in me as I am in you." Perhaps I should not have admitted this, but your candor has caused me to be frank with you." With pretty pouting lips and an injured expression, she continued, "I had hoped that you would invite me to remain, at least until after dark so that for once in my life, I could see the virgin wildwoods in the twilight. It must be wonderful to watch the squirrels, birds, and butterflies retiring for the night. I had hoped for this, and now you want to send me away."

"No, Madam," Buck replied, "it is not that, but I would

feel in a degree responsible if you became lost and had to remain in the forest all night. I am used to such things and like it, but they would frighten you. Imagine how you would feel when wolves and wildcats began to howl and yowl and you were hopelessly lost in the jungle. You must be going at once."

"Please do not hurry me away, my nameless young man," replied Miss Castle. "I do so much want to hear you talk some more in that involuntary way of yours. Allow me to say that you may be ignorant in the sordid ways of society life, but you are wise in the fields of nature. Pardon my conceit when I say that I have read you clearly, through and through. You only need opportunity and some capable one to teach you and that keen mind of yours would develop into a giant intellect.

"It would be a pleasant privilege for me to teach you what I know and to learn from you how to fathom the mysteries of these great wild forests. I will be frank and confess that I already know who you are.

"You have been so minutely described to me that I recognised you the minute I saw you. I know from what I have been told that there is a picturesque setting in your stormy young life that I greatly admire. I have been told of your daring and cunning. Ever since I was a girl of twelve years, I have craved to meet a real knight of the forest like you, and I am overjoyed in finding you.

"There are men who have had less adventure and fewer thrills in their career than you, whose names have reached high places in history and fiction. You are the man-boy they call Buck."

Buck was captivated by the loveliness of this young woman and was amazed at her wisdom. There was a warmth and indescribable magnetism about her that seemed impossible for him to resist. He wanted to get her started on the trail home so he could find time to locate himself and digest all of the splendid things she had said to him. Looking straight into her eyes for the first time, he said, "I like you. I like to look at you and hear you talk, but you have no time to spare.

For the third and last time, I tell you to go home, then I will look these woods over to see if one or more of my enemies are spying on me. I have put that off too long already.

"So far as I know, you may be their decoy and they may be already lying in ambush for me. I will allow you five minutes in which to get ready and start. If you fail to start by the end of that time, I will leave you here alone to find your way out or to get lost. Dusk is gathering. Go!"

With a pitiful look, Miss Castle replied, "Your intimation that I would serve your enemies against you, has hurt me deeply." She gave way to a smothered sob and her eyes held unshed tears. When she recovered her voice, she continued, "I will excuse your suspicions because you have been the victim of deception so often that I cannot blame you for watching strangers. To please you, I will go at the end of five minutes, but while that time is passing, please tell me something about the wild dwellers of these enchanted woods."

Buck looked pensive for a moment, then he said, "The owls that you hear whooping over there is the cypress trees are proclaiming to the other night prowlers that the day is fading and that the day rambles are going to their dens, leaving the jungles free to the night shift. Wolves, coons, wild cats and other night rambles have heard the signal and are creeping from their lairs to start to hunt their prey.

"The droning of bees and bugs has ceased and their symphony has been taken up by the crickets and katydids. Now we hear the whip-poor-will's mellow warble—Miss Castle, your time is up. Go!"

"One minute more, my new-found friend," pleaded the girl; "and I will break the spell that has been binding me, and go. I will be leaving you in person, but in spirit I will still be with you. I could listen to you talk all night and never close an eye. You, with your matchless record and miraculous escapes from your enemies, remind me so much of a great hero of Grecian mythology that I will call you by his name.

"Surely, Achilles, you would not go away and leave me here alone. I feel that you are too gallant for that. I have been so fascinated by you and your talk that I failed to mention

that I sprained my knee in that fall a while ago and it is beginning to pain me. I am brave enough to dress the injuries of others, but I have no courage to doctor my own. I have a first-aid kit in a satchel over there by the horse. I hope you will not regard me as immodest when I ask you to get it and bandage my knee for me." With a seeming effort to expose her lower limbs as little as possible, she made bare her snow-white knee. She did this with the apparent simplicity and innocence of a child.

Buck flushed and hesitated. A hundred thoughts raced through his mind. Did she really mean what she said? Should he comply with her request? To hide his embarrassment, he walked toward the satchel. What would Kate think if he did this and she knew it? How would Maggie regard it? What would be his mother's opinion?

Right and wrong struggled with equal force in his mind. At last he made his decision. Placing the satchel on the saddle-horn, he turned to the girl and said, "Miss Castle, I will not risk the consequences of complying with your request. I am in enough trouble already without taking chances on more. You should not trust a stranger so far.

"I am not blind to your beauty or immune to your unusual charms. You are escaping by a slim margin. Thoughts of my mother and two others made me strong enough to be a man and you escaped. I will do what I can to interest and please you, but as long as I can help it, I will not compromise, both you and myself. I am trying to believe that I misunderstood you. I want to believe that you are too refined and pure to do wrong knowingly. I know that I am not so attractive as to cause you to lose discretion and forget yourself and that is why I cannot shake off the suspicion that there is another purpose behind all of this, and if there is, rest assured that sooner or later, I will find out what it is." Quickly placing a hand under each of her arms, with ease and swiftness, he swung her gently into the saddle and pointed to the trail that led towards the hills.

With her eyes half closed and dreamy, Miss Castle said, "Achilles, when and where shall we meet again? I could



talk with you for ages and never grow tired. We can teach each other so many interesting things. I cannot bear the thought of not seeing you again. I know that my impulses have carried me a little too far and given you cause to suspect me of wrong motives, but I will yet prove to you that I am worthy of your best thoughts. You said a while ago that you would do anything you could for my pleasure. Do this. Name a time and place for us to meet again."

"Though much inclined, I do not think we can meet again, at least, not soon," replied Buck. "You know so much about me, you must know that I am a hunted outlaw and have to keep hidden all the time. The reason for this is too long a story to tell to you, and it could not interest one like you anyhow.

"However, I will say this. I am a victim of circumstances and injustice. I do not regret anything that I have done and intend to go on doing the same things, until my people and I are given some quarter and a degree of justice."

"Yes, I know that you have been misjudged and imposed upon shamefully," the girl said sympathetically. "That is one reason why I want to meet you as often as I can, to cheer and comfort you. You must feel neglected and lonely out here in these silent woods. Like you, I love the wild woods and have had the chance to be in them so little.

"A long stay in the forests has been my dream for years. If you would allow me, I would like to camp somewhere out here at least for one night and be your close neighbor. We could have a delightful time all to ourselves. Can't we meet here or hereabout, next Sunday evening?"

"No," replied Buck, "we cannot meet by appointment, or at least, I will not until I investigate and know more about you. I have ways of finding out things that you could not imagine. I like you very much in some ways and if you continue to ramble in these woods, late in the afternoons, I will be apt to meet you sometimes, but you will not know of my presence until I appear, and if there is any one with you, I will not appear."

Seeing that Buck was firm in his refusal to have a definite appointment with her, Miss Castle smilingly waved him a farewell and rode away toward the hills.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

Buck watched the girl until she was lost to sight on the winding trail, then struck out for Crooked Lake. Darkness had come on. After re-baiting his traps, he returned to his den and to bed. He did not go to sleep at once, however. The afternoon had developed a mystery which demanded his keenest study if it was to be solved. This mystery was smart, beautiful, and bewitching. She was also broad-minded and generous. She had made a wide allowance for his ignorance and had appreciated his worthy points more than any one else, even his own people.

Could she really be interested in him or had she another purpose? Was it possible for her to be a tool of his enemies to decoy him into their hands? No. It was hard to believe such a thing of one so unselfish and lovable. Was he in love with her? No, because when he thought of Kate Graham, the image of pretty May Castle dimmed in comparison. But there was no denying the fact that he wanted to see and be with her again. She had placed him under a pleasant hypnotic spell such as he had never felt before. Like the drinker for his dram, Buck wanted to have that feeling again.

After more than two hours' hard study of the matter, he found himself no nearer a solution of the problem, and decided that the thing to do was to watch future developments and act accordingly. With this decision, he went to sleep and dreamed of clouds of white lace and pretty white knees.

As her horse picked his way through the woods toward the Rogers place, May Castle dropped into a close study of the evening experience. By a solemn agreement and for a valuable consideration, it was her business to find the notorious boy outlaw and lure him into capture. After a long and skilful hunt, she had found him, but how different was he

from the homely, half animal ruffian that had been described to her! Physically he was almost perfect. He was modest, wise, and handsome. Yes, she said to herself, he is a gentleman in the rough and fearless to a point of recklessness. The moment she rested eyes on him, she had felt herself irresistibly drawn to him.

He filled every requirement of the hero that she had visioned in her mind ever since she had reached her teens. She could love him as she had never loved a man before. Again she whispered to herself: could I lead him to love me to the extent that he would leave the country with me? If so, he could escape his enemies that are hunting him to the death and I could live happily with this fearless man-boy.

After weighing the question fully, her verdict was no. Even if he had fallen in love with her, his superior love of honesty, his mother, and his country was too strong on him. A young man with the urge of loneliness and the amorous blood of youth coursing through his body that could resist the warm advances she had made to him would hold the worth of principle too high to fall for her.

She thought of breaking with her military employers and leaving the country rather than betray this sinless young savage. Then she thought of her part of the large reward that would be hers when the boy was captured. If she could not have the boy, she could at least have the price of his capture. She consoled herself with the thought that he would finally be captured anyway and that she might as well have the reward as some one else less worthy.

Miss Castle reached the boarding house some two hours after dark, and explained to those who were becoming a little uneasy over her absence that she had lost her bearings while in the forest and had forced the horse to go in the direction she believed to be right. When finding herself completely lost, she had allowed the horse to follow his own instinct and the faithful animal had brought her home.

After quieting her hunger with a cold lunch, she and Woods soon were in their usual place on the porch. May

had apparently forgotten about her sprained knee, if indeed it had ever been injured.

"Well, let's have your report," Woods demanded, in his usual low tone, though more irritable. "You have been rambling in the woods for more than two weeks now, and you have not so much as reported seeing the tracks of the quarry. The time limit in which we have to trap our prize and secure the reward will be out in ten more days. The military is becoming impatient. They cannot understand how that scapegoat can outgeneral all of the forces that are hunting him, and continue his dirty work.

"Why don't you go farther into the swamp and watch closer? If you once meet him and play your charms strong, you would snare him for sure. He is just at the age that he could not resist you. A little flattery, a few compliments, and the touch of your lips to his, and soon you would have him following you to any part of the woods you wished to lead him. It seems to me impossible for you to ramble in his range all this time and not meet him accidentally, if in no other way. I am growing a little bit suspicious of your loyalty."

"For shame, Bennie. After all I have sacrificed for you—"

"Never mind that sob stuff," broke in Woods. "It would not be the first time you jumped a game. You quit a good confiding husband to follow me. How do I know that you have not already been meeting this young rascal, having a good time playing savages in the swamp? I know your mania for wild life. I can see that something has wrought a change in you. I noticed it the minute I saw you after your return this evening. I can—"

"Stop!" commanded May. "I will not be bullied by you. I left all that was dear to me for your sake, and this is my reward. A runaway, disgraced, an outcast from my home and people, all for you. It is you that is growing tired of the bargain. I am not blind. You haven't kissed me in a week. You have ceased to have anxiety when I leave for the forest or to show relief when I return. You are secretly trying to

captivate a certain innocent pretty young girl who lives near the molasses mill. You would blight her life as you have ruined mine if you could. I am growing ashamed of the low cowardly game with you and that domineering military, but as I have begun it, I will carry out my part, get the reward, then leave you and your dirty bunch."

This outburst made Woods uneasy. Perhaps he had gone too far with his scolding. He cautioned her to talk lower. Placing his arm around her, he said, "I love you, May. My seeming neglect of you is because of worry over the important matter we have on hand. When this is accomplished, we will have more time for each other and to enjoy life. Tell me now, about your ride in the woods this afternoon."

Somewhat mollified by Woods' show of affection, May proceeded to relate her day's adventures.

"While in the swamp near the little creek that runs in from the west, I saw our quarry standing behind a clump of bushes, watching my every move. How he reached that spot without my seeing him, I cannot tell. I had been watching closely in every direction. From the description you gave me of him, I recognised the boy at the first glance. His eyes were like two flaming arrows. I could almost feel them piercing through me. I purposely pretended not to see him. Luckily, the butterfly that I happened to be chasing, went straight toward him. When within a few feet of him, I intentionally lost my step and fell at his feet with my skirts all awry and my silk underwear exposed. With a blushing face, he gently adjusted my clothes, asked me if I was hurt, and looked so straight at me that I was almost unnerved.

"I proceeded to play my charms in a way that I felt sure he could not resist. Twice within the next half hour I saw him weaken but he recovered each time. Do as I could after that, I was unable to get him fully under the spell again. His suspicion of my playing a part in a plot against him kept his mind divided. That kept him from under the spell each time I applied my charm.

"I found him to be very cunning and peculiarly attractive. I know that I have him deeply interested in me and feel sure

that I will get him under the spell the next time we meet. To be frank about it, Bennie, I found him to be so nice and clean minded that I was ashamed of the two-face role I was playing, and I fear that I will feel like a murderess when I lure him into capture."

"Fine work, May," commented Woods. "I knew that you and you only, could work this game. With careful management from now on, we are sure of the reward. Of course you made an appointment with him to meet you at a definite time and place."

"No, Bennie, I tried hard in a seemingly careless way, but I failed. He firmly refused to do that, but said that he would see me nearly any time that I came into the swamp late in the afternoon, but that I would not see him until he came to me. I told him that I would be in the woods near where we met, and hoping to see him, day after tomorrow, in the afternoon. I feel sure that he will come, but that does not mean that he will not be on his guard, or that he can be outgeneraled.

"The only way we will ever catch that game rooster, is to have a detachment of soldiers hide in the swamp near where I ramble and have one of them follow near enough to see my signals. After meeting the boy and monopolizing his attention, I can give a sign to the watchman, who in turn can signal the soldiers to surround us. I will appear surprised and indignant. He will be captured, and the reward will be ours."

"May! You are a wonder," Woods declared enthusiastically. "I'll go tomorrow morning and give your report and proposed plan to the captain and he will detail a squad of Negro soldiers to follow your instructions. A white officer ought to lead that bunch of Negroes in order to make sure of no mistakes, but the cowards are afraid of that boy. Not one of them has ever been induced to go deep into the swamp on hunt of him. Now, we had better retire, it is after midnight."

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

The second day after Buck met May Castle, he found himself waiting impatiently for the afternoon to come. Absence from the entrancing girl had increased his desire to be with her again. He also felt an urge to appear as attractive as possible when they met again, if indeed she cared enough for him to come again. He scraped the mud off his boots and tightened his hat-band, which lately had become slack and allowed the brim to droop. He sewed a button on his shirt when he found one was missing.

Using a gourd of clear water as a mirror, he discovered a thin downy coat of fuzz on his chin and a quarter of an inch growth on his upper lip. He had no razor, so there was nothing he could do about that.

At about four o'clock in the afternoon, he climbed his lookout tree and scanned the open places in the nearby swamp. His heart beat faster when he saw May ride slowly into one of the openings about a half a mile away. After all, she might be on the square and really cared for him. He was not sure that it was right for him to meet her again. His conscience rose up against it. It seemed to him that he could hear his mother's voice faintly calling to him to beware. The innocent eyes of Kate and Maggie seemed to rest accusingly on him. He was almost persuaded to remain where he was and leave pretty May Castle entirely out of his life and thoughts.

Again, May rode into an opening a little nearer. Even at that distance, he could see the graceful lines of her perfect figure. Thoughts of their former meeting came crowding back to his mind. Her beauty, her charming eyes, her bewitching smile, yes, and her snow-white knee. Well, he must see her once more, then he would decide on what he should do after that.



He descended from the tree, placed a supply of ammunition in his pockets, strapped on his pistols and hastened to meet the fair lady. Taking a circuitous route in order to see that May was alone before he approached her, he was soon within a hundred yards of the place he had seen her. He halted and listened for a minute. All was quiet, save for the chattering of several squirrels further down the swamp.

He recognised this as a warning of the fact that something out of the usual had alarmed them. After looking and listening for another moment, he decided that it was probably an owl or hawk that had caused the alarm. He moved on slowly and cautiously. Soon, he saw May, riding slowly toward the North, looking anxiously in every direction. "Yes," he said to himself, "she is looking for me and looks more beautiful than she did when I saw her before." He figured that if she kept the course she was going, she would miss the place where he was standing by fifty yards. After satisfying himself that she was alone, he walked out into the open and catching her eye, he beckoned to her. She smiled, raised her hand above her head, and waved three times in answer to his salute. Buck, ever watchful for signs of danger, wondered why she had waved three times.

May, with a smile like the rising sun, cantered up, dropped the reins, and extended her arms in invitation to Buck to help her dismount. When he advanced to the side of the horse, she fell into his embrace, placed both arms around his neck, and cried, "Oh, Achilles, I am overjoyed to meet you again. It was so good of you to find me. I have thought of you every hour since we parted. Let's gather a lot of this soft gray moss, make a deep downy cushion, and sit down and talk and talk and talk. There is much I want to tell you and so much that I want to hear from your lips. It is gloriously good to be alone with you again. Just you and I and the silent wild woods."

As these romantic sentences flowed from her smiling lips, she snuggled closer to Buck. Her voluptuous breath came warm against his cheek as she kissed his lips. Dreamily,

speechless and resistless, he felt himself yielding to the hypnotic spell.

Suddenly, a flock of jay-birds nearby sounded a sharp warning. Buck knew the alarm signals of these feathered rangers of the forest. Quickly disengaging himself from the girl's arms, he stepped on top of a high log, listened, and looked. A deer came bounding from the thicket in the vicinity of the jay-birds. Beyond the low brush, Buck saw brass buttons sparkling in the sunlight. Negro soldiers were approaching fast from three directions. With fire in his eyes, he shot a look at May Castle and uttered one word: "Traitor!"

Dashing through the open sector of the circle which was fast being formed about him by the soldiers, he ran swiftly into the swamp. A hail of bullets whined about him. One clipped the crown of his hat. Another grazed the bone of his left leg below the knee. Still another flattened against the barrel of one of his pistols.

There was a long narrow opening, caused by the drying up of a shallow lake between Buck and the denser part of the swamp which Buck was trying to reach. Two hundred yards down swamp and to his right, the glade merged into a larger lake, upon which were logs and much driftwood. He figured that his best chance of escape was to lose himself in the jungle beyond, if he could get there.

Before reaching the lake, however, he was pressed so close by the soldiers that he was forced to turn about and fight. Dropping down behind a large log, he began firing on the approaching soldiers as fast as he could take sight and pull triggers. He sent twelve bullets into the front ranks of the enemy. He saw three fall and others stop and take shelter behind trees.

While the soldiers were recovering from their surprise and shock, Buck ran on all fours until he reached thicker brush, then rose and ran to the drift. So rough was the route, he made slow progress on the drift. When about half way across, he heard the soldiers thrashing their way through the thicket that he had just emerged from. He realized that he

would be an easy target if they discovered him in the open on the drift. Two hundred yards ahead was the jungle, where no man would be able to trail him. It seemed so close, and yet so far.

Still struggling forward in the difficult drift, he caught sight of a large hollow log with one end buried in the mud and water and the other projecting about four feet above the surface of the water. Instantly, he jumped into this natural hiding place. A moment later, he heard the soldiers rushing out of the thicket on his trail. They came on over the muddy ground, gesturing and pointing to his fresh tracks. When they lost his trail at the edge of the water, they stopped and held a brief council.

Buck felt reasonably safe for the time being. There was only one chance in a thousand that the Negroes would look into the hollow log for him and if they did, he could shoot every one that dared to peep in and stand off the rest until dark. Then he could climb out and make his get-away. The soldiers were now walking about on the drift, cursing their luck. After a thorough examination of the banks of both sides of the lake and finding no trace of the quarry, they apparently came to the conclusion that Buck had doubled back into the thicket, instead of crossing the lake. They threw out a wing to the left and one to the right, and began combing the woods in the direction from which they had come.

After scouting until near dark, they gave up the chase. They gathered up two dead and five wounded comrades and returned to their headquarters in the hills.

When Buck peeped from the hollow log and found the coast clear, he climbed out and hurried across the drift and into the jungle beyond. For the first time, he began to feel pain in his wounded leg. After a short rest, he hobbled on through the vine-thatched cane-brakes to his den. After another short rest, he washed the clotted blood from the wound, plastered it with fresh turpentine which he secured from a bruised pine tree, and bandaged it.

His hatred for the military officers and Negro soldiers was now more intense than it had ever been. Hitherto, he had

felt a degree of pity for the Negro soldiers on account of their ignorance. Many times, he had passed up chances to kill them, but now he resolved to kill every Negro soldier he discovered hunting for him. He was just as determined to shoot the military leaders when opportunity offered.

His belief that all women were good had changed also. He still believed that good women were the glory and salt of the earth, but not until this day had he learned that wicked ones were the destroyers of men. Despite the treachery of May Castle, he still retained unshaken faith in Kate Graham and Maggie Parker. He had heard from Kate several times recently, but he had not seen or heard from Maggie in over a month. For a while he had been afraid that she would visit him too often, but she had not and he was longing to see her again.

Her child-like frankness, purity of mind, and unaffected beauty appealed to him. Her wise judgment and quick decisions in emergencies somehow added to his feeling of security when she visited him in his wilderness retreat. The effect of her presence was like cool water to a fevered thirst. He realized, however, that it was best for her not to visit him too frequently, because he loved Kate and he dreaded the time when Maggie should find it out.

While thinking of these things, he heard a low whistle in imitation of a quail call, a short distance away. He recognised the signal at once. It was Maggie. He answered the call and hobbled in the direction whence it came. He found Maggie sitting on a log, waiting for him. Her face, usually unreadable, was showing anxiety. She grew slightly pale as she saw the limp in his walk and his bandaged leg. She did not reject his extended hand as she usually did. She gripped it lightly, however; and when Buck assured her that his wound was not severe and promised to tell her all about it later, she proceeded to tell him what was on her mind.

"I have seen a girl riding on the edge of the blue jungles several times in the last ten days," Maggie ventured, as her eyes studied Buck's features. "A few days ago, while cow-hunting in the foot-hills near where Cat Creek connects with

the swamp, I saw you help her on her horse. A few minutes later, I saw her wave a goodby to you and ride back into the hills. It was almost dark when this took place. Was she the one you found lost in the woods and sent home? Do you meet her often? Have you fallen in love with her? Are you not afraid that your meeting her will lead to your capture? Who did all that shooting on the other side of Flat Lake this afternoon? Who shot you? Have any of your enemies discovered your den?"

"Give me a little time, Maggie," replied Buck, "and I will answer all of your questions. The girl you saw me help on her horse was not the one I found lost in the woods. That one proved to be a traitress. She proved to be a lure for my enemies; though of course I was ignorant of it at the time. I never saw her before the day on which you saw us. She claimed to be a writer of stories for magazines, and studying the science of trees and bugs or something. We met by chance, at least I thought so at the time. She wanted me to tell her all about the forests and everything in them and seemed to be deeply interested in these subjects.

"I had a slight suspicion of her at the time, but she was so nice and friendly to me that I could not believe her to be bad. I met her the second time this afternoon and she led me into a trap. A squad of Negro soldiers were in hiding near the place we met. No doubt, by previous arrangement, they had been following her at a distance all the afternoon, watching for her signal. They had me nearly surrounded before I saw them, and bounded away through the open sector.

"A running fight followed which continued until I gave them the dodge at Flat Lake. I killed two or more of them and crippled several more, while their bullets whined like hornets about me. One bullet got me in the leg. The wound is not serious. With care, it will be well and forgotten in two or three weeks. I am glad to see you, Maggie; I have thought of you every day since I saw you last."

The expression of worry had by this time faded from the girl's face, and she smiled as she said, "I am glad you whipped that bunch of kinky-heads and came out alive. They cannot

get the young scout. He is too cunning for any of them. I hope that the wicked woman that betrayed you has gone to hell. If she has not, I will send her there if I ever meet her. I know that sounds ugly, Buck, but it is the way I feel and I might as well tell the truth.

"Perhaps I should not have come in here today, but I had grown uneasy about you, and regardless of the threatening weather, I yielded to the impulse and came. Now, Buck, I must be going; it is growing dark, and the storm that has been gathering all afternoon in the South-west, is approaching fast. I must hurry out of the swamp before it reaches here, or it will be pitch dark and I'll be unable to find my way."

"It is already too late, Maggie," Buck said as he gently laid a detaining hand on her arm. "It is not so late, but the dense clouds are shutting out the light. It would be dark before you could reach your horse that you left by the big lake. I can't allow you to take such a risk. The storm is going to be a terrific one. You must remain here until morning. I can see that your strength is almost spent." Seeing questions in the girl's eyes, Buck hastened to say: "You can take my bed in the hollow tree. I'll stretch a large deer hide over those two small logs that are lying near the tree and find secure shelter under it for myself." As Maggie started to protest, a sudden gust of wind swayed the tree-tops low and rain began falling. Reluctantly, Maggie agreed that Buck was right.

After removing her boots and jacket, Maggie crawled into the hollow tree and onto the soft mossy bed. Her slim body, tired by strenuous exertions of the long day, soon found repose and she fell into a sound sleep. Buck hurriedly stretched the buck-hide over the poles, which were about two feet above the ground, made a thick mat of dry leaves under it and lay down. The storm now broke in fury. Lightning flashed constantly and wind roared in the mighty tree-tops. Bursts of thunder shook the earth and rain poured down in sheets. At about eleven o'clock, the storm spent its force and passed on. Awake until now, Buck was lulled to sleep by the patter of slow rain on the deer-hide above him.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

Dawn came the next morning clear and cool. The woods were ringing with songs of hundreds of wild birds. Buck's wounded leg was sore and somewhat stiff, but he got up and limped about in a lively fashion preparing breakfast for his guest of honor and himself. Maggie had not yet awakened. He had broiled venison, Johnny-cakes, wild honey, and coffee ready when Maggie came out, refreshed and fully recovered from her exhaustion of the day before. They sat down by the fire on a mat of moss and ate heartily. Both drank coffee from the same tin cup, the only one in camp. When it came Buck's time to drink, he turned the cup slowly around and inspected its brim.

"What are you trying to find on the cup?" inquired Maggie. "I was trying to locate the place where you placed your lips when you drank," Buck replied. "I want to put my lips at exactly the same place. It will be the nearest I can get to a kiss from you." Maggie blushed and both smiled. "Did a boy ever kiss you?" inquired Buck.

"No," Maggie replied. "Hal Douglas tried it one day when I was at the wash-tub with my sleeves rolled to my shoulders. He pinched my arm and started to kiss me. I slipped the wash-board between his face and mine and he kissed it a loud smack before he could stop."

"Did he try it again?" Buck asked.

"No, I laughed at him and he got sorter mad and went home."

"Then you would have me understand that you would not like to be kissed by a boy, even if he really cared for you?"

Maggie studied this a moment, and replied, "I believe I would, Buck, if both of us cared a heap for each other, and—besides, I would like him to beg for it."

"I am a beggar right now," laughed Buck, as he moved nearer.

"Shut up and stay where you are, or I will run off and leave you," threatened Maggie. Buck remained where he was.

With a tantalizing look, Maggie asked, "Did you ever kiss a girl, Buck?"

"Yes, Maggie, one girl, one time. I can taste it yet." Both laughed. "Who was she, Buck?"

"I will never tell that," answered the boy. "I believe that a boy who would not keep such things to himself, is not worthy of a girl's trust."

"I believe you are right about that, Buck,—and—yet, if such things are nice and honest, why are people ashamed for it to be known? Birds coo, fondle, and love, regardless of the world about them, and enjoy life more than people do. They have few social troubles and never suffer disgrace."

"That is a question hard to answer, Maggie. I do not understand it very well, but I think it is because, away back in the minds of people, there is a consciousness of the fact that under impulse and the warmth of passion, they might do wrong and they have to guard against these things or probably suffer disgrace. I think God gave people knowledge and judgment to guide them against wrong. Birds and animals have only a limited instinct to guide them and it serves them well."

"I believe all of that is true, Buck, and if so, we must agree that we are inferior to the birds and animals. Of the two, I like birds the best, because their love is true and enduring. I have watched them close and know them well. The male bird helps to build the home and feeds his mate while she is hatching the eggs, and helps feed the little family until they are able to take care of themselves. He fights their enemies away from the home, and when summer is over, he leads them in their flight to winter quarters."

"That is a splendid defense of the birds, Maggie. If ever I should need some one to defend me in court, I would like to have you make it. Now, what about the animals? Some



few of them are all right, but the rest of them are not. Most of the males pose grandly and strut lovingly about the female during a brief mating period, then go on their way looking for new flames, leaving their former mates to feed and defend the little ones that come. They are lazy and extremely selfish. Mother told me that she once knew a man that was like that and I have hoped ever since that he was the only one in the world."

By this time, the sun had risen above the horizon and bright rays peeping through between the tree foliage reminded them of the swift flight of time. Maggie began hurried preparation to depart. Smilingly she said, "There are no dishes to wash or floors to sweep, so you don't need me any longer."

"Yes, indeed, I do," Buck responded. "I need you as long as you can stay, but I will not insist, because your mother may be uneasy about you."

It appears to the writer, as doubtless it does to the reader, that it is strange how these two youths could be so care-free and happy, while surrounded with so many difficulties and dangers. Like the wild things of the forest, they thought only of today, letting the morrow bring what it would. Together, they walked half a mile to the place where Maggie had left her horse tied. They watered him and took some corn from the saddle-pockets and fed him. While he was eating, Maggie said, "To me, this has been the happiest time we have ever spent together. While I am sorry you were shot, I am glad of your experience with that woman, because it has taught you a valuable lesson and it will make you more thoroughly appreciate your honest friends."

When the horse had finished the corn, Maggie mounted, and for a moment silently surveyed the immediate surroundings. Presently, she said, "Come close up to me and cross your hands behind your back?"

"What are you going to do to me, Maggie?" queried Buck.

"Never mind about that," she commanded; "do as I tell you."

Buck complied. "Now lean your head back and close your eyes." When he complied with this order, Maggie kissed him

full on the lips and then rode swiftly away, smiling back over her shoulder at him. Buck gazed at her until she was lost to view on the meandering trail, then hobbled back to his den.

Upon leaving home the day before, Maggie had told her mother that she would probably spend the night with Louisa Hallmark, a girl friend of hers who lived on the other side of Big Creek. Thus, Mrs. Parker had been prepared for her daughter's absence. She felt much easier, however, when at about nine o'clock in the morning, she heard the familiar yoddlle that heralded the return of her daughter.

On the morning after the battle of Flat Lake, Woods found an unstamped letter on his desk. He opened it and read:

Ben Woods.

I am leaving you forever. I am going home to repent of my folly and crimes. Do not attempt to follow or write to me. You have ruined my life. I shall hate you always. May a just God punish you as you deserve, and he will.

MAY CASTLE.

May had hurriedly left the swamp when the Negro soldiers disappeared in pursuit of Buck. She had stopped only a few minutes at the Rogers place to pack her clothes and say that she had news that compelled her to return to the East at once. Then she had gone to the station, caught the night stage, and left the country.

## CHAPTER XXX.

No longer repressed by the watchful and jealous eyes of May Castle, Woods once more became the bright light in the little social affairs of the community. He gave most of his time to these friendly gatherings, except when he was absent on one of his mysterious missions. He continued, however, to be reluctant to meet strangers and newcomers to that section, at least until he found out who they were and their business.

An old-fashioned candy pulling was given at the molasses mill one night and many of the young people were present. Kate, though plainly dressed, appeared more beautiful than ever before. Her girlish, willowy form was developing into the gently rounded form of young womanhood. Her large blue eyes, with their long brown lashes, had grown more expressive and tender. Her cheeks reflected the glow of perfect health. Her pose was stately, yet there was no haughtiness in her bearing. She was the fairest of the girls present and, at the same time, she appeared altogether unconscious of her striking beauty.

Her unassuming manner and modesty appealed to Woods. He had heard it hinted on various occasions that Kate and Buck were sweethearts, and made up his mind then and there to win her away from the young Clansman. He flattered himself that this would be easy to do, but what the boy might do about it was a matter to be considered. He had seen and heard so much about Buck and his prowess since the day they first met at the little church that he had long since decided to steer clear of any difficulty with him, but he would have his revenge in a safer way.

He figured that he had every advantage. He was a better talker, was more handsome, and had more time to woo the girl. He knew, too, that Kate's sister Anna favored his suit. He improved every opportunity to make light of Buck. En-

gaging in the conversation of a little group which included Kate that evening, he intimated that Buck was ignorant, coarse, and common. Some of the girls present, who admired Woods, sided with him, but Kate mildly defended him.

Woods knew that if he won Kate, he would have to do it gently and diplomatically. Before the entertainment was over, he came to the conclusion that he was making some headway, but was going to have a more difficult task than he had first thought, to win this unusual girl. In a mild way, she held firmly to her opinions on all subjects presented.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

Unforeseen problems for the Clan to solve were developing. Their scouts who were most active in suppressing bad Negroes and opposing the military, were becoming too well known to successfully continue their work in asfety. The same trouble was prevailing in other localities of the state, and in other states.

After a thorough consideration of the matter by the chief council of the order, assembled in conclave at Jackson, Mississippi, it was decided to transfer their best range scouts from places where they were too well known to new localities. Many of them exchanged places.

Some days after this order had been passed and sent out to the subordinate lodges, a strange young man reported to the Mustang Lodge. He introduced himself as Malcom Moore and submitted his credentials from a Clan lodge near Shreveport, Louisiana. He had been sent to take Buck's place. After his report to, and recognition by, the local Clan, and after he had been given general instructions, he was sent to Buck, who led him into the range and made him wise to all of the trails, lakes, and streams of the blue jungles and surrounding country.

A few days later a call came from a lodge near Canton, Mississippi, to the local lodge, asking for their best scout. A committee of the Clan sought out Buck in the swamp and laid the matter before him. After reading the cipher message and studying the matter for a short time, he said, "I will go. The enemy has been drawing their lines of vigilance closer and tighter about me ever since I killed those Negro soldiers near Flat Lake. They are so constantly on my trail that I can render but little service to my cause and people. After they find out that I am gone, they will partly forget

me; then, at some unexpected time, I will return and give them a lot of brimstone."

Two days later at about the hour of midnight, the Colonel's best horse was led to Buck's den by King. Buck had already packed his bed roll and other necessary camp equipment. He strapped these to his saddle. He wrote loving farewell notes to his people, to Kate, and Maggie. To King, who was now crying, he said: "Cheer up, old partner! I will return, and when peaceful times come, and they will, you and I will have a long good time, hunting and fishing like we used to." After a hearty handshake with King, Buck rode toward the east, and King toward home.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

Three weeks later, Buck arrived in Canton, Mississippi, and soon sought out members of the local Clan who called a meeting for eleven o'clock that night. They convened in the swamp near the river. Buck produced his credentials and was welcomed by the Cyclops who gave Buck the following information and instruction.

"Young man, we feel fortunate in securing a scout with the reputation you bear. Under the conditions prevailing here now, we can promise you nothing but hardships, privation, and constant danger. Two of our best men who served at different times in the place you are to fill were murdered by Negro soldiers. Three others are in a military prison with little hope of liberty. All were brave and cunning but were not well skilled in woodcraft and were often too reckless. Another good scout served in the place for a short time but became uneasy and left us. Knowing these things, are you willing to take the place and help us?"

"From the way you talk, one would think you were trying to scare me away," replied Buck. "I came here to remain until I get ready to leave or until you are through with me."

"Good boy!" commented the Cyclops. "There is another thing I must tell you. We have arranged with the Clan on the east side of the river, for their best scout to work with us on this side where he is not known, and have agreed to let them have you. They will place one of their local men with you for a few days to show you the country; especially the swamps where you will have to run for shelter when crowded by the enemy."

"That's agreeable to me," Buck replied as a faint smile appeared about his mouth. He said nothing about what had provoked the smile. He felt that it was unnecessary for them to know that he was born on a big plantation, only eight miles

away on the east side of the river; that he knew every hill, lake, stream, thicket, and jungle for miles around that old plantation.

When the meeting broke up, several of the Clansmen invited Buck to spend the rest of the night with them in their homes. "No," he replied. "If conditions here are like they are in East Texas, these woods have eyes. In a short time I will be under suspicion by the military. There must be no known connection between me and any one of you. I will camp in the wagon yard tonight. Tomorrow I will select a camping place in the swamp on the other side of the river."

A young man by the name of Eugene Cursh met Buck at the wagon yard about daylight. After an exchange of signs, grips and passwords they left town by a dim road and forded the river a half mile below the ferry. After riding on dim trails and old timber roads looking the country over, they came to a little rise in an opening and stopped.

From this point, Gene pointed out a large colonial house, flanked in the rear with many Negro cabins. Beyond the cabins lay an extensive plantation. A few large spreading oak and beech trees stood about the big house. After silently looking for a moment, Buck asked Gene who was living in the big house. "It is being used for a sub-military post and prison," replied Gene. "The large east room on the second floor has been remodelled into a prison. The rooms on the first floor are occupied by a few white officers and one white woman. Most of the cabins beyond are occupied by Negro soldiers. They ran a white man off the place and took possession about a year ago."

"And I am going to run them out of it," added Buck.

"Don't bite off more than you can chew," Gene advised. "That is too big a job for twenty men, and one would have no chance at all. We had better travel on now so I can show you the country in Mill Creek swamp."

"No need of that," replied Buck. "Promise me that you will tell no one else, and I will tell you a strange story."

"I promise," said Gene.

"That big plantation and more than a hundred Negroes be-



longed to my father when the war closed. We were practically driven from this country by Northern scalawags and free Negroes. I was born in that big house. Those trees near the house shaded me and my playhouses before I quit walking wide like a forty dollar pony. The first fish I ever caught was out of the branch over there back of the orchard. Later, I hunted rabbits, coons, and bob-cats in every thicket and jungle for miles around here. In my imagination, I can hear my dogs barking in the chase over back of the field now. This place is too sacred to me to allow it to be desecrated by vandals.”

Buck had grown angry. He rose in his stirrups and continued, “By the eternal gods of Dixie, I will drive them out or have their blood to pay for it. You watch my smoke, then take a look at the place from which it arose. There is a small cave under the south bank of Mill Creek about one half mile from the mouth. That cave becomes larger as it extends out under a small hill about 200 feet from the creek. At that point, it connects with an old well; evidently dug by some prehistoric trapper. There used to be evidence of the existence of a log cabin near the old well that had long since rotted down.

“The well was covered over the top with oak logs. The sap part of them had rotted away but the heart was sound and in place. So far as I know, no one except a Negro boy and I knew about the cave and the old well. It was by accident that we discovered it. Our dogs ran a wild cat into the cave one evening. With small pine torches in our hands, we followed through the cave and found where the cat had climbed out through the old well. This place is well hidden by thick switch-cane and dense swamp. There are no trails leading to, or near it. I intend to make my camp near the old well. If I should ever be found and assailed, I will enter the cave through the well and the devil himself can't find me.

“You might as well return to Canton now and report to the Cyclops. I will make my way to the cave and arrange my camp. There is plenty of young succulent switch-cane near the place on which my horse can feed and do well. I will put

lock-chain hobbles on him so that in case he is discovered, he cannot be driven away."

After a short practice on an agreed schedule of signals, Buck rode on into the swamp and Gene returned to Canton. In making his report to the Cyclops, Gene said, "That Texas boy can learn a range in the woods faster than you can read a book. Already, he knows more about the swamps and trails on the other side of the river than the few people who live near them."

Buck reached the cave and found it and the well in about the same condition as it was when he discovered it during the war. Using poles and large sheets of oak bark, he built a small shack. Like Solomon's temple, it was built without the sound of tools. When dark came, Buck crawled into his shack and lay down to rest on his bed of moss.

Whooping of the swamp owls and the mellow song of the whip-poor-wills carried his mind swiftly back to his small boyhood days when he and King were carefree and happy while hunting small game in the swamps that now surrounded him. From this, his mind flew back to his home in Texas. Would his mother in her fast failing health live until he finished his work here and returned to her? Was Kate thinking of him every day as he was thinking of her? or would she yield to the influence of her Sister Annie and encourage Woods? His verdict on this was: "No." Kate would remain true to him. This pleasant thought lingered with him until he fell asleep.

After a frugal breakfast the next morning, Buck strapped on his pistols, shouldered his rifle, and slipped away over the hills to a point within sight of the big house and plantation. He climbed into a spreading dogwood tree, the thick branches of which concealed his body from sight. From this retreat he could see the big house, the Negro cabins, the orchard, and a part of the plantation. No one was moving about the big house. A few Negro soldiers in uniform passed in and out of the cabins occasionally like bees from a lazy hive.

There were no fences about the place. A few tall posts marked the places where gates used to be. The large orchard

was covered with a growth of hog-weeds which blended into the switch-cane at the back side where the fence once stood. On close scrutiny, he saw that the green blinds had been removed from the windows of the east room on the second floor and iron bars put in their place. There were no guards about the place. Perhaps they had stood picket during the night and had been called in at daylight.

An oak tree, draped with vines, stood near the east end of the house. As the morning wore on, more life appeared about the place. Smoke began to curl lazily from several chimneys. Negroes were feeding horses. Believing that he had discovered about all he could for the present, Buck climbed down the tree on the opposite side from the house and returned to his camp. After laying aside his disguise, he saddled his horse and rode a roundabout way to Canton. He left his horse at the wagon yard and walked aimlessly about town.

On hearing loud talking and laughing in a saloon, he staggered in as though half drunk and sat down on a goods box that was sitting some distance from the bar and the group of men gathered about it. He picked up a newspaper from the floor and pretended to be reading it, while, in fact, with his eyes just above the top edge of the paper, he was sizing up the patrons at the bar; they consisted of two white military officers and a half dozen Negro soldiers. They were telling vulgar jokes and laughing and boasting between drinks.

With his eyes closed and his chin resting on his breast, Buck appeared to be in a drunken sleep. He was listening to the following conversation between two soldiers who had seated themselves on a billiard table some ten feet from Buck.

"Whar did you git so much money, Tobe?" a black soldier asked the yellow one. "We ain't had a pay day in a mont'.

"Whar you spose I got it?" answered the yellow Negro.

"Dat is whut I is asten you now," was the answer.

"Well, ifen you must know, I'll tell yer. Me an Mose took it ofen dem three Clux what we put in de prison las saddy. We took it to keep for dem an we is gwine to keep on keepin it."

"Whats yer gwine say when they axes you fur their money?" questioned the other.

"Tha ain't gwine ter have no chance to ax fer it cause they is goin to be took to de big prison at Jackson nex Chuesday. Tha won't be in the sub-prison but three mo days. One uv em never is comin back. Sogers gwine shoot him soon as he is cote-marshaled."

"Whuts tha gwine shoot him fah? whuts he done?" questioned the black soldier. "Aw, you heard about a Klux killin a cullud boy fer gitin in a white gal's bed one night las mont. He is de one cullud sogers is gwine shoot."

"Has he been tried?" questioned the black soldier.

"No," answered the other, "the cote pass sentence on him yistidy and tha is gwine try him when tha gits him to Jackson."

After going to the bar and taking another drink, the two Negroes returned to their seats and resumed their talk.

"Yes; I heard about dat," said the black Negro, "an I is tellin you now dat I don't want none uv the honer uv takin dem white men to Jackson, cause I spicions dat a bunch uv Klux is a watchin dat road evah day to rescue their men an tha is liable to do it. Ifen tha do, dar is gwine ter be some dead sogers on dat road an I ain't gwine be one uv em."

After giggling for a moment at the other's ignorance, Tobe replied, "You is wrong about dat. We already knows dat a big bunch uv Klux is out in de swamp evah day, watchin fah us to go by wid he prisoners." Lowering his voice to a little above a whisper, he continued, "So we has decided to take de prisoners to Jackson nex Sunday night. We will start at ten o'clock in de night an have dem prisoners in prison at Jackson afo daylight Monday mawnin. Dem Klux knows dat we nevah have traveled about at night since tha commenced to ambush us a year ago. Dat is how we is got em fooled dis time. We is--" Further talk was cut short by an order from one of the white officers for each soldier to return immediately to his quarters at the post across the river.

Buck roused up as though just awakened by the loud voice of the officer. He shambled to his feet and staggered out

onto the street. An hour later, he met the Cyclops at the wagon yard. After making his report, he said, "I want three of your best men to work with me next Sunday night. Have them meet me at the mouth of Mill Creek, between sundown and dark. I would like Gene Cursh to be one of them. I am going to release those three prisoners. I do not know yet just how, but I will do it."

"Your request and anything else you want is granted," replied the Cyclops. "All I have to say is, be cunning and prudent. There are no better men than two of the men in that prison. The other one may be all right but I am not sure of it."

Buck went to a blacksmith who was a Clansman and borrowed two files, wrapped them in an old gunny sack and put them in his saddle pocket. He had an old trapper, who was also a Clansman, go to a store and buy ten pounds of gunpowder which he placed in the other saddle pocket. After sundown, he rode back to his camp and went to bed early.

He rose at about three o'clock the next morning. After a hastily prepared breakfast, he pocketed a ball of small fishing line, buckled on his guns, and started walking rapidly toward the east. An hour and half later, he reached a point near the big house where the military was quartered and took a position about 150 yards from the house. He looked and listened, but failed to discover any sign of life about the place. As day began to break, a door to the front room opened, revealing a dim light within. A man stepped out cautiously and slowly disappeared around the south side of the house. Buck left his tree and with catlike steps moved to another tree that was within fifty yards of the house.

The man who had gone behind the house reappeared on the west side with three other forms following him. They stopped near the front and made a low call. Another form rose up out of a bunch of weeds and went to them. When he had joined the others, one of them who seemed to be in command said, "Every one of you have been asleep while on picket duty. I can't blame you much for there is really no necessity for picketing this place in the latter part of the night, even if it

is orders from headquarters. We have scared the Clansmen away from this section anyway. However, we will pretend that we stand picket each night in order to draw full pay. From now on we will stand picket in the fore part of the night only. Go to your quarters and to bed."

The speaker passed in at the open door and closed it behind him. The other forms disappeared in the direction of the cabins.

The light in the room flickered out and silence prevailed.

Buck had written a note in Clan cipher the evening before to use in case he found the chance. It contained the following:

To you three prisoners:

We, your friends and fraternal brothers, have found out that you are to be transferred to the prison at Jackson next Sunday night. They are to start at about ten o'clock at night. We intend to waylay the road at the north end of the bridge on Mill Creek and make a surprise attack on your military escort. In other words we are going to take you away from them. I will return here at about four o'clock tomorrow morning, at which time I will expect you to drop a note from your window giving me what information you have or may gather between now and then.

Loyally your friend, B. T.

Buck took a small stone from his pocket, folded the note around it, and wrapped it with one end of the fish cord, giving two half hitches with the two last wraps. He picked up a small pebble and tossed it against the iron grated window of the upstairs prison room. A moment after the pebble struck the window, the lower sash rose noiselessly and a face appeared against the bars. Buck waved the Clan salute, whispered, "Catch this!" and tossed the little ball. It missed the opening between the bars and fell to the ground. His second aim was better; an extended hand caught the ball and drew it in. Buck immediately retreated behind a large tree and walked away, keeping the tree between him and the house

until he reached the thick timber. From there he walked leisurely to his camp.

After discarding his disguise and taking a short sleep, Buck rode over to Canton. At the wagon yard, he met a man by the name of Hale who had driven a large bunch of unbroken Spanish horses from Navarrow County, Texas, to Canton, and placed them on the market. Both being from Texas, Hale and Buck became friends at once. In telling Buck some of his troubles while on the road, Hale mentioned having lost his best wild horse rider, who had died at Shreveport with pneumonia. This had left him short of riders and there were none among these Eastern men.

"I can ride anything and I like it," volunteered Buck. "For two reasons I would be glad to help you out when I can. The first reason is I want to help you because you are a Texan and a Clansman. The other reason is, I would like to play a kind of double life for a short time. I am serving this section as Clan scout and it is a hard place to fill, because the Clans here have been whipped and cowed by the overwhelming numbers of military officers and Negro soldiers. If I break horses for you occasionally and become known as your man, it would enable me to prove an alibi in case I should be captured and charged with being a Clan scout and Negro killer. I can work for you for a while this evening."

"It will help me a lot," replied Hale.

Buck and one of Hale's horse wranglers roped and rode bucking horses in the afternoon, a performance which proved to be of great interest and wonder to the natives who had never seen bucking Spanish horses in action before.

Late in the afternoon, Buck returned to his camp. Four o'clock the next morning found him near the old Tyler place again. He looked and listened long enough to satisfy himself that there were no guards on duty and that no one was stirring. He crept to a place under the window where he had tossed the note the night before. Feeling about on the ground, he found a small package, wrapped with his fish line. He placed it in his pocket and disappeared in the darkness. He reached his camp and sat down to wait for daylight so he

could examine the package. It was against his rule to make a light in his camp.

When daylight came, he unrolled the package and read:

Your note was a happy surprise. It has brought hope and cheer to us. Since our best fighting scouts were captured and imprisoned, the military officers have become careless and more bold. The Negro soldiers have become more impudent and brutal. I can tell from the way they talk and act that they believe the power of our Clan is broken or at least subdued. They talk and boast in our hearing. We heard a white officer talking to the Negro guards yesterday. He said, "If we don't start some excitement soon, our superiors will decide that so many of us are not needed here and we will lose our jobs. We are going to pull off a sham battle next Sunday night while en route to Jackson with our prisoners. When we reach Jackson, we will report a desperate battle with about fifty Ku Klux who tried to take the prisoners from us. We will halt just this side of the Mill creek bridge, shoot bullets into the bridge timbers and gallop about so as to leave many horse tracks. This will leave ample evidence of a battle. This will put you wise to their plans. They are going to put handcuffs on us and take us in an old canvas-top hack. Our escorts will be on horses. There will be thirty of them; fourteen Negroes and one white man are to ride in front of the hack and the same number behind it. There was one other matter they talked of that we know nothing about. Maybe you do. They said that it was being whispered about that a bad man from Texas was to join the Clan scouts here soon. He said, however, that no such man had been discovered in the country and that he believed it was all a bluff. If you succeed in freeing us next Sunday night, you will have the lasting gratitude of three men, three good women and a dozen innocent sweet children. If you



fail, it will mean an indefinite term in prison for two of us and death by a firing squad of Negro soldiers for the other.

Truly, three loyal brothers.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

Buck went to Canton the next morning and helped Hale with his horses during the morning. Late in the afternoon, he secured a meeting with the Cyclops in the wagon yard. He did not tell of all that he had learned from the prisoners or anything definite about his plans. He only said that he was going to raise some hell among the military and for the Cyclops to see to it that the three men that he had promised to him were on time at the place of meeting.

"Tell them to bring a spade with them. Much depends on our success or failure in what I am going to undertake."

"Trust me, son," replied the Cyclops. "I will see to it that the men meet you on time and I heartily wish you good luck and success." They shook hands and left the wagon yard by different routes.

The three scouts: Gene Cursh, Fort Saunders, and Tom Hollin, met Buck on time and he conducted them to his shack. In a brief but clear manner, he told them of his plans to ambush the soldiers who would be on the road with the prisoners that night. He had each one repeat the plans over to him several times so they would remember every detail. As dusk began to gather, the four scouts, fully armed and equipped, rode to a point 200 yards below the bridge on Mill Creek. They tied their horses in a thicket and proceeded cautiously to the bridge.

Finding the coast clear, Saunders was stationed near the road a short distance from the bridge. Hollin took a position by the road about 100 yards north of the bridge. They were to signal a warning to Buck in case they heard any one approaching.

Buck and Gene went to work with the spade and made a small excavation under the butment of the bridge. They shovelled all loose dirt from the excavation into the creek.

They placed the ten pounds of powder in the hole and covered it with two feet of dirt, packing it in hard. They had already placed one end of a quick-flash fuse in the powder. The free end of the fuse was carried along the shelving bank of the creek to a point thirty feet below the bridge. This work done, Buck signalled the pickets and they came together.

Buck stationed the three scouts in the edge of a patch of switch-cane by the side of the road about fifty yards north of the bridge. "Now," said he, "I will remain here with you until we hear that bunch of bigots coming, then I will take a position by the end of the fuse. When the lead riders stop near the bridge where they have planned to pull the sham battle, I will touch off the blast, at the sound of which you will rise up and give them a volley of lead. While you are re-loading your guns, I will crack down on them from my side of the road and give the Indian battle yell. After that, each of us will act in accordance with his own best judgment."

Except for the croaking of water frogs, the woods were ominously silent. Hundreds of little fireflies flashed their sparks brightly as though trying to rival the twinkling stars above them. The boys were once more feeling the thrill that comes to every warrior when a battle is imminent. A few minutes after eleven o'clock, they heard the sound of horse's feet and the low rattle of a vehicle a short distance up the road. There was no mistaking these sounds. The enemy was approaching. In a whisper, Buck said, "Do not shoot toward the hack. In case we should become separated in the shuffle, remember that we are to meet where we left our horses." He then took his position by the end of the fuse.

When the leaders of the cavalcade reached a point within ten feet of the bridge, Buck touched off the blast. The explosion was terrific. Bridge timbers were blown half as high as the tall trees.

Immediately following this, a roar of guns came from the east side of the road and from the banks of the creek. Several horses fell under their riders. The rest ran wildly in every direction except toward the wrecked bridge. The horses that were drawing the hack ran into a tree top, became entangled,

and stuck there. Seeing no live enemy left on the field, the scouts liberated the horses from the hack and helped the three prisoners to the ground. The prisoners mounted the hack horses, two on one and one on the other. Without an effort to conceal their tracks, the scouts and prisoners traveled in the swamp toward the east for a mile, turned north and traveled where pine straw was so thick and deep on the ground that no tracks were made. After covering two miles of this, they turned south. When they reached a point near the military post, they turned the hack horses loose and headed them toward the horse lot. From this point, they led the horses and all walked west across a rocky ridge that showed no tracks, thence to Buck's shack, reaching there a little before daylight. By using the files, time about, they soon had the prisoners free of the handcuffs.

Cursh, Saunders, and Hollin left in the afternoon for their former posts. The three rescued Clansmen remained in hiding with Buck for three days, then slipped away at night and went to Copire County where they were not known. A brief account of the Mill Creek battle came out in a Jackson paper as follows:

#### DESPERATE BATTLE FOUGHT WITH KU KLUX

While a brave squad of soldiers under the command of Colonel Denson were carrying three murderers from the sub-military post at the old Tyler plantation to Jackson for trial, they were ambushed and assailed by more than a hundred Clansmen. Our soldiers fought them bravely. Being outnumbered five to one, they were finally forced to retreat and give up the prisoners. Three of our soldiers were killed and seven of them wounded. It is believed that more than a dozen of the Clansmen were killed and many others wounded. The battle occurred at about eleven o'clock last Sunday night. A company of soldiers went to the scene of the battle on Monday morning. They followed the trail of the Clansmen several miles to-

ward the north and lost the trail in a pine forest. It is believed that the Clansmen will soon be found and captured.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

Some changes in conditions were taking place in Buck's old home country in Texas. The military offered a police commission and \$100 per month to a limited number of ex-rebels to join them and help enforce the military laws. Several weak-kneed men who held money above principle accepted the offer. While they did as little as they could against the Clan, they could not avoid giving information and a degree of protection to the Negro soldiers when they were marauding in the country sections.

Under these conditions, the Negroes grew more bold and overbearing. The scout that had taken Buck's place killed a Negro soldier whom he caught trying to force a white widow to let him spend the night in her house. The military trailed him so constantly after this that he was forced to leave the country.

In their distress, the people of the Wild-cat Ranch community appealed to the Clan to have Buck return. They were not sure that he could do anything to improve matters, but they had felt safer when he was there, and for that reason they wanted him. Bill Thompson agreed to place their request before the Clan. Under the pretense of hunting cattle, Colonel Tyler and Bill Thompson rode into the swamp one evening and stopped near Flat Lake. Other Clansmen who had been notified came one at a time, and joined them. The purpose of the meeting was to consider recalling Buck. They placed a watchman near, on each end of the only trail that led to the spot.

Before the picket on the north end of the trail had seated himself comfortably, he heard the sound of horse's feet coming toward him. He sprang to his feet and gripped his gun. A moment later, a horse and rider appeared within forty feet of him. As he levelled his gun, he discovered that the rider

was Maggie Parker. Maggie had also drawn her pistol. The picket stepped behind a tree and said, "Don't shoot, Maggie; it is I, Hal Douglas." Maggie reholstered her gun and demanded, "What are you doing in the jungle at this late hour?"

"I will ask you the same question," replied Hal. "What brought you here?"

With a mischievous smile, Maggie replied, "My horse brought me."

"Don't get smart with me this time, Maggie, I am on picket duty. Now tell me why you are here."

"All right, Hal, I will tell you. I heard it whispered yesterday that the recall of Buck was being considered. It was reasonable to suppose that Colonel Tyler would be consulted on the matter. I want to speak to him before the question is disposed of. En route to his house this evening, I saw him and Bill Thompson riding toward the swamp. As a matter of policy, I did not follow at once, but soon after they were out of sight, I took up their trail and followed it to this point. Move out of the trail and let me pass, I must find them."

"You can go no farther, Maggie. The Clan is in session under those large trees over there by the lake and my orders are to let no one except a Clansman pass that way."

"Go tell Colonel Tyler to come here. If you refuse to do this, I will ride into their presence."

Seeing no way out of it, Hal agreed. Cautioning Maggie to remain where she was, Hal walked to the assemblage and reported. Nute Blanton suggested that the girl be invited to come before them so that all could hear what she had to say; and he added, "No one is more loyal to our cause than Maggie Parker." This was agreed to and Hal was instructed to conduct her to them.

When she arrived and was asked to dismount, she declined, saying that three minutes was long enough for her talk, after which she would hurry on home. Without further preface, she said,

"Recall Buck. He is the only one that can relieve us here. Not so much on account of what he might be able to do, but because of the fact that all of our enemies, both white and

black, are mortally afraid of him. They never dared to ramble about here at night when he was here, and it is in the night they do most of their dirty work now. As soon as they found for sure that he was gone, they became bold and now they ride about in the neighborhood all hours of the night; and this country has been going straight to the devil ever since. If he comes back and stays only long enough for them to know that he is here, they will come into the outlying sections only in the daytime. By that time, military law may be withdrawn and the Negro soldiers with it."

Without waiting for answer or comment, she turned and left as suddenly as she had come. When Hal proposed to see her home, she replied over her shoulder, "No, you are too slow. Something might catch you."

The majority of the Clansmen present had been arguing against recalling Buck, before they heard Maggie talk. After hearing her keen reasoning, they were unanimous for his recall and instructed the Colonel to write for him.

All of the military officers and Negro soldiers that had been quartered at the post on the old Tyler place refused to return there after the tragedy of Mill Creek bridge. A new company was sent there from Jackson. They carried with them a small cannon which chambered a four pound ball. Soldiers took it into the old field near the house and practiced shooting it. They fired it into thick places in the woods where they suspected Clansmen were in hiding. This made it dangerous for Clansmen to venture within a mile or two of the post, for they could never tell when the soldiers would take a practice spell of shelling the forest.

In addition to this, the soldiers had brought a pack of four large bloodhounds to the post, which they loosed at night and let roam about the place. It now appeared that the post was safe against an attack by the Clansmen. After firing the cannon into different parts of the woods a few times during the morning, the soldiers rode out into the country and took good horses, fat hogs, or anything else they fancied, from the settlers, paying for them in bogus script that all knew was worthless.



Buck began to study on a plan to dispose of the two new dangers, the dogs and the cannon. He could not spy on the enemy as long as the bloodbounds were there. The presence of the cannon made it dangerous to scout in the woods. He decided that his first job would be to dispose of the dogs. While in Canton one morning, he bought a bottle of strychnine and four pounds of beef steak. On his return, he called by the home of Will Allen, borrowed his female dog, and led her to his camp. He cut the meat into eight pieces, cut a slit in each and put in a large dose of the poison. He wrapped these in an old towel. After dark, with the packages of meat in one hand and the dog leash in the other, he walked over the hills to within 400 yards of the post. Considering the direction from which the wind was blowing, he circled around to the south side of the post and stopped in a grove of trees. He tied the bitch to a sapling, unrolled the meat, and dropped the pieces about thirty feet apart in a circle around the bitch a little beyond her reach. This done, he walked across the wind to a distance of 200 yards and sat down on a log to await results.

He knew that the hounds at the post would soon catch the scent of the female and that nothing would prevent them from going to hunt her. In a shorter time than he had expected, he heard the hounds growling over the lady dog. This continued at intervals for half an hour, then all grew quiet. Buck knew that each hound had got his dose and had gone in search of water to slake the burning thirst that always follows the swallowing of strychnine. He walked cautiously back to the sapling, untied the bitch, and led her back to his camp. He released her from the leash and saw her make a bee line in the direction of her home. There was no more barking and howling of dogs at the post after that night.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

Through a spy or traitor, the military learned that the Clan would convene in the swamp near the mouth of Mill Creek on Thursday night at about eleven o'clock, and prepared to storm them unawares. Buck had picked that night to spy on the post. While hid near the post soon after dark, he saw more than half of the troopers, all heavily armed, ride away in a westerly direction. When they were out of sight, he crept nearer the house, looked and listened. The place seemed to be deserted. He saw the cannon near the yard. So far as he could tell, there were no pickets near it or anywhere else about the place. He decided that now was the time to spike the cannon, as he had been carrying a round file in his inside pocket for several days, hoping for a chance like this. He crept on. As he was passing the wood pile, he picked up an axe. He reached the cannon, drove the file deep into the touch-hole, and broke it off. He threw the axe down, dodged into the brush, and ran toward the swamp well pleased with his work.

Aroused from dozing by the sound of the axe on the file, four guards bounded to their feet, yelled a loud alarm, and fired at the fleeing form. A dozen soldiers rushed from the house and joined in the pursuit, firing a fusillade as they ran. Buck increased his speed and was widening the distance between him and his pursuers. As he was crossing an old thrown-out field, he heard the rumble of horse's feet directly in front. Raising his head, he saw a band of horsemen coming straight toward him. Looking back, he saw his pursuers emerging from the woods not more than a hundred yards away. He thought rapidly. Could he turn at a right angle and make it to the woods without being seen?

No, the moon was shining bright and the field was too open. Could he fight his way out? No, there were too many of the

enemy. The sight of a large pile of dead brush decided him. Lying flat on the ground, he pried his way under the brush to a place near the middle of the heap. The oncoming soldiers and the trailing guards met near the pile of brush. The guards told about the intruder spiking the cannon, the flight, and their pursuit. One of them said, "I saw him not twenty feet from this spot as we came out of the woods, and I cannot understand how he disappeared without some of us seeing him. You soldiers were within a hundred yards of him when I saw him last."

"We were not expecting to see any one, therefore we were not looking," replied the captain of the horsemen. "We met one of our spies in the swamp who informed us that the Clan had been made wise to the fact that we knew of their meeting place and had changed to some other locality. There was nothing left for us to do but return to the post. When within 300 yards of here, we heard the report of your guns at the post. We were hurrying there when we met you."

Lying still under the pile of brush, Buck heard all they were saying and was wondering what their next move would be. He was also congratulating himself on having destroyed the bloodhounds which would have trailed and located him had they been there.

"Well," said one of the guards, "we might as well go back to the post."

"No," answered the captain. "All of you guards go back to the post and keep your eyes open. The rest of us will build a fire and remain here until daylight, then one half of our number will find and follow the front trail of the spying devil. The other half will back-trail him and find out where he came from."

Buck said to himself, "That means that I will have to lie here in the cold until they leave in the morning. They will find no tracks of mine leaving this place and their restless horses have tramped out all the signs I made when crawling under here." The guards left for the post and the soldiers began to gather wood to make a fire.

"Never mind about that," said the captain. "There is a

lot of poles and large limbs in that pile of brush. Set it afire. It will probably last until daylight." This order fell like a death sentence on Buck's ears. His mental comment was: trapped at last. Not outgeneraled, but luck had gone against him. He must surrender or be burned alive. It would be foolish to fight thirty well-armed men. When he heard the striking of matches, he spoke in a loud voice and said, "Do not set fire to the brush until I crawl out."

With cocked guns, the soldiers stood and watched their prisoner crawl from under the brush and lay down his guns.

"Light the brush heap," ordered the captain, "so we can see what we have caught." After they had handcuffed their prisoner, the captain looked him over and ordered, "Tell us who and what you are. Who sent you here? If you make a clean breast of it, we will take you to Jackson for trial. If you lie to us and we find it out, you will fall before a firing squad tomorrow."

"You might as well save your bullets for your enemies," replied Buck. "A few words will answer your questions. My name is Nelson Roach. My business is breaking horses. Mr. Hale gathered a bunch of his horses in Texas and drove them to Canton over on the other side of the river to sell. I hired out to him. After we reached Canton and found that unbroken horses would not sell, we proceeded to break them. When he paid me a month's wages last week, like a fool I got drunk, remained drunk three days and spent all of my money. When I went back for my job, Hale discharged me.

"Late that evening while I was looking in a barn at the wagon yard for a place to sleep, I met a man who called me into a stall, gave me a drink and asked me if I wanted to make \$50. I told him I did. I figured that it would take about that amount to pay my way back to Texas and I sure was anxious to get back home. He said that he believed I could earn the money in one night. He gave me another drink and a dollar to buy my supper and breakfast. After an agreement to meet there in the wagon yard early the next morning he went away.

"He brought a young fellow with him the next morning who

said he was from Texas and he looked it. The older man said, 'This young man will go with you this evening and show you what I want done. The job is a dangerous one and will require prudence and cunning.' I followed the young man who led me to that bunch of thick-top trees in front of that big house from which your guards chased me this morning. From that place, he pointed out the big house, the barred windows, the cabins and the cannon. He said: 'All you have to do is to slip here tomorrow morning at about four o'clock, spike that cannon, and heel it back to Canton. The man that employed you will meet you at the wagon yard and pay you your money.' I did not like the job, but as no one was to be killed or hurt and me needing the money, I agreed to try the job. Just before leaving Canton last night, the young man gave me the round file and I spiked the cannon. You know the rest."

The Captain asked the prisoner the following question: "Was your father a rebel?"

"No, he died before the war," was the answer.

"Are you a member of the Clan?"

"No, they refused my application because I drank too much whisky."

"Do you know a young Clansman that came here from Texas two or three months ago?"

"No," replied the prisoner, "but I heard of one that they called the fighting fool from Texas. I heard it intimated that he led the charge on the soldiers at the battle of the bridge and killed a pack of bloodhounds at the post. I also heard that he left here for Texas about two weeks ago."

"All right, young man," replied the captain. "Your story sounds straight and reasonable. However, we will hold you in prison at the post for a while and see what our investigations develop."

They carried the prisoner to the post and placed him in an upstairs room behind iron barred windows and doors.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

Buck found himself in his old childhood home once more. Happy bygone days of childhood came crowding into his mind. How different now! Except for one old wooden bottom chair and a soiled army-cot, the floor and walls of the room where he did his first walking and talking, were bare. The morning passed gloomily for the prisoner. When evening came, there were no cheerful sounds of song or the laughter of children.

Buck walked to the barred window and looked at the old Negro quarters where the once happy darkies used to sing and dance at this hour in the evening. No sound came from there and there was nothing moving except that, now and then, a Negro, attired in uniform with brass buttons sparkling, walked proudly in and out of a shutterless door. Dark was now shrouding the scene and Buck turned from the window. In the unlighted room, other scenes came mystically before his unseeing eyes. He was snuggled under cover in his soft feather bed, he was growing sleepy. Now his adorable mother, crooning a song, was tucking the cover about him. Now he hears her say "God bless my boy" and he feels the goodnight kiss on his lips. For the first time in several years, tears came to his eyes. He did not try to check them, but sat down on the cot and let them flow. He was not ashamed of them because they were sacred to the memory of his sweet, and once beautiful mother.

Buck lay down on the soiled cot and began to study the problem of how to escape from the place before the military found out more about him, for by some chance they might find out who he really was. He could not hope for assistance from the outside. The Clan had become too weak and the military too powerful for that. Help from Texas could not reach him in time. He would have to play a lone hand; the

cards were stacked against him, with no joker in the deck. "Well," he mused, "I will watch for chances. I have been in as tight places as this and escaped. Some streak of good luck may come my way."

The captain of the post came in at about ten o'clock the next morning and said to the prisoner, "A lady, who in addition to serving me as secretary, is a newspaper reporter, will call here this afternoon to get your name and description, and to interview you in general. She will be accompanied by a guard who will remain just outside of the door until her business with you is over.

"If you treat this lady disrespectfully as some prisoners who preceded you here have done, I will punish you for it as you deserve. If there are material facts in your career that you have not told to me, tell them to her and save punishment." So saying, the captain walked out and locked the iron door behind him.

"The conceited fool," mused Buck. "I have posed as a simple ignoramus and he has swallowed it, hull and all. If his secretary is as blunt as he, she will accept whatever statements I give her."

With but little light in the room and nothing to read, the hours passed slowly for Buck. He made a firm resolve on one point, which was that if he ever made his escape from the prison, he would return to Texas whatever the cost or risk. He was growing hungry for his home folks, for Kate—yes, and for Maggie.

At about four o'clock in the afternoon, Buck heard the rasping sound of a key in the door lock. A giant black soldier, with a bull-like neck, swung the door open, and placed a small table and a chair in the room. He placed a candlestand, with an unlighted candle in it, on the table. A woman with writing materials in her hand, followed. The Negro retired to a position just outside. He closed but did not lock the door.

When the woman struck a match to light the candle, Buck involuntarily placed his hands before his eyes to shade the light until it ceased to blind him. When he lowered his

hands, the woman stared at him for a moment, then screamed, and fell to the floor. The guard rushed in with gun in hand. Seeing no evidence of imposition, he asked Buck what had caused the woman to swoon.

"I know no more about it than you do," Buck answered. "Lift her up and put her on dat cot," ordered the guard. "I would do it but I have to obey orders an' keep dis gun in my han's."

Buck placed the woman on the cot and suggested to the Negro that he get water and bathe her face. Covering her eyes with her hands, the woman rose to a sitting posture and said, "Oh! those horrid mice. They frighten me to death. One of them tried to climb my leg and I fainted. I will soon be all right. You may go back to your post, Mr. Guard."

The guard guffawed, and returned to his post. Then the woman gazed again at Buck and gasped in a whisper: "Buck Tyler! back from the grave."

"Yes, May Castle, it is I, but I am not a ghost. It is no fault of yours that I am not in my grave."

"Don't! Achilles. Do not make my cross harder to bear," pleaded May. "In my mind, I knew you were dead, but I have all the time hoped that you were not. I left Texas hurriedly and have never heard from there since. I was afraid to make inquiry. I also knew that there was no one in that country who would answer my letter except Ben Woods and I never wanted to see or hear from him again.

"The last time I saw you, bullets from more than twenty guns were clipping the bushes about you as you ran toward the swamp. I knew in my mind that you had been shot to death. Knowing that I had led you into the death trap, I felt I had murdered you and that feeling tormented me from that day until this. That word, 'traitress!' that you threw back at me as you bounded away has rung in my ears ever since. I thank God that you are alive and while I am still a traitor, I am not a murderer."

"And I suppose that you are still a spy for the military?" questioned Buck.

"No," replied May. "Between you and me, I am on the



other side of the fence. I draw a salary from the military and, all unknown to them, I gather and send valuable information to the Clan. I am the daughter of rebel parents and was born and raised in Dixie. I was led astray by Ben Woods. In mind and heart, I have returned to my own. I have to be wise and very prudent. Not a single Clansman knows who gives the tips I send to them. I am glad that the time has come when I can do all that is within my power to make amends for the unpardonable game I played against you in Texas. If it is humanly possible, I am going to secure your escape from this prison if it costs me my liberty."

The stirring of the guard in the hall awoke them to the fact that they had been talking for more than two hours and that night was drawing near.

"I have stayed too long," declared May. "I must go, but I will come back tomorrow. I cannot say just what time. I will explain to the captain that my fright at the mouse, which of course was a fake, made me too nervous to write or question you intelligently, therefore I must visit you again. He is half crazy in love with me and will believe anything I say to him. He intends to go to Canton tomorrow anyway." Softly she added, "Goodby, Buck," and disappeared.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Hope came back to Buck. With the help of May Castle, he felt that his chances to escape from prison were good. He did not for a moment doubt May's sincerity. She had honestly unbosomed herself to him. She had not tried to flirt with him by word or act. Honesty showed in every line of her face. He decided that if she had never met Ben Woods, she would have been a good and useful woman.

After these musings, he read the book that May had left, for a short time, then went to his cot, where he slept more peacefully than he had since he had been caught by the soldiers. May came at about nine o'clock the next morning. Buck saw marks of worry on her face. After closing the door, she said, "I have some unpleasant news. By eavesdropping the officers while they were in council last night, I learned that one of the prisoners that was rescued by Clan scouts from the soldiers was recaptured in the Northern part of the county last week. He was tried and sentenced to be shot.

"In the hope of securing some much desired information about the Clansmen who planned the ambuscade on the road near Mill Creek, the court offered the prisoner his freedom if he would give them all of the facts about it. At first, he claimed that he knew nothing about it, but when he saw the soldiers who were to shoot him marching out of the Jackson Barracks, he weakened and told what he knew and what he had heard.

"Among other things, he told them that the commander of the scouts in the Mill Creek battle was a desperate gunman who had been brought in here from Texas where he had killed lots of Negro soldiers and several white military officers. His description of this scout fits you in every detail, even to the bullet scars and the stub finger on your right hand. He told

them that he heard the scout say that he was going to kill the bloodhounds at the post and spike the cannon. He further stated that if the bad man from Texas had not left the country, he could be found in camp near the mouth of Mill Creek.

"The commanding officer of the military in Jackson and his staff are to come out here day after tomorrow evening for the purpose of looking you over to see if you fit the description given them by the prisoner. The captain of this post and his lieutenants are to go into the swamp tomorrow to look for the gunman's camp. You must escape tonight. I have studied out and planned a way for you to get out of the country if we can manage to get you out of this prison."

"I believe that part is easy," replied Buck. "You manage in some way to get the guards away from the east side of the house at about eleven o'clock tonight and I will get out."

"Oh, if you can only do that, the thing is done," replied May. "Tell me how you will do it, Buck?"

"Well, then, listen," said Buck. "That stationary door you see in the partition wall once opened into a clothes chute that extends to the basement. If you will create some kind of excitement out about the horse lot, the noise of which will drown the noise I make, I will kick that door in and slide down the chute. I noticed when they brought me here that the basement windows were broken out and a lot of corn fodder stacked in the room. When I reach the basement, I can pass out through a window opening."

"Good," whispered May, "I have planned the rest of it. I have a dependable friend who runs a keel-boat on the river, and navigates it between Jackson and Canton. He has it tied up at a point about a mile below the mouth of Mill Creek, loading shingles. He is to pull out for Jackson some time before noon tomorrow.

"I will write a note that you are to hand to him in private. You may give him the Clan sign and grip. He is a Clansman, and will place you safely on the wharf at Jackson. I know that you can do the rest. But we are moving too fast; must begin at this end of the line. Horses are saddled and hitched

on each side of the house soon after dark each night. These are for use in emergencies. In case you get out, you can ride away on one of them. I will write the note to Brant and slip it under your door this evening at about half past ten. Immediately after that, I will slip out through the orchard and start a fire under the floor of one of the empty Negro cabins.

"Then I will creep back to the rear porch and watch the progress of the blaze. When I see that it is getting beyond control, I will yell: 'Fire! Fire!' Every guard will rush to it. You will slide down the chute; out through the window; mount a horse and ride away into the swamp. You will hide in a cane brake until morning, then go to the reel-boat. We have it all dovetailed together," whispered May, as her eyes sparkled with enthusiasm. "When the guard carries your breakfast to you at about nine o'clock, and finds the prison empty, there will be a storm of commotion, all too late. The most daring scout in Dixie will be safely on his way to his home and loved ones in Texas. My debt to him will be partly paid and I will be happy once more.

"I must be going now, before my long stay with you creates suspicion. If our plans work out right, it is not likely that we will ever meet again, but my prayers will follow you."

Buck took May's hand in his and said, "I freely forgive you for the wrong you once did me. At that time, you gave me the kiss of Judas. I will give you the kiss of a brother." He passed his arm around her and kissed her. Then May went out, and the guard closed and locked the door.

The promised note was passed under the door at the hour stated. Buck lit the candle and read:

Dear Brant: The bearer is my friend and is worthy of all you may be able to do for him in escaping from this country to his home in Texas. He has done more for the oppressed people of Dixie than any other one man. He is a loyal K. K. K.

MAY CASTLE.

The fire alarm at eleven o'clock took every guard from his

post. Soldiers poured out of the cabins and rushed to the fire. Unmolested, Buck passed out through the chute, mounted a horse, and galloped away. When within a half mile of his camp, he dismounted, started the horse on his back trail and walked to his camp. He found it as he had left it, and his own horse not far away. After saddling him and tying on his camp roll, he scrawled a note on a piece of wrapping paper and laid it in the door of the shack. The note read:

To E. C.

I escaped from prison last night. Times are getting too hot here for me. I am going up the river into Leek County where I intend to hide until the storm of the military on my trail blows over; then I will ride a long ways west. Give these facts to the Cyclops at Canton.

Loyally yours,  
B. T.

This note was to mislead the soldiers who, he felt sure, would find his camp the next day. He mounted and rode down the river, and reached the keel-boat about sunrise. Instead of introducing himself, he handed May's note to Captain Brant. After reading the note, Brant shook hands with Buck cordially and said, "I can take care of you. We will leave here for Jackson at about nine o'clock. I will explain to my men that I have hired you to work on the wharf at Jackson. There is an empty stall near the rear of the boat. Put your horse in it. The military will never look for you in Jackson. In your present disguise, they would never recognise you, anyway."

Buck went to work on the wharf for Brant the next day. One evening at the close of the day's work, Brant handed to Buck a newspaper, telling him to read the first column on the second page when he reached his boarding house. Buck placed the paper in his pocket and began to wonder if more trouble was threatening him. On reaching his room, he closed the door, opened the paper, and read:

## DESPERATE OUTLAW ESCAPES FROM PRISON

A desperate outlaw with a long criminal record escaped from the military prison on the old Tyler Plantation last Monday night. Up to the time of his escape, it was believed that he was a poor simple farmer boy who, for small pay, had been used by the Clan to do their dirty and dangerous work. It now develops that he is a notorious gunman from Texas. The military of East Texas has a standing reward of \$6000 for his capture and delivery to them. It is known to the officers that he went North to hide in the swamps of an adjoining county. Soldiers are hunting him there, while all of the roads and trails leading from the jungle are being guarded day and night. It is a matter of but a short time until the bandit will be captured.

Buck smiled as he clipped out the article and put it in his pocket.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

Three weeks later, late in the afternoon, Buck dismounted at his old hollow tree camp in the blue jungles. There was no sign that it had been visited by any one. He figured that he would be safe here, at least for a while. No one knew of his return and it would probably be some time before his old enemies found it out. He was hungry to see his people, and could scarcely wait until dark to go to the hills. He stored his camp outfit in the hollow tree, hobbled his horse, and lay down, for he was very tired. Half dreaming of the happy meeting that was soon to be, he rested until darkness cloaked the forest, then remounted, and rode out on the hills.

When near his old home, he tied his horse in a thicket. When he reached a point near the back gate, he imitated the whoop of the swamp owl, a signal well known to his father. The signal was heard in the house and recognised. The Colonel, the Queen, and all of the children came trooping into the yard where they met Buck. "Blessed be the name of the Lord," said his mother as Buck gathered her into his arms. "He has never failed to answer my prayers." The Colonel embraced his boy and said, "My prodigal son has returned, but we cannot supply the fatted calf, for the Negroes stole it." The children climbed all over him in their joy.

After the happy greeting, Buck and the Colonel retired to the barn to hold a private council. Buck related his experience in the East and gave it as his opinion that the Southern people of that section would suffer from Negro domination as long as military law prevailed there. The Colonel said: "We have missed you much. We have had several good men in the range since you went away, but none of them could fill your place. We have made life as miserable as we could for the impudent Negroes and domineering carpet-baggers. The scout that took your place was brave and true,

but not cunning or a good woodsman. The enemy soon had him constantly on the run and he had to leave the country or be captured.

"I believe your return is opportune. You can do a lot of good work before the enemy finds out who is doing it. After they find out, the Negro soldiers will cease to ramble about at night. They are mortally afraid of you. Their new recruits have been told so many blood-curdling stories about you that they become awed at the mention of your name. Your former tree-den is the best place for you at present. However, it will be better for none of us, not even King, to visit you there. We will hide provisions for you in the big drift at the upper end of Little Lake as long as we find it safe to do so. I will call a meeting of the Clan soon and have you meet and counsel with us. I am still entertaining hope that civil law will be given back to us before many more months.

"Without your saying so, I know that you are anxious to see Kate Graham, but I would advise you to wait until it is safer to do so."

"All right," replied Buck. "I can wait if it is best, but I hope the time will not be long. I will return to my den. It is my intention to rest a few days before I start out scouting." After telling the Colonel where to find the horse, Buck walked back to his den, where he rested and read his three old books for several days.

It was pleasant to look again on the blue jungle and hear the voice of his favorite songbirds ringing among the trees. Becoming restive, he gathered up his steel traps. Finding but few beaver signs about the lakes, he crossed over to the big creek and set several traps along its banks. While rebaiting them the following evening, he saw two Negroes sitting on the bank, fishing. He crept to a lower sheft of the bank and noiselessly approached to within thirty feet of them and concealed himself in some vines. His purpose was to hear their simple talk, which was always a source of fun to him. Besides this, he might gather some news.

The older Negro was saying to the other, "I is tellin you, Dave, dat we is sho gwine be shed uv dem Ku Klux afo long.



I heard some sogers talkin yistidy abouten it. Tha ses tha wuz gwine git de leaders uv de Clan nex Thursday evenin an dat will bust de band. Mr. Woods done tole um dat Bill Thompson and dat cunnel Tyler is gwine to their haug-pen in de swamp dat evenin to mark a passel uv pigs. De sogers is fixin to way lay dat haug-pen. When tha plug dem two ole leaders, tha will slip outen de swamp an no body will know who done it."

Buck did not wait to hear more. Thursday would be the day after tomorrow. He went back to his camp, and, soon after dark, went to Bill Thompson's and signalled him from the back yard. When Bill responded and met him, Buck told him all that he had heard. Continuing, he said, "Send six good men to meet me at Blue Lake Thursday at about two o'clock in the afternoon. I will do the rest. You and the Colonel leave the hills at the time scheduled. Doubtless, spies of the enemy will see you leave. Ride toward the hog-pen until you are fully out of sight, then circle back in the hills and hide until dark, then return home."

Thompson agreed to send the men and to follow all instructions given him by Buck and cautioned him to be prudent; after which, Buck returned to his camp.

Thursday afternoon found Buck and his six men well hidden in the switch-cane near the hog-pen. An hour later, twenty Negro soldiers came quietly out of the nearby woods and took a position in a small thicket near the trail that led to the hog-pen. "Let's charge them," whispered Tom Porter. "No," answered Buck. "Keep still and act when I order and not before." The woods were as silent as a graveyard as the time passed. Occasional twitching of bushes showed that the soldiers were becoming restless. As daylight began to fade, the soldiers came from hiding and lined up in the trail for a council. Buck gave an order.

A roar of guns and the Indian war-yell followed. Six soldiers fell dead or wounded. Panic-stricken, the rest ran into the woods. Buck and his men left the scene, Buck to his camp, and the men to the hills. Soldiers who survived the attack reported to the military that more than thirty

Clansmen, led by the boy scout, had ambushed them. They declared that there could be no mistake about Buck being back in the range. They had recognised his voice in the Indian yell and in his other fighting tactics.

The military forces were immediately doubled in that locality and instructed to trail down and capture or kill the boy scout at whatever cost. This made Buck abandon his visits to the hills except when hunger forced him to go. Except for the riding of the range by many soldiers in the daytime, the country became quiet.

## CHAPTER XL.

While foraging in the hills for something to eat one morning at about three o'clock, Buck approached the vicinity of the molasses mill, which was now being operated day and night. His purpose was to waylay a lunch carrier and take the lunch from him. Suddenly there rang out on the resonant air, the strains of Annie Laurie. The voice was gentle and low, the sweetest soprano he had ever heard. Lest he should frighten the singer by his sudden appearance, he softly hummed the same tune as she drew nearer.

"Oh, Buck," gasped Kate. "I am so frightened. How could you come into the hills, knowing how dangerous it is for you? Why do you expose yourself to capture? They are seeking not only to capture, but to destroy you. Your good mother is sorely distressed about you. Only yesterday, she was telling that it was like you to disregard the danger and come into the hills. I told here not to be uneasy, that you were fully aware of your danger and too smart for your enemies, and now—here you are!"

"Thanks, Lady Angel," answered Buck, "but I was so anxious to see you again that—I just took a chance. Besides this, I have had nothing to eat for four days, except hickory-nuts and persimmons. Those who have been bringing supplies to me, cannot afford to visit me again until my enemies slacken their vigil. Of course I could kill some game, but the report of my gun would attract the attention of my pursuers. My, but I am hungry. May I have something out of your basket?"

"Bless your brave heart, yes," Kate replied sympathetically. "You shall have all of it and I will get more for my brother. Eat what you like and take the rest with you." They walked a short distance from the trail and sat down on a log. Kate talked while Buck ate heartily of the lunch. "Buck, while

you are eating, I want to tell you something and ask your advice," said Kate. "It is about Mr. Woods. He is pressing his attentions on me and sister Annie is doing all she can to influence me in his favor. She believes he is a fine gentleman and rich.

"Poor Sis, she has always been proud and she hates poverty. She cannot forget the old luxuriant days before the War. She wants me to better my position and have all of the desirable things of life. I promised my mother on her death-bed that I would listen to Sis and take her advice on all important matters. Mr. Woods is very nice to me and I suppose I should appreciate it, but the more I try to care for him, the less I like him. Several of my girl friends are urging me to encourage him. Perhaps I am ungrateful, but I cannot help it. Emmet says nothing, but I believe he would be pleased if I would favor Mr. Woods' suit. But forgetting this side of it, and considering my poverty and the promise I made to my dying mother, what would you advise me?"

Buck listened in thoughtful silence. He felt deeply depressed. It was a hard question to answer. How could he advise her without intruding his own interest, which was boundless. Still, Kate had sought his counsel. Whether she accepted it or not, he must advise her to the best of his ability.

"I scarcely know what to say," he faltered. "If I was not personally interested, I would say this. Every one, sooner or later, must be the sole judge of personal affairs that are nearer to himself or herself than to any one else. No doubt your mother's dying request was made so that you might be influenced by your sister's more mature judgment until you were old enough to judge for yourself. She could not have meant for you to be governed by your sister all through your mature life.

"It seems to me that you have reached the age that makes you capable of judging for yourself in a matter that concerns you more than anyone else. Let your conscience, and thoughts of your future happiness, guide you in deciding this matter. You cannot afford to sacrifice your happiness for

your sister's comfort. If you were to marry Woods without caring for him, you would be selling yourself. It would be mercenary and fraudulent. Besides this, things are not always what they seem. You are not sure that Woods is wealthy, and what is more important, you are not sure that he is honest and honorable. My own opinion of him—well, I wouldn't dare express it to you."

Kate listened intently as Buck spoke, her eyes studying his features in the dim moonlight to see if he was allowing self interest or his dislike for Woods to influence the advice he was offering her. At length, she said, "Your reasoning is sound, Buck. I believe and approve every word of it."

"Thanks, Lady Angel," Buck smilingly replied. "Now, may I tell you something—something I've wanted to say to you for many months? I may never have another chance to tell you, because I'm being hunted by heartless enemies who may kill or force me to leave the country, at any time. Kate! you are beautiful—most lovable. You must have many admirers. You will be courted by other men. What I want you to know is,—I loved you first and best. I know that I am not worthy of you now. I am branded with such names as wild, reckless, and lawless; but I want you to wait for me. Some day, I will be a man of whom my people—and you—will be proud. I know it is going to be a hard struggle, with no means, influence, or education to support my efforts, but if you will believe in me, I will win. I know it. Meeting and knowing you has inspired in me an ambition to be a useful and honorable man—and that ambition has been growing stronger every day. I'm going to make good and when I do, I'm going to try to teach you to love me. Since I found you lost in the wild woods, I have dared to claim you as my own. Every pure and beautiful thing I see reflects your image in my mind. Only last week, I had my gun leveled to shoot a fawn, but when it turned its head and looked at me, I saw an expression of defenceless innocence in its eyes that reminded me so much of you, that I lowered my gun and let it go unharmed. I see that same expression in freshly opened flowers. I have seen it in the eyes of babies."

"I hope I am worthy of these beautiful comparisons as well as of your confidence," Kate replied in a voice so gentle and low that Buck felt rather than heard her words. "You must know already that I care for you, perhaps more than I should on so short an acquaintance. It may be bold in me to say it, but I feel that I should be frank with you just as you have been with me. In my thoughts each day, I live over again and again the thrilling occurrences of the day fate brought us together in the swamp. I will remember that day always and as long as my hero of the wild woods lives I feel that I will care for no other man."

Gently, Buck placed his arms about her and drew her to him. This time, there was no telltale charcoal smut on his nose and chin, but neither was there about her lips.

Long they sat in this bower of happiness. The hours that sped by were only moments in their elysium. Vaguely they realized that they were overstaying their time, but love was ever reckless and ever laughed at danger. It was so seldom they could meet and there was so much they wanted to tell each other. Buck's mind and vision had been broadened by his growing love for Kate. He was beginning to see romance and beauty in everything about him. Although his education was limited and he lacked the power to express all that he felt, nevertheless he could convey to his fair companion some of the imaginings that had come to him during his lonely hours in the wild woods. In trying to express his meaning and feelings, he said,

"No doubt, a thousand romances have brought happiness to the dwellers of this forest in the past, but none of them was so real and beautiful as ours. In fancy, I can see prehistoric men fighting here to the death for the favor of a woman. Perhaps under these same spreading trees an Indian brave wooed his dusky maiden in the moonlight; told her that her eyes were as soft and gentle as those of a fawn and that her carriage was as graceful as that of the antelope. In his own simple way this savage lover told the same sweet story of love that has lived in romance through all the ages of the world. In my mind I can see them, hand in hand, roaming these

beautiful woodlands all through their lives, then on up to the happy hunting grounds together. Yet their love could not have been so sweet and beautiful as ours.

"Gay songbirds for a thousand generations have courted and mated in these groves, each gallant male believing his meek-eyed mate to be the loveliest of all the feathered tribes. A poet tells of a Highland chief of Scotland that loved Lord Ullin's daughter so dearly, rather than lose her, he drowned himself with her in a lake. I love you so much that I am determined to overcome every opposition and live to make you happy. I have read in the Bible that a fellow by the name of Jacob loved a girl by the name of Rachel so much that he worked fourteen years to pay for her before they could be married. My love for you is so great that I would work all of my life for you."

"Stop," exclaimed Kate. "Your intensesness frightens me. You have made the prettiest talk I ever heard. It has filled my heart with joy. Some day, you must put all of this in a book."

The crowing of roosters in a nearby barnyard warned them that day was near. This broke the spell that had been binding them. Dawn was near. Soon, the world of day workers would be stirring. Kate's people would be looking for her and the soldiers would be renewing their hunt for Buck. They must part without delay. For a moment, they looked into each other's eyes. There was no need for further pledges of love and constancy. A gentle embrace, a kiss, and they were walking in opposite directions; Kate homeward, and Buck toward his camp.

Day was breaking. The splendor of early morning in the wild woods begs description. Ninety-five percent of the American people never enjoy this rare beauty. Their souls are not enriched by the glories which are here spread for all who will but look and see. If the kings in their castles, the captains of commerce in their mansions, and millions of others who sleep through the early morning, could once see the real wild woods at daybreak, they would learn more about God's beautiful creation and the marvelous organization of

nature than they could from books in a lifetime. The beauty and silence is awe-inspiring.

Night is retreating. Day is advancing. Flowers that close their petals at night begin to open and dispel their rich perfume, distilled in them during the night. There is a bracing freshness in the air that is impossible to describe. Behind the soft veils of mist, hovering over lake and stream is heard the flute-like call of the curlew and the farewell song of the whip-poor-will.

A shift is taking place among the forest dwellers. The night roamers that fear the daytime are hurrying to their dens. The wolf, wearied from his long hours of rambling, sneaks to his cave. The raccoon, after crawl fishing all night, is shuffling to his bed in a hollow log. The fox is slinking to his hole, and the bat finds cover underneath the loose bark of a dead tree. The owl flies lazily across an opening and settles in the dense foliage of a tree-top, there to hide, blink, and nod until darkness comes again.

The night shift has retired. The day workers begin to stir. The cardinal or top-knot red bird is among the first to herald the approach of day. At first, he whistles very low as though afraid he may have commenced too soon. Then his notes grow more lusty and cheery and sound as though he were saying: "Dawn's here, boys! Get up! Get up!" The squirrel peeps cautiously from his knot-hole in a lofty tree, blinks his eyes, and chatters in a low tone at the woodpecker in the nest hole. A moment later, he is outside, sitting erect on a limb and saluting the dawn with quick waves of his tail. The wild turkey gobbler struts defiance in view of his neighbor in the next tree, then gobbles a challenge. A flock of jay birds sail in from a nearby thicket, alight near the squirrel, and a general jubilee begins. It is now broad daylight. The forest is athrob with life and filled with a myriad sounds. The voices of a thousand songbirds ring and re-echo through the resonant woodlands.

Buck, light of heart and deeply grateful to his Creator, was drinking in the beauties of the early morning and day dreaming of Kate. No wonder he hummed the old Scotch love song



as he walked briskly on toward his camp. He heard a squirrel chattering excitedly to the right of the trail not far away. Then several jay birds cried out shrilly a short distance ahead and to the left. They would swoop downward to near the top of the switch cane, then dart back into the trees. Buck knew from these signals that some unusual disturbance was near. These little watchmen of the woods never made false alarms. It might be some animal or it might be a man. In any case he must hurry on to his den. He should have been there an hour ago.

He had gone scarcely twenty yards further on the trail, when Negro soldiers rose up on the left, on the right, and in front of him. There were twelve of them and their guns were levelled on him. A larg black Negro with a captain's badge on the lapel of his coat ordered him to surrender. Buck saw at a glance that he was trapped and that he had no show to fight out of it. Reluctantly, he laid down his guns.

Eleven Negroes and one white man marched up, took his guns, and tied his hands. "One uv you fetch a rope here while two others look out a good limb on which to hang dis here carcas," ordered the Negro captain. He has been cotched foh times an got away evah time. Now we is gwine take no chances. He is give us an de cotes mo troble than all dem udder clux put togeder."

While one of the Negroes was gone for the rope, the white man interrupted the proceedings by saying, "We cannot afford to kill this notorious boy out here. The standing reward for him delivered alive is \$6000. Delivered dead, it is only \$3000. That would be only \$250 each for us. Deliver him alive, and we will get \$500 each. Besides, this, if we kill him out here, the Clan to which he belongs would never stop until they way-laid and killed every one of us. What is the difference any-way? When we carry him in, he will be courtmartialed and shot."

The Negroes saw the truth of this and agreed to it. They tied Buck on a horse and carried him to military headquarters at the county seat, where he was locked in an iron cage that

was securely bolted to the floor in the guard house. Guards were placed about the cage.

Perhaps never before in America, were so many precautions taken to prevent the escape of a youth as yet in his teens. News of the capture soon reached all parts of the county and other outlying districts. When the news reached Austin a week later, E. J. Davis, military governor of Texas, sent orders to the local military commander to hold the prisoner at whatever cost.

## CHAPTER XLI.

Delegates from every Clan lodge in the county met in a swamp clavern to consider the situation. Buck must be set at liberty if it was humanly possible. They could not afford to lose so valuable a man from their ranks at this important time. After a long discussion and the consideration of many proposed plans, they sent for King, who they knew to be quite cunning. They wanted his opinion, if nothing more. When he came before the council, he listened in silence to all of the suggestions advanced by the white men regarding the rescue of his young master.

When asked for his ideas, he said, "I is been studyin while you gentmen wuz talkin an I has got a scheme all figured out. One uv you gentmen go to town an to a second han sto an buy a suit uv ole cloes lac dem what a nigger potah wears at de hotels. Git some dat fits me if you kin, den you buy some specks what is got yaller glasses in em. Giv em to me an take me to town whar Buck is. Do dis in de nite an turn me loose dar. I'll put a cote uv light brown transformer over de skin uv mah face an hans, den even Buck won't know me. Den I goes an gits a job as potah fah dem niggers whut is guardin Buck. Nex Monday at about one o'clock in de mawnin, I'll put dem guards so soun asleep, dat da won't wake up til Christmas.

"About faughty uv you gentmen come sneakin in dar about three o'clock wid a cro-bar, a monkey rench, an a wagon an teem. Afo dat town wakes up, we has Buck back in de jungle."

This scheme of King's was laughed at when first stated, then considered more seriously. Some of the delegates thought favorably of it. Others were doubtful. Being unable to think of anything better, they finally approved it and sent Hal Douglas to secure and deliver to King the outfit he had asked

for. They instructed King to be very careful in his manoeuvres and in case he fell into trouble, to send word to Colonel Tyler.

All of the Negro guards except two went off duty at midnight the following Sunday. The town was unusually quiet. A coffee colored Negro boy was in attendance on the two guards. He was polite and attentive to every want of his acknowledged superiors.

"Looks lac you gentmen ought ter have a little whiskey to cheer you up whils't it's so lonesome about here," King ventured. "I knows whar I kin git some."

"Say; potah, doan you talk so loud," cautioned one of the guards. "Hit's agin orders fah us to drink wile on juty, but ifen you know's whar you can git it an bring it here widout nobody seein you, go fetch it."

King had gotten a pint of whiskey the day before and slipped it to his room. He also bought a small bottle of liquid morphine at a drug store and poured it into the bottle of whiskey. King departed and soon returned with the bottle. After listening for a moment and hearing no one about, the guards eased in behind the cage and each took a drink. Within a short time they took another swig, and then another, and before long they were smiling sleepily and talking incoherently. One said to the other, "Sposh de Cu-lux come—now, whush—we do?" The other replied, "Das—all right. Me an you—kin whip all—de Cluxeshes in zis—county. I ish de fienesh—cullud man—in, hic—d—" the voice ceased. The first speaker aroused from his growing stupor for a moment and said, "Potah! haf zhrink—wif—me."

"No, sah, boss," objected King. "Ah b'longs to de chuch an de tempence sassiety. No, Capen, skuse me."

A few minutes later, both guards slowly crumbled to the floor and began breathing heavily in deep sleep. King went to a window and gazed at the silent street, watched, and listened impatiently.

Buck was awakened from a fitful sleep by a grating noise. "Who's there?" he demanded before his eyes were fully open. "Shet yo mouf an doan you make no noise," King whispered

through the bars. "De Boss an a bunch uv Klux is prisein dis dungin fum de flo cause we got no key to unlock it." Three minutes later, the cage was dragged as noiselessly as possible from the building, loaded on a wagon, to which four big horses were hitched and driven rapidly toward the west. Twenty Clansmen flanked the wagon on either side.

Twenty miles from town, they stopped at a roadside blacksmith shop, from which they secured sledge hammers, and the iron cage was smashed to pieces. Buck was free once more. After congratulations and hearty handshakings, the Clansmen broke ranks, each riding homeward by separate routes. Knowing that Buck's own judgment would guide him best in his next move, none of the Clansmen made a suggestion to him. King returned to the Tyler place, burned the disguise suit of clothes, and again donned skirts.

The prisoner's escape was not discovered until the next morning when relief guards came and found the night guards asleep and the prisoner gone. This created much excitement among the military. A company of soldiers took up the trail of the Clansmen and followed it to the blacksmith shop, where they found the broken parts of the cage. The blacksmith told them that he heard the Clansmen breaking the cage, but that he was afraid to interfere. The soldiers were unable to trail the Clansmen from this place; at least, that was the report they made to headquarters. The truth of it was, they were afraid to venture further into the forest. They dreaded a surprise attack or an ambush by the Clansmen.

Buck decided that he could find no safer place for a while than his hollow tree camp. Though the soldiers had frequently invaded the jungles while he was away, not one of them had ever discovered this hidden spot. He went there to stay an indefinite time and watch developments.

## CHAPTER XLII.

About this time, a committee of wise men were sent from Washington to tour the rebel states and find out the real facts in regard to the social, financial, and economic conditions of the people. In their report to the President and Congress, they advised the following:

Send money and teachers to the South to educate the Negroes. Their pitiful ignorance is a menace to themselves and to the white people about them. As a penalty for their folly and arrogance, take mules and land from the ex-slave owners and give to each adult Negro, a mule and forty acres of land. With this, the penniless Negroes can make a start.

This report soon got wide circulation among the Negroes. The original story grew as it traveled until it was told and believed that a law was being passed that would give to each adult Negro, not only a mule and forty acres of the white people's land, but that one hundred dollars in gold with which to buy supplies would also be given.

Money and teachers were sent as advised by the committee. It developed that clean, self-respecting teachers from the North could not stand the scent and unsanitary habits of the Negroes. They quit and returned to their homes. Only the undesirable teachers remained and they did not stay long. They found no welcome from the Southern white people. A few weeks was all they could stand of the filthiness and bestiality of the Negroes, and they too left the country. In some instances, poor white Southern teachers who understood the Negroes, continued the work, and to some extent successfully.

A few sensible Negroes who had been defrauded at every turn by the Northern carpetbaggers, organized schools of their own. These were helped and encouraged by the Southern white people. King attended one of these schools by short

spells. He learned to spell and read a little, but made slow headway in learning to write.

The white men, who could spare the time from defending their homes and property, and the few Negroes that went to work, made fairly good crops that year and times began to look a little better. The daily cry of the white people now was, if the powers at Washington would only call off military law and allow the South a chance. The Negroes were growing more restless, impudent, and overbearing. The white officers from the North had fleeced the Negroes of what little money they had, under the pretense of using it to push the land and mule bill through Congress.

The first of January came but the land and mules did not. When the Negroes questioned the officers about it, they were told that Colonel Tyler and other influential men of the South, through the Southern representatives in Congress, had prevented the bill from passing. This news enraged the Negroes to desperation. A mass meeting of all the Negroes that belonged to the loyal league was called. A shyster lawyer, who formerly had been bureau agent for the military, was appointed to make a speech, and the old Reed place was selected for the gathering.

Their main object was to devise means of obtaining food and clothes to keep from starving and freezing during the remainder of the winter. The condition of the Negroes was becoming frightful. A few Clansmen who had learned the loyal league's sign, grip, and pass-word, disguised as Negroes and attended the monster mass-meeting.

In his speech to the meeting, the Bureau agent said:

"My oppressed and down-trodden countrymen—

"Never in the history of mankind was a people so heartlessly abused as the colored people to whom it is my privilege to speak tonight. God made all men equal. The constitution of these United States, declares equal rights to all men, special privilege to none. With utter disregard for the Constitution, the white people here are feasting in luxury on the fat of the land which, by all the laws of justice, is yours. For more than a hundred years they have driven you and your fore-

fathers under the bloody lash and become rich from the fruits of your labor. They have bartered and traded in your human flesh, the same as if you were mules and hogs. Every pound of meat and ear of corn in their possession is yours, by all the laws of justice. They are eating your bread, while you are starving.

"The colonists of this country were called traitors to the English government until they rose in their might and took from their oppressors the things that rightfully were theirs. Then they were recognised as an independent people. Follow in the footsteps of the colonists. The civilized world is standing aghast at the dastardly inhuman treatment you are receiving at the hands of your arrogant oppressors. Rise up in your righteous wrath and bring your bread and meat home. Teach these traders in human flesh to acknowledge and respect the common brotherhood of man."

This speech was received with prolonged shouts of approval. Wild excitement prevailed. Resolutions, hastily passed, called for the mobilization of their fighting forces and fixed the date for killing the white people and seizing their possessions. A committee was appointed and instructed to obtain guns and ammunition from the military store at the county seat. It was decided to organize their forces in the swamp at the mouth of Cheirs Creek at dark, one week hence.

The Clan spies who had attended the meeting made a full report of the proceedings to the Cyclops of the county, who immediately called a meeting of delegates from all the Clans in the county. The white people who had learned of the conspiracy viewed the situation with grave concern. There were no telegraph lines in the country. It would be impossible to reach Austin by courier and get state troops there in time to avert the impending catastrophe. There also was the likelihood that the state authorities would discredit the seriousness of the affair and regard it merely as a scare.

To gather the women and children in some hiding place would probably be collecting them for slaughter or even a worse fate for the women. After a discussion of these things, the Clansmen adjourned to meet two nights later. A special



messenger meanwhile had sought out Buck and summoned him to appear at the next meeting, as the best counsel was wanted.

When the time arrived, the Clan convened at ten o'clock at night and opened the council. Buck rode in at midnight and was heartily welcomed. He was immediately appointed chairman of a committee to submit some plan of defense. After weighing the facts and giving due study to possible methods of protecting their people, Buck made the following report:

"Fellow Clansmen: There is no doubt that we are now face to face with the most serious problem that has confronted us since we organized to protect our homes and loved ones. If the Negroes should carry out their fiendish purpose, of course their leaders would be caught and hanged by the state authorities or destroyed by surviving Clansmen; but the Negroes are too ignorant to know this and the white men who are encouraging them do not care. They will carry out their bloody work if not prevented. Our idea is that an enemy should be assailed at the point of its greatest weakness. We must play upon their superstitions."

Buck proceeded to outline a scheme which he believed would route the mob and put them to flight. By a unanimous vote, Buck was selected to direct the Clan forces. Bill Thompson was made second in command. On the night that the Negroes were scheduled to gather in the swamp, Bill Thompson, at Buck's bidding, led a company of Clansmen to the old timber road, leading from the swamp to the settlement on the hills, and placed them in ambush. Buck was confident that the Negroes, as soon as their forces were organized, would travel that route to the white settlements.

Buck and King, perfectly disguised as middle-aged Negroes, slipped into the swamp near the appointed place for the Negroes to gather, earlier in the day. They had taken with them several balls of twine, six big round gourds, and a like number of small wheel-pulleys. They cut a hole in one side of each gourd large enough to admit a hand with a candle and on the opposite side, they cut holes shaped like large human eyes, and a third hole in the form of a mouth. They attached

a cord to the top end of each gourd and inserted an unlighted candle in it. Climbing a large tree, the spreading branches of which reached to within thirty feet of the ground where the Negroes were to gather, they attached the pulleys to the limbs about four feet apart. The cords to which the pulleys were attached were passed through the pulleys, and the ends of the cords were then passed over and across other limbs for a distance of seventy or eighty feet, then extended to the ground in the thick switch cane. The gourds were drawn up until they were hidden in the foliage of the trees.

There was a large drift of logs near the spot where the Negroes were to gather. The youths dug a hole underneath the pile of logs and covered the fresh dirt from the excavation with leaves. They placed a ten pound keg of gunpowder in the excavation, and placed one end of the fuse in the keg of powder. The other end was extended to the spot where the cords that were connected with the gourds extended to the ground. They covered the entire length of the fuse with leaves. When they had arranged the plant to their approval, they found a well hidden and reasonably comfortable place in the thatched cane, and sat down to rest and wait for the Negroes to gather.

At about six o'clock in the afternoon the Negroes began to arrive in small squads. As darkness came on, they arrived in ever increasing numbers. Some of them brought whiskey. As their numbers grew, they became more boisterous and boastful.

"Makes no difference how many white men we kills tonite," one Negro was saying. "Dar is one Nigger I sho' wants to git if I kin scare him up. I means dat Nigger tha calls King. Thar ain't no kine uv killin too bad fer him. He is been runnin wid dem murderin Klux evah since de waw. He is as cunnin as a ole raccoon. He sneaks aroun an finds out all we is doin an whut we intends to do; den he goes an tells dem Klux all about it. He will do anything dat boy, Buck, tells him to do. I is gwineter beat his head off wid a pine knot."

King, from his hiding place in the dark, whispered low: "Shut up! You wall-eyed, knock-kneed, rubber head, blue-

gum, tick-bitten polecat! I is hearin' all dat you is sayin', an I hopes dat you is a settin on dat pile uv laugs when de blast is teched off."

Another burly Negro of the group was saying: "I'd ruther kill dat white boy which we cotch an let git away fum us five times, than to kill all de udder white men in de Ku Klux Klan, but he is lef de country, an dats why we is gwine to win tonight."

"Dat boy may not be gone," another Negro interrupted. "You nevah can tell whar he is or whut he is doin. He may be settin up dar by de moon rite now, fixin to drap down here on us. Seems lac he is got a stand-in wid de spirits. Ah hope he's some whar roun heah and we gits him tonight. I is gwine fight hard an all I wants fah my part of de winnins is dat black hoss of Thompson's an dat perty white gal dat lives close to de lasses mill." Buck's right hand involuntarily grasped his pistol, for he knew that the black brute meant Kate.

By this time hundreds of Negroes had gathered. At about twelve o'clock, the leader mounted a large stump and began a fiery speech. The lights, made of pine knots, were so dim that it was hard to distinguish one Negro from another. King had already found his way to the edge of the crowd. He felt about in the leaves until he found the signal cord, one end of which was in Buck's hands eighty feet away. On feeling the signal cord tighten, Buck slackened the cord to which the gourds were attached and let them down to the ground. King interposed his body between the gourds and the crowd and quickly lighted the candles in each gourd. Pulling on his end of the cords, he raised the gourds to about twenty feet from the ground, then moved them slowly up and down. The glaring eyes of the gourds appeared to be gazing on the throng of Negroes below. The first Negro that saw them, cried out in terror, "KU KLUX! KU KLUX! Look! tha is all ovah de woods an up in de trees."

At the sound of the Negro's voice Buck slackened the cords and let the red-eyed faces slowly descend toward the ground. Just as the stampede started, Buck lit the fuse. The explosion

that followed sent logs high above the tree-tops. Fragments and splinters fell for half a minute following the mighty detonation. The great assemblage of Negroes became so widely scattered in their headlong flight toward the hills that Clansmen in ambush got only a few shots at them. The gourds, cords, and all other materials that had been used were gathered by Buck and King and burned so as to destroy all evidence as to how the mysterious calamity had been brought about. The crisis had passed. It would be some time before the Negroes would recover from their fright and reorganize.

Northern newspapers characterized this episode of reconstruction as a defenseless outrage. The writers, however, did not take into consideration what would have happened to the defenseless women and children of this community if the Negroes had not been checked. Not one of the participants in this so-called crime would have taken part in it, if it had not been in defense of their homes, their women and children, and in defense of their own lives.

## CHAPTER XLIII.

A drought of several months' duration had cast its blight over a wide area in East Texas. Water in the wells and cisterns had become so low that they supplied scarcely enough water for drinking purposes. All of the branches, small creeks, and lakes had gone dry. Work-stock had to be taken to the big creek for water. The residents of the Tyler community had to haul water for domestic purposes from the big creek. The women were forced to go to the creek to do their washing.

Those of the Tyler neighborhood observed Friday of each week as wash-day and went in a body to the stream. As a rule, several men would be stationed near the spot for protection, while the rest of them guarded their homes and farms to prevent the Negroes from carrying away their goods and stock.

One Friday morning in September, more than a dozen women and girls with their washtubs, kettles, soap, battling paddles, and soiled clothes, were hauled to the creek on slides, each of which was drawn by a mule. This method of transportation was employed, in order to get through the thick forest, in which wagons could not be used. A dinner in common was spread at noon and all gathered about it. Although washing under such conditions would be considered by the majority of women as hard labor, these wash days were viewed partly as an outing, and were enjoyed by the women and girls. On this Friday, the washing had been finished by three o'clock in the afternoon and the garments hung out to dry.

Mrs. Tyler had washed some underwear for Buck and, according to their previous understanding, it was to be hung on a sapling near a small lake which was hidden in the switch-cane about two hundred yards from the creek. It was Buck's

custom to go there in the night, get the bundle, and return to his camp. Hitherto, King had carried the bundle to the lake, but on this Friday, from some cause, he had not come and Mrs. Tyler was worried a little as to how she should manage to place the bundle in its place.

She knew the place, but it was difficult to reach it through the jungle of brush and tangled vines, so she confided in Kate, who volunteered to take the bundle to the lake for her. Kate, with the bundle under her arm, had gone only a short distance down the creek when Mrs. Tyler overtook her and whispered, "You are going in the wrong direction. The place is up the creek and on the east side."

Kate smiled as she answered, "Trust me. I learned a lot of cunning and woodcraft from Buck when I was with him in the swamp, the time I was lost.

"It is possible that an enemy is watching. I am going out of sight in this direction, then swing back through the thicket to the lake, leave the bundle, and return from up the creek."

"Bless your heart," Mrs. Tyler said. "You would make a good scout. I leave it to you. Go ahead."

Kate returned shortly in a seemingly careless way.

The weather had been unusually hot and sultry all day. The sky had become overcast with dark clouds. Deep toned thunder rumbled in the southwest. Lightning flashed with increasing frequency across the horizon. The three men who were there to protect the women rushed to their homes to place under shelter the new corn they had spread out to dry in the sun that morning. They wanted to put up cistern troughs and gutters, for they felt sure that a good rain was coming. By this time, the thunder had become a continuous deafening roar, while flashes of lightning followed in rapid succession. The clouds had become so dense that a weird darkness was gathering, despite the fact that it was only a little past four o'clock.

The women hurriedly gathered the half dried clothes, bundled them and placed them on the slides. Impatiently, they waited for the men to return with the mules to haul them home. The storm had already struck the hills, strewing trees

and limbs so thickly across the trails that they scarcely could be traveled on foot, much less by mules and slides. The first gusts of wind and rain now struck the swamp.

Four big buck Negroes who had been picking cotton two miles further down the creek came by on their way to shelter in their cabins up the creek. When a short distance beyond the group of women, they stopped behind some large trees. Now and then they peeped out, and leered and grinned at the white women. Each of the Negroes was carrying a gun, as did most of the blacks at that time. It was a privilege that had been denied them in slavery days and which they now enjoyed immensely.

About two hundred yards away, was a log house which had been partly filled with cottonseed by Bill Thompson, who planned to feed it to his range cattle when winter came. Following another strong gust of wind and downpour of rain, the women saw the storm breaking in its fury, not a quarter of a mile away. Hurriedly, they held a council. Some of them thought it best to run as speedily as possible to their homes. Mrs. Tyler, however, declared that it would be foolish to attempt it. "It will be pitch dark within a few minutes," she said, "and we could not see where we were going. Besides this, the storm would destroy us."

Mary Ann Hardy declared that she had rather take her chances in the storm than remain so near those beastly Negroes when darkness came. The storm was now upon them. Further argument was futile. The washed clothes were scattered high and wide. Many garments lodged high up in the tree-tops. In a loud voice, Mrs. Tyler commanded all to follow her to the cabin. It was so dark that they could see only a few paces ahead when the lightning flashed. Rain was falling in sheets. Determinedly the women fought their way against the wind step by step toward the cabin. The weaker ones now and then were blown down and were assisted to their feet by the stronger ones. All finally reached the cabin, scrambled in, and closed the door. Kate, who was ever watchful, called Mrs. Tyler to her and whispered, "I believe those Negroes have followed us. I think I saw one of them peeping

through a crack at us when lightning flashed a moment ago. Watch that large crack on the east side when the lightning flashes again."

A moment later, by a bright glare of lightning, they saw four pair of eyes gleaming evilly upon them. There could be no further doubt. The Negroes were there. The Negroes knew that they had been seen and made no further effort at concealment and ordered the women to open the door. The door was latched on the inside, but the women knew that the Negroes could break their way through. Mrs. Tyler made an appeal to their better nature. "Go away to your homes," she pleaded. "Be honest men like Jonah and merit the respect and friendship of the white people and the better class of your own race. Do not force your way in here and frighten these defenseless women."

"All uv dat souns mouty nice," replied the Negro leader, "but yo whinein ain't gwinter do no good. Yo white men done as tha pleased wid our gals an wimin in slavery times an now it's our time. We is jus as good as you is an we is comin in dar. It is too dark fer you to tell who we is an whut we does. Nobody will no us when daylight comes."

In another moment, the Negroes broke down the door and entered the cabin. Frightened into hysterics, the women began to scream.

"Shet yo mouf!" thundered the Negro leader. "You ole hens stop dat cacklin. We don't want you nohow. Hit's de pullets we wants an it's dem we is gwinter have."

After scouting all of Thursday night, Buck returned to his den a little before daylight, went to bed, and slept until about three o'clock Friday afternoon. After eating a lunch, he sat down on a log to ponder over what he had learned during his night ramble and to renew his interesting study of wild nature.

Those who spend their lives in the busy cities may never know how and why any one can love solitude, but to the lover of nature there is a never ending splendor in the virgin forests. One who loves truth can find it naked there. Veneer, fiction, and fraud are strangers to the wild woods. However, per-



haps conditions are better as they are, because the man of the forest could not live in a city and the city raised man would die of loneliness in the forest. The cave-bat could not live long in the sunlight and a skylark would soon die if confined in a dark cave.

Buck had been raised in the thinly settled, heavily timbered forests and loved them as the tiger loves the jungle. He knew the name of every tree, flower, insect, animal, bird, and reptile. He knew their habits, nature, call, and song.

Awakened from his reverie by a burst of thunder, his eyes scanned the heavens, and he saw storm clouds approaching. An ominous stillness was prevailing. Butterflies, bugs, and wasps buzzed by and disappeared under the loose bark of a dead tree or fallen log. Jay-birds ceased chattering as they sought the thickest places in the tree foliage. Squirrels raced over limbs and on into knot holes. These natives of the woods knew instinctively that a storm was impending.

Buck told himself that no officers or Negro soldiers would venture out into the range in the face of a storm like the one now rising, so he decided to go to Little Lake and get his clothes which he expected to find at the usual place; then he would not have to go for them after the storm. Observing that the storm was approaching more swiftly than when he first noticed it, he hastily buckled on his guns, and hastened on his errand. He reached the lake just as the storm broke into the swamp.

Above the roar of the wind and rumble of thunder, he thought he heard a scream in the distance. He stopped and listened intently. At first he believed it to be the yowl of a panther, but on hearing it the second time, he knew it was the voice of a woman.

He quickly deduced that some one of the women who had been washing, had been caught in the storm and had been struck by a falling limb. Whatever the trouble, help was needed. He dashed through the woods and across the creek to the place whence the cry had issued. Again, he heard screaming by more than one voice. Blended with the screams,

he heard his mother's voice saying, "Lord, thy children are in distress—and defenseless. Send help or we are lost."

Something awful had happened or was impending. His mother never prayed out loud except when in church or when in great distress. Battling the storm, he rushed on and in less than two minutes he was at the cabin. Looking through a crack between the logs as the lightning flashed, he saw a sight that made his blood run cold—four girls gasping for breath as they staggered and fought in the arms of four burly Negroes. The other women who had not fainted, were helping the girls all they could by gouging at the Negroes' eyes.

Buck saw at a glance that he could not shoot into the cabin without danger to the lives of the women. If he rushed into the cabin, it would probably result in defeat and death to all at the hands of the Negroes. He found the Negroes' guns propped against the wall, and threw them far away into the brush. Now he must frighten the Negroes in such a way as to start them out at the door, then he could do his work. He fired one shot in the air and yelled: "Come on, Clansmen, we have them hemmed in the cabin." The terrified Negroes, believing that many Clansmen were at the rear of the cabin, made a rush for the door. Buck met them there. Not a Negro reached further than just outside of the door. The slaughter was fast and horrible.

The storm was moderating, and the women who had fainted from fright came back to consciousness. "Praise the Lord!" Mrs. Tyler exclaimed. "He has answered our prayers." The wind had ceased blowing. A steady rain continued and the blood was being washed away from the door, where four black faces stared with unseeing eyes. Four more Negroes had paid the price of too much freedom, ignorance, and bestiality. Four innocent girls had been saved from a fate worse than death. As soon as the men from the hills reached the scene, Buck prepared to return to his camp, because he knew that the Big Creek would rise soon and cut him off from his retreat. Kate followed him for a short distance so they would be alone when they said goodbye.

"Our faces have been washed too clean by the rain to show

any smut this time," Buck said smilingly, as he pressed her to him, "and, besides, it's too dark for any one to see us."

"Yes, Buck, I know you deserve a thousand kisses and you shall have one soon," Kate said, "but I must talk to you a little first. Can you believe it? All through the terrors of this day, I never lost hope entirely, because—something told me that you would come and save us. Yet I had no reason to believe that you would be out in the storm so far from your camp. How I wish that I could believe that God helps us in temporal matters, as your mother does. Nothing could make her doubt that God heard and answered her prayers. She has a beautiful faith.

"Buck! I'm afraid that I am becoming very wicked. I find myself feeling glad that those Negroes are dead. It must be sinful to feel that way. I'm afraid, too, that so much of this awful kind of work is going to harden your finer sense and make you still more reckless. Does your conscience hurt you, Buck?"

"No, Kate, not in the slightest. Of course, I regret that I have been forced to shed more human blood, but when it becomes necessary to destroy the bad, to save the good, I can do it and feel no remorse. I do not believe that any just man—not even God—will condemn me for what I did tonight. My convictions in this are almost as strong as my mother's faith in prayer. Who knows but what God put it into my mind to go after my clothes at Little Lake tonight?"

"I'm so glad you feel that way, Buck. You are my ideal man." Then in a voice so gentle and low that Buck could not be sure that he heard, she continued, "Will you think me immodest if I put aside all subterfuge now, and tell you that I love you?—Love you, Buck—and will stand by you, regardless of what the future may bring. I know you for what you are and no matter what others may say, I will trust and be true to you." A fond embrace that was all too brief—the promised kiss—and Buck was hurrying back to his retreat.

The rain ceased falling at about three o'clock in the morning. Some time before this hour, the men from the hills had cleared a path through the fallen trees to the cabin and carried

the women to their respective homes. The Big Creek overflowed and its swirling waters extended from hill to hill. The bodies of the four dead Negroes were caught up and carried down stream by the swift current. They were found in a drift seven miles below, three days later, by a squad of soldiers who buried them on the spot without ceremony. The public never knew whence the bodies came, nor who was responsible for their deaths. As usual, however, the deed was charged to the Clan. For several years after the Clan disbanded, the radicals of the North attributed mysterious deaths of Negroes, whenever they occurred, to the Clan.

## CHAPTER XLIV.

Early in January, news came from Washington that military law had been lifted from Texas. Never was a more welcome message received by an oppressed people. A day of celebrating and thanksgiving was observed all over the state. The white military officers left the country. The Negro soldiers, now lacking leaders and shorn of military jobs, reluctantly went to work on the farms. Civil law was again enthroned. Men who were the choice of the people were elected to state and county offices. The white people breathed a great sigh of relief throughout Dixie. Once more, they were inhaling the pure air of self government.

A great and rapid change was taking place. The dark days of reconstruction were over. The healing process was on. A wide breach between the North and the South still existed, but it was beginning to narrow. The bloody war-shirt was beginning to fade, and the foundation of a new and better America was being laid. The North had learned that the South was not a soft defenseless baby, and the South had learned that she could not whip her mammy. Sons of once proud slave owners were taking off their gloves and going to work.

Buck was now free from dodging in the swamps to escape military officers and Negro soldiers; but several charges of murder and manslaughter against him had been transferred from military court to that of the district court. He stood trial on each of these, but all of the officers and every member of the several juries were his friends, so it was no wonder he was cleared in each case.

When the jury came in to report on the last charge and rendered a verdict of "Not guilty," Mrs. Tyler, who was in the court room, asked permission of the judge to say a few words, and her request was granted. With tears of joy in her eyes,

she rose to her feet and asked all present to bow their heads. When all become quiet, she said:

"Great God of all men and all things, allow us to approach Thee with thanks from the bottom of our hearts for the blessings that have come to us and our glorious Southland. Forgive all who have abused and oppressed us. Bless those who were recently in bondage to us. They need wisdom from Thee and Thy guiding hand. Hasten the time when our United States of America will be reunited in bonds that will never more be broken. Amen." Every one in the court room responded with a hearty Amen.

Buck, with one arm around his mother, left the court room a free man for the first time in nearly four years. His heart overflowed with gladness over the thought of liberty. To a host of his friends who had gathered about him, he said, "I hope that I never again will be forced to defy the law or destroy a man. I am so strong for peace and conformity to the law that I intend to assist the officers in bringing it about. I also intend to do all I can toward educating and elevating the Negro race, for which I have great sympathy. Give them time and opportunity and they will make good."

Buck, though still under age, had grown to a little above medium height, was broad of shoulder, straight as a post and scarcely knew the limit of his physical endurance. He went to work helping his father build up and improve the farm, which had been neglected for the last four years.

He spent most of his spare time with Kate. They rambled in the woodlands, which they loved so well, and recalled thrilling events of the past, and planned for the future. They never tired of discussing details of the day and night they spent together in the blue jungles. Believing that their troubles and sorrows were past, they were very happy. What a blessing that they did not know, then, the heartaches that were ahead of them!

The Ku Klux Klan had done well its work in purging the country of low white men and protecting their people against bad Negroes. Believing that its days of necessity were over, the Clan disbanded throughout the Southern states. They

turned their energies to the building up of the devastated South.

## CHAPTER XLIV.

During the War of '61-65, and for some years thereafter, cattle thieves infested the thinly settled sections of Texas. They plied their trade most actively while honest men were in the war or busy defending their people during the days of reconstruction. East Texas offered a rare opportunity to the thieves at this time. They were well organized, with their chief headquarters in the section known as Big Thicket, which embraced parts of Polk, Trinity, and Liberty Counties.

A band of four or five rustlers, as they were called, would go into the range and in a seemingly disinterested manner, look the cattle over. A few days later, after their presence in the neighborhood had been forgotten, they would ride in after dark at a time when the moon shone, gather a bunch of cattle and drive them out of the community. At or soon after daylight they would pitch camp. When darkness came again, a relief crew would take charge and drive the cattle toward Big Thicket. The drivers who had been relieved would then go to a new locality and gather another herd. These tactics were employed so that a description of the men and their horses, if seen at different times driving the cattle, would be confusing and mystifying. After the cattle had been held in an out-of-the-way place for a few days, they were driven into Louisiana or elsewhere and sold.

Now that reconstruction troubles were over, the farmers and stock men had time to watch their cattle more closely and the thieves found it more difficult to operate without detection.

Officers and a band of men had been placed on the trail of the rustlers and after several days' scouting discovered the thieves with a bunch of stolen cattle in a small prairie or open space in the Big Thicket. An advance scout brought news that more than twenty of the rustlers were there with the



cattle and all heavily armed. The sheriff knew that the rustlers would fight desperately if attacked since they would face the penitentiary or death at the hands of the enraged people.

After retiring a short distance and striking camp, the sheriff sent a messenger thirty miles away for reinforcements. When a spy of the rustlers came in and reported having seen a band of armed men only a mile away, the leader of the thieves sent pickets out and called the rest of his men into conference. Some of the men were in favor of scattering the cattle and hiding out in the brush. One of the under bosses said, "We have too many cattle here to let them go without a struggle. If that bunch of men who are sneaking around here are only a sheriff and posse, we can whip them as we have done every time they have bothered us. If they have sent for reinforcements, we can drive the cattle out of their reach before their help arrives." This view was shared by the others, and scouts were sent out to investigate the enemy.

When it was reported to the sheriff that a rustler's messenger had been seen galloping toward the Windrum Camp, he called a council of his men. "If the rustlers' reinforcements reach them before help comes to us," the sheriff warned, "we'll have a poor chance to get out of this alive. The thieves will fight like fiends if they have to. If we could only get Buck Tyler and his old gang of scouts here in time, we would be safe. I wish I had sent for them in the first place. I am afraid now it will be too late, still it's worth the effort."

A man was mounted on the best horse in the outfit and ordered to ride fast and continuously until he found Buck and ask him to gather his old gang and come with all possible haste.

Buck and Kate were returning from a stroll in the woods when they saw a horseman emerging from a cloud of dust a short distance down the road. "That looks like old times," Buck exclaimed. "It brings back the thrill of battle and makes me feel like I should strap on my guns."

"Forget it Buck," pleaded Kate. "Thank God, those terrible times are past."

"Yes, I know," replied Buck, "but there is something unusual afloat or that rider would not be riding at that break-neck speed." The horseman dashed up, drew rein, lifted his hat to Kate, and handed a note to Buck. The message read:

"Hemmed by a desperate band of cattle thieves. They have sent for reinforcements. Gather your old band of scouts and come in all haste or we are lost. The bearer will pilot you.  
CARSON.

"Don't go, Buck," Kate pleaded, after reading the note over Buck's shoulder. "You have done enough dangerous work for your country. It would grieve your good mother and I could not sleep until you returned, if you ever did."

"I know and realize all that, Kate. But our friends are in serious danger. However, I will leave it for you to decide, but hope you will agree that I ought to go and fight for our friends and the cause of justice once more."

"Putting it that way, I will have to agree," replied Kate as her voice trembled and a troubled expression came on her face. "Of course, you will go, but promise me that you will make this your last aid and that you will be careful and expose yourself to danger as little as possible. May God send you back to me unhurt."

The sheriff's reinforcements first sent for arrived. They were raw recruits and few in number. However, the sheriff was determined to hold against the thieves, if possible, until more help came. On the following night, he moved his force to within a half mile of the hustlers' position and made camp. After posting pickets, the rest slept with guns in hand. It is strange how still a forest can be at night, when three score men, prepared to fight to the death, are within it. Throughout the night, the stillness was awesome. The occasional neighing of a horse or the lowing of a cow was all that broke the stillness.

A little before dawn, a scout came in and reported that the thieves were breaking camp. They were rounding up the cattle to start them on the trail eastward. In a minute every

man was on his feet. Horses were saddled and mounted. Led by Sheriff Carson, they circled around the rustlers and took a position directly across the trail which the enemy would be forced to travel, because there was a deep lake on one side and the river on the other.

The rustlers' advance guard discovered the officers and opened fire on them. The sheriff and posse returned the fire and charged, driving the pickets back to the herd. The opposing forces were now in plain view of each other and one of the most desperate battles ever fought in the woods by small forces, was on. The rustlers deployed and forced their opponents into a horse-shoe bend of the river. They fought from behind trees, logs, out in the open, and from behind dead cows which had been killed accidentally as they tried to escape between the lines of battle.

The thieves were fighting to save themselves from the noose or the penitentiary. The sheriff and posse were fighting for their lives, because they were hemmed in, without an opening for a retreat. Each side was looking for reinforcements at any moment. The sheriff's force, inferior in numbers, were being slowly forced to the edge of the river. "Whatever happens now, boys, never surrender," the sheriff shouted above the roar of battle. "It would only mean murder for all of us. If the worst comes, take to the river and swim for the other side. I'd give every thing I am worth if Buck and his band would come."

The rustlers saw their advantage and charged to within pistol range, and sent a shower of lead into the ranks of the officers. One member of the posse fell dead. Two others were wounded. The sheriff, with his left arm dangling helpless by his side, and seeing no chance to win by further fighting, raised his head to order a retreat into the river. Looking once more toward the North, he saw a cloud of dust rising in the near distance. His hope revived. Straining his eyes, he saw and recognised Buck's big bay horse as it galloped at the head of the cavalcade.

"Hold your ground, boys," the sheriff shouted. "Buck and his band are coming. We will win yet." Too late, the

rustlers saw the on-rushing horsemen. Facing about, they met a hail of bullets from Buck and his band. Caught between two lines of their assailants, the rustlers fought with desperation. When they realized that a retreat was impossible and saw their men falling like dead trees in a storm, they raised a white flag and surrendered. Seven thieves lay dead on the field and eight were wounded. The rest were hand-cuffed, tied on horses, and taken to the county jail. When numbers of the cattle rustlers' gang, who were not in the battle, heard of the fight and the death of so many of their comrades, they left the country. This battle marked the last stand of the cattle rustlers in that part of Texas.

Returning from the battle of Big Thicket, grimy and worn, dust-covered and hungry, Buck placed his horse in charge of King. After a greeting with each of his home folks, he went to his room for a rest and sleep. On a small table, he discovered a letter. It bore the local postmark and the date on the stamp showed that it had been mailed more than two weeks before. His name and address were written in almost perfectly shaped letters, but the spelling was not good. There was no return address on it.

Tearing open the envelope, he hastily scanned the first lines. Although he had never seen the handwriting before, he could not mistake the language. It was Maggie's. He did not feel like reading it at once. He wanted to ponder a while first, for his conscience troubled him. He felt guilty of having neglected as true a friend as ever lived. He had intended to go to see her on several occasions, but, each time, something had intervened and prevented his going. He began to think up excuses which he might offer in answer to her letter, before he had read all of it. Then he took the letter and started again at the beginning.

#### TO BUCK TYLER:

When you read this, I will be gone from this country, with no hope of ever seeing you or the pretty blue jungles again. My old bachelor uncle, who lives far out on the western frontier, has been trying for some time past to

induce us to move to his ranch and make it our home. He has thousands of cattle and hundreds of horses. He wrote mother that he needed all of us to help him on the ranch. Mother has wanted to go there ever since we received his first request, which was more than a year ago.

For reasons known to none but you and me I did not want to go then, and mother would not go unless I was willing. She was my only confidant and she knew why I was opposed to going at that time. Unknown to you, I kept wise to your movements and found out for certain that you are in love with the girl you found and rescued in the blue jungles. Do not think I blame you. I do not. I made it my business to meet the girl twice. I wanted to see the girl who could and had won you away from me. She is pretty and I believe she is as good as she is beautiful.

I went to see her expecting to hate her, and tried to, but I came away loving her, and I was glad for your sake. After this, I was ready to move to my uncle's ranch. Going away makes me brave to let you know things that I could not say to your face, and maybe I should not say them now, but somehow it seems as if I will feel better if I do.

I love you, Buck. I did a long time before I knew it myself. I thought you loved me, and still believe you did, some. I am not sorry it happened. All of my life, I will think and dream of you and the blue jungles where we often met and had such a happy time.

This will be better than to have never known love and happiness. I find myself crying for the first time since I was quite small. Goodbye, Buck!

MAGGIE.

Buck's own eyes filled with tears as he finished reading the letter. Honest, true, sweet Maggie had gone out of his life forever. He could not even write and explain to her, for she had left no address. She had not stated in what part of the West her uncle lived. It was possible that his ranch was in

Arizona or Colorado. He did love Maggie next best to any girl in the world and he wanted her to know it. After all, perhaps it was best for Maggie and for him that she had gone away and left no trace. He loved Kate and he must give all that was best in him to her, but this did not prevent him from grieving over losing Maggie. As though she were standing near, he reached out his hand while his lips fashioned the phrase, "Goodbye, Maggie—dear earthly angel, goodbye."

## CHAPTER XLV.

Tournament riding in exhibition contests was a favorite sport of the young men of Texas in the early 'seventies. It gave keen interest and exciting thrills to the spectators and brought the pleasures of competition in horsemanship to skilled riders.

Only expert riders and well trained fast horses could qualify for the track. Few are now living who remember the tournaments of those days. It was very dangerous sport and perhaps for that reason, if no other, it ceased to be popular as the people became more civilized and turned their energies to saner and safer sports.

To appreciate reading about the tournament, the reader should have at least a general description of the track and the rules governing the sport.

Straight posts were set firmly into the ground in a straight line, thirty yards apart. A wooden arm was firmly bolted to each post near the top. This arm was seven feet long and extended out horizontally over the track. A large wire, with the lower end forming a hook, was attached to the end of the arm and extended to within seven feet of the ground. On each of the wires was hung a two and one half-inch steel ring.

The knight, as the rider was called, mounted and took a position forty yards from one end of the line of posts. He was armed with a cue or shaft, one and one half inches in diameter and about eight feet long. This cue tapered at the front end, where a steel point was firmly fixed.

When the starter gave the signal the rider ran his horse at full speed down the line, spearing onto his cue as many rings as he could. Ten seconds were allowed for the knight to make the distance from the starting point to the last of the five posts. If he failed to make the time, he lost his run, regardless of how many rings he had speared.

He was required to ride to the judges' stand with the rings on his cue. If from accident or any other cause, the rider lost one or more rings from his cue before reaching the judges, his run was lost. A queen's gilded crown was the trophy, won by the knight that speared and delivered to the judges the greatest number of rings in three runs. A first, second, and third honor consisted of beautiful artificial wreaths. The winners were envied the distinction of placing the honors won on the heads of their fair ladies.

These ceremonies took place on a grandstand before the assembled hosts, after a speech, congratulating the gallant knights and their fair ladies, by a gifted orator. On this occasion, the day of the grand exhibition was to be held on a prepared track at the county seat. Sixty-one knights, some from adjoining counties, enrolled and paid their entrance fees. A big barbecue and basket dinner was an added feature.

At first, Buck had not intended to enlist, but when he learned that Ben Woods had registered with the boast that he was going to win the crown and make Kate Graham queen of the day, by placing it on her head, he changed his mind. He enrolled at once and began regular practice on an improvised track that he fixed up near his home. All of the other knights went into training on the regular track at the county seat. Only a few knew that Buck would be a contender for the crown.

Woods' mount was still the finest horse in the county, no one doubted that. Woods was a fairly proficient rider to start with and improved rapidly during the days of practice.

The day of the much heralded exhibition arrived. Men, women, children, and their coon-dogs came from all parts of the county and adjoining counties. All were highly keyed for the coming sport and festivities. Many had heard of the handsome dashing Ben Woods and his fine horse and were anxious to see him run and win the crown.

Each knight was allowed to make one practice run on the track before the regular event commenced. After the preliminary run, Woods became a favorite and betting on him by many was two to one against the field. Only those from



Buck's home neighborhood and a few others who knew that he had been practically raised in the saddle, were betting on him. His horse was not so handsome and spirited as the stallion owned by Woods, but he was strong, steady, and swift.

A few, who did not want to be known in the betting, staked King with more than a hundred dollars to bet on Buck. When Buck found this out, he called King to him and in a spirit of mischief demanded, "Didn't you tell some Negro guards, once upon a time, that you belonged to the church? and isn't it wrong to gamble?"

"Yes, I guess so, Buck," King replied: "but when I tole dem niggers dat, I wuz in a tight fix. Ah fixed dat whisky specially fur dem an I wuzn't gwine take any uv it away fum 'em. I'se a perlite nigger to mah cullud frens anyway."

Each knight registered under a fictitious name—such as Knight of Kildare, Knight of the Crown, and other loud sounding names. Woods had taken the name, Knight of My Lady-love. Buck had assumed the title, Knight of the Dixie Wilds. Each knight was adorned with helmet and plume and otherwise apparelled as nearly like the knights of old as possible. They presented a grand sight when on parade.

There were scores of maidens bedecked in their best and thrilled with the hope of being crowned Queen or at least sharing in the wreaths of honor that would be awarded to the successful knights. Ben Woods' name came last on the list and Buck's name came next to the last. This was in consequence of the names being arranged alphabetically.

Fifty-nine knights, one at a time, swept down the track in the order their names were called. The highest number of rings taken by any one of them was three. Four of them tied on this number. The records of the others ranged from two down to none. It was now Buck's turn. While he was tightening his saddle-girth, King slipped a note into his hand. He opened it and read:

**"HOLD YOUR NERVE AND TEMPER AND YOU WILL  
WIN.  
KATE."**

This message stimulated Buck, and made him more determined to win. He mounted his horse, which for the first time seemed to know a thrill was coming. He bowed his neck and his eyes sparkled. The starter gave the signal and he was off like the wind. A breathless stillness prevailed as the dust rose above the track and partially hid the horse and rider from view. After passing the last post, Buck rode to the grandstand and the spokesman of the judging committee cried: "Four rings."

Bedlam broke loose. A great cheer went up from Buck's friends and backers. The town people and society leaders, most of whom were in favor of Woods, remained quiet.

When called, Woods rode to the starting mark. Silk ribbons fluttered gaily from his helmet and from the wavy main of his prancing horse. Cheers rose lustily from his supporters. At the signal, he flew down the track like an arrow. When through the track, he pranced to the judges' stand, and once more the cry rang out: "Four rings." The announcement was greeted with a roar of applause.

At the second running, Woods, John Stewart, and Buck scored four rings each, while the next best scored three. On the third running, Stewart took three rings, and Woods and Buck again scored four rings each. All of the other knights were now out of the race for the crown. They could only compete for the wreaths. Woods and Buck were tied with a total of twelve rings each.

The tension and excitement of the sea of people knew no bounds. Men who had bet high stakes were at high tension. Ten minutes were allowed to the two leading contestants in which to rest and have their horses rubbed. The excited masses were pressing closer and closer to the track. It took hard work of all of the officers and deputies on the grounds to keep them back from the lines so they would not impede the horsemen in their course. Men and women stood up in wagons and buggies, while youths climbed small trees in order to get a better view of the track. Betting was running wild.

As the allotted rest period came to a close, Woods appeared to be nervous. His cue-hand trembled a bit. On the other

hand, Buck seemed to have no nerves at all. He was as steady and composed as a king-fisher, on a button-willow snag. Woods rode to Buck's side and, with arched brows and low voice, said, "I had hoped that this final contest would be with a more respectable man and myself. I am ashamed to run the contest off with you, but I am going to win and bestow the crown on the girl whom you believe has no more pride than to care for an ignoramus like you. She is the fairest girl in Texas."

Buck dismounted and started toward Woods with the intention of dragging him from his horse, when he was checked by Bill Thompson, who said, "Let him alone. He is trying to stir your temper so you will be nervous in the saddle. Keep cool, at least until the contest is over. He knows that if he could goad you into an attack on him, public sentiment would be against you."

Buck saw the point, remounted his horse, and replied to Woods, "Yes, she is the fairest and sweetest girl, not only in Texas, but in the world, and if she wears a crown today, it will be placed on her head by me. I am going to win in this contest and take all of the conceit out of that bloated head of yours."

Again King called Buck to one side and whispered "I is been watchin' dat man, Woods, close, an he sho is got sumpin up his sleeve. He is gwine 'fraud you outen de prize if he kin. Watch him, an I is gwine watch him, too."

Again the people were breathless as Buck ran the course, and again a deafening roar of applause went up as he carried four rings to the judges. Far back in the sea of faces, Buck singled out Kate and smiled. Kate waved her fan and returned the smile. Woods' keen eyes saw this little exchange and grew more nervous.

All eyes were on Woods as he thundered down the track. As he passed the last post, his horse appeared to become unmanageable and ran two hundred yards into the woods before his rider's apparent efforts checked him. In a few moments, Woods reappeared from behind a thicket and cantered to the judges' stand. A moment later, the announcer called, "Five

rings." The throng shouted like mad. Hats were sailed high in the air and umbrellas were thrashed to a frazzle.

King ran to Buck and told him that a white boy and two Negroes, who had gone into the woods to catch a horse that had slipped his bridle and run away, had seen Woods take two rings from his pocket and string them on his cue when the bushes shielded him from the people. "While evah body wuz lookin at Mr. Woods an his hoss runnin off into de bushes, I seed dat doode whats ben hangin around Mr. Woods all day, flip de two rings whut wuz lef on he wires, off de wires so it would look lak Mr. Woods took all uv dem wid his cue."

The judges were preparing officially to award the crown to Woods, when Buck galloped to the judges' stand and demanded a hearing. Woods was near, posing as a hero, with the five rings adorning his cue, which he held in his left hand, while with his right he was waving acknowledgment of the cheers from his friends.

When Buck spoke, the judges called loudly for order. The great crowd sensed some new excitement impending. A hush prevailed as Buck in firm tones said to the officials, "Gentlemen, prompted by a sense of justice and fairness, I demand that you carefully examine the five rings on the cue in that man's hand." He pointed to Woods. "I was watching, and saw clearly that he took only three rings of the five that were on the wires. Some one, evidently in his employ, took the other two rings from their places, while the eyes of every one were following him and his runaway horse. That runaway was a fake. I saw Woods pressing his spurs to the horse while he was pretending to check him. I have three witnesses who saw Woods take two rings from his pocket and string them on his cue while out of sight behind the brush."

When asked by the judges for his side of the question, Woods answered, "Gentlemen! I leave it to you to decide between my word and his. I am a gentleman, known and respected by all of the prominent people of this section. I took five rings from the wires fairly, My accuser is of doubtful standing and a notorious outlaw. This is not the first time he has grossly insulted me. I insist that you have him re-

moved from the grounds. I will not allow a swamp-rat like him to insult me again and go unpunished. He is a sneaking coward."

Hardly had these last words been spoken when Buck leaped upon Woods, dragged him from his horse, and struck him in the face. The judges ran up to part them, but scores in the crowd yelled, "Let them fight it out." Dozens of men forced back the crowd and even the officers were not allowed to interfere. Woods was taller and heavier than Buck. He weighed 170 pounds, while Buck tipped the scales at 155. Woods was slightly corpulent below the waist line. Buck was narrow of hip, broad of shoulder, and full chested.

Friends of each contestant gathered to see fair play and cheer their favorite. Woods rushed at Buck, making a right swing at his head. Buck dodged and delivered a blow on the back of Woods' neck. For a minute, the fight raged furiously with honors about even. Woods began to breathe hard, and seemed to realize that he must win quickly or be defeated. In a rush and clinch, he gripped Buck's right arm with his own left so closely to Buck's body that it became useless. With this advantage, he delivered smashing blows on Buck's face and chin.

Blood streamed from the youth's mouth and nose and he appeared to be weakening. Believing that this was true, Woods twisted out of the clinch, with the intention of throwing his opponent to the ground. At this second, however, Buck suddenly revived. With a lightning movement he caught the side-hold-lock and threw Woods with terrific force to the ground and pinned him there. With his left hand gripping his throat, Buck dealt unobstructed blows on the face of his adversary.

Wheezing and gurgling, Woods, as soon as he could utter a sound, cried out, "Murder!" It took two men to pull the youth off. He held on to the throat like a bull-dog. When he was freed, his friends led him away. While the fight was going on many of the spectators were laying bets as to which of the combatants would win, and Buck's backers were now

collecting their winnings. Presently, they chipped in and handed fifty dollars to Buck.

Friends of the battlers took them to one side and bathed and dressed their bruised and bloody faces. The judges carefully examined the five rings taken from Woods' cue, and found two of them to be different from the others. They were one sixteenth of an inch larger and were new, while the other three showed wear. Three witnesses testified that they saw Woods take two rings from his pocket and string them on his cue while out of sight of the grounds.

After due deliberation, the judges declared Buck the winner of the crown. Amid thunderous applause, Buck, with a swollen cheek and one eye closed, led Kate to the grandstand, and in the presence of the people, crown'd her Queen of the South, and Buck was hailed Knight of the Dixie Wilds. He was also awarded prize money amounting to one hundred and eighty dollars. No victorious knight of the jousts of old was ever more happy than he.

## CHAPTER XLVI.

Brooding over his double defeat at the tournament and nursing his bruises, Woods spent several days in seclusion at home. He had been exposed and humiliated before a host of people whose favor and esteem he had sought. His shady schemes and yellow streak had been paraded before the public. His hatred of his victorious enemy had increased a hundred fold. These things made him more determined to discredit Buck and win Kate Graham. In his mind, he saw Buck as the only obstacle between Kate and himself. He would ruin him in her estimation at whatever cost. If the strategy he was now planning failed, he would hire some adventurer to waylay and kill him.

He called to mind a number of low criminal charges that had been filed against Buck during the reign of military law. He also remembered that through the false swearing of low white men and Negroes, the charges had been proven and recorded. After military law had been withdrawn, no one cared or thought about these old charges.

Woods went to the county seat and spent hours in examination of a copy of the old military court records and made copies of the cases. He discovered that a copy of the charges had been transferred to the district court, but had never been taken up or considered by that body.

A few days later, Woods called on Emmet and told him confidentially that Buck had a very low criminal record which hitherto had been practically unknown outside of the courts; but which was now being talked in whispers by an increasingly large number of the better class of people in the neighborhood.

He inferred that Kate's reputation as well as that of her people would be sullied by further association with Buck. He went on to say that at least one of the proven charges against him was too low to be discussed by decent people.

"It is not my purpose to expose the young man," he said. "My purpose in telling you these things is to save your sister's fair name from the breath of scandal. People are sure to talk if she continues to allow him in her company."

Woods showed Emmet his copy of the court records and suggested that he go to the court house and examine the originals for himself. He pointed out that since the civil law had come back in force, the proven facts of the cases had been purposely or carelessly overlooked but that they were nevertheless true.

Emmet went to town the next day on business, and while there found time to examine the old court records. He was shocked to find that Buck Tyler had been proven guilty of a statutory offence against a Negro girl. According to the evidence, the girl had been spirited out of the country by Buck's friends as soon as it was reported that she would become a mother. Emmet could scarcely believe his eyes. Whatever else Buck might have been, he had believed him clean in his morals. He did not know that the story had been made up by Buck's bitter enemies and that the hired testimony of low white men and Negroes had proven the charges.

It was enough. Emmet read no farther. He was a strong friend to Buck and his people but he felt that he must act at once and break up whatever ties existed between Buck and his sister. Kate was the baby of the family and an orphan. He would die before he would allow her to marry or even associate with a dishonorable man. Returning home, he conferred with Anna, who again urged him to help her make a match between Kate and Mr. Woods, who she insisted was a gentleman, cultured, and well-to-do.

"Kate has ceased to act on my advice in this matter," she said. "I believe she will listen to you. If she does not, then it is our duty to employ force. Act at once, Emmet, or it will be too late."

After supper that night, Emmet and Kate carried lunch to the boys at the cane-mill. On their way back, Emmet suggested that they sit down on a log by the side of the trail for a talk on a matter that was on his mind. After they were



seated, Emmet said, "Kate, I want you to tell me how much or how little you care for Buck Tyler. I am not asking you this with any desire to meddle in your little sweetheart affairs. I only want to guide and protect you.

"We have been swept from a position of wealth and power to one of poverty. Circumstances over which we had no control forced us to this. Our good name, however, has never been tarnished and by the eternal powers that be, it never shall. We are of a stock that never let impulse or fancy lead us against sound judgment. We may live and die poor in purse but we will remain rich in a good name."

"My little sweetheart affairs, as you call them, or some of them, at least, are sacred to me, Emmet," replied Kate. "You seem to forget that I am nearly seventeen years of age. I am no longer a child to be led by fancy or to be driven by force. I prefer to keep my social affairs mostly to myself, but if the matter you have in mind is as grave as you seem to think, I will answer your question.

"I must say that I have a very high regard for Buck. You must have known this for a long time. I believe him to be far superior to the average young man. He is brave and has an unusually bright mind. I feel sure that he will make his mark some day when opportunity comes his way. I know that he amounts to but little just now, but he has never had a chance. As you well know, he has had to combat misfortunes and dangers of the most trying nature ever since he was a small boy. I believe he has the ambition and pluck to win."

"Thank heaven," said Emmet. "I am glad to learn that your feeling for him is nothing more than high regard. I was afraid that perhaps it had gone farther than that. Now, it will not be difficult for you to turn him away and you must do that at once. Never be found in his company again. I have found out that he is unworthy of the association of you or any other nice girl. I know that he is of good stock but I found out yesterday that there is a black spot in his record. Under his many good traits, evidently, there is a low streak in him. He is not—"

"Stop, Emmet! "Do not say another word against him and please take back what you've said. You have been listening to some enemy of his. I know him better than you do. He is true, unselfish, and the soul of honor. Time and again, he has risked his own life for his friends. Twice he saved me from a fate worse than death and you know it. How can you be so ungrateful to him? If you repeat any more of the lies that have been told to you about him, I will not listen."

"Now, my dear sister, calm yourself," counselled Emmet. "I am sorry. It is going to be very trying for you, because I see that what I feared, is true. You love this boy and you must send him away." Gently he told her of his discovery of how he had examined the court records and seen with his own eyes the irrefutable proof of Buck's guilt. He drew from his pocket a copy of the record and handed it to Kate. He lit some pine splinters and made a light. Kate read the document quietly at first but, at the end, she broke down with spasms of grief. Between sobs she said, "It seems to be genuine and true. Against my conscience and will, I will have to give him up; at least for the present. As I have to do that, I will tell you the full truth. You are wringing it from me and it is breaking my heart.

"Yes, I love Buck; no one except he and I know how well. He was my ideal, my hero. In all of my romantic dreams, he—his—face shone resplendent with tenderness and yet with fearlessness. On this log, on which we are now sitting, he and I once sat from midnight until daybreak, telling of our deathless love for each other. It was on the morning before he was recaptured the last time by the Negro soldiers. I—called him—my peerless hero and he—named me his angel of light. We planned for the future and the many,—many details of getting started when we were married. Now,—it is all over and—oh—how empty my life will be."

Emmet was deeply touched. He idolized his baby sister and it hurt him to see her suffer. "Do not grieve so," he said. "Try to forget him as soon as possible. Keep in mind that he is not worthy of you. There are a number of nice young men about here who admire you and there is Mr. Woods who

seems to be a fine and prosperous gentleman, and is deeply in love with you. Any of the girls in this neighborhood would be glad to get him for a husband."

"Do not mention Mr. Woods to me," demanded Kate. "I never cared for him and never will. Somehow, I feel that he has had something to do with these charges against Buck. I hate him! Oh, if I could only wake up and find all of this a bad dream—all untrue. I will never marry. As a matter of policy, I will continue to go with the young set, for a while, so the change in me will not be so readily seen. After that, I will devote my life to helping the helpless—and keeping sacred my lost love."

## CHAPTER XLVII.

Under the management of Buck, the Tyler farm began to reflect an appearance of prosperity. With the help of King and old Jonah, he rebuilt the fences around the farm and pastures. He had sought out and driven home most of the cattle and hogs that had strayed away while the storms of reconstruction were raging. To improve his education Buck used his spare time in the day and long night hours with his few books. He read history and specialized in the science of building. He drew sketches of buildings and figured out the weight, strength, and crushing resistance of different building materials, and studied proportion and harmony of shapes.

In the mass of sketches that he had made, there was one that he carefully guarded from the eyes of others. It was of a five room residence with many conveniences and appointments of beauty. His mother, ever watchful of him, noticed that there was ever a smile on his face when at work on this drawing. Curious to know, she asked him one day what there was about this sketch that made him happy? He confided to her that it was the plan of a home which he intended to build for Kate, some day when they were married. In the middle of the largest room, in which a fireplace was shown, was written in shapely letters, The Angel's Room.

Because of the deep interest he was taking in his studies at this time, Buck was late in arriving at a dance that was being given at the home of Travis Burton. A party or dance in those days was attended by most of the people of the neighborhood. It served as a social gathering for the middle aged and the old, as well as for the young people who danced.

Kate Graham was among the first arrivals. In an effort to throw off her melancholy appearance she went a little too far the other way. She was vivacious and appeared to be as gay as a lark in the springtime. Her cheeks were flushed and her

eyes sparkled with unusual brightness. Some of those present noticed these things and wondered what the cause could be. When Buck entered the hall, he saw Kate dancing with Ben Woods. He was surprised. What could this mean? Kate had not allowed Woods her company since before the tournament exhibition. Now she was smiling and dancing with him.

They were the most handsome couple on the floor and all eyes followed them as they gracefully glided in the dance. As Kate caught sight of Buck, the smile left her face instantly. Though she struggled to appear cheerful, she paled and her gayety vanished. Most of those present knew of the rivalry between Woods and Buck, for Kate, and the question as to which would win, became the subject of conversation in many little groups as the set ended.

"I hope that Kate will favor Mr. Woods," Mrs. Porter whispered to old lady Chandler. "He is so handsome and refined. What she can see in that other fellow is more than I can understand. True, he is daring and has had rather a picturesque career around here, but he is ignorant and as poor as poverty."

"Pardon me when I say that I do not agree with you," replied Mrs. Chandler. "I hope she will prefer Buck Tyler. He is made of genuine stuff. I admit that he has but little polish, but he is all that he appears to be. He is honest and clean and is of good stock. Besides this, he has done more for the protection of us and our homes than any man in the county. He is a diamond in the rough, if I ever saw one, and I intend to tell Kate so the first chance I get. To me, that man Woods is a suspicious character. The way he tried to swindle Buck out of the crown at the tournament was enough to convince me that he is a fraud, and the way he carried on, with that highfalutin May Castle who left here so suddenly, was shameful."

Woods remained by Kate's side during the intermission and neither seemed inclined to part company. Buck waited several minutes for them to part company and when they did not, he walked up and asked Kate for the next dance. Without looking at him, Kate walked into the adjoining room. Re-

turning a few minutes later, she handed a note to Buck and walked away. She met Woods and smilingly said, "I am ready for our next dance, Mr. Woods."

Buck stared at them as they whirled away in the dance. He was dumbfounded. With burning cheeks he glanced at the faces of those around him and knew from their expressions that they had seen what had transpired. Study as he would, he could think of nothing he had done to occasion this slight. His face burned with humiliation. Edging his way around the dancers, he walked out in the yard where a log-fire was blazing and read the note:

I have learned some things about your past that makes it impossible for me ever to associate with you again. I refused to believe these things until unmistakable proof was placed before my eyes. This is causing me more pain than it is possible for you to know, but I must do my duty. I cannot and will not discuss the matter with you. Do not attempt to talk or write to me. Farewell.

KATE.

Buck shoved the note far down in his pocket, staggered to the porch, and sat down. He tried to think but could not find a starting place. Knowing that Woods was his bitter enemy, he naturally suspected that he was at the bottom of it all. Returning to the hall-door at the conclusion of a dance, he called Woods out into the yard where he abruptly charged him with meddling with his affairs. Woods denied the charge stubbornly and even offered his help in finding out the trouble and where it started. Buck was becoming very angry. Past experience had taught him that Woods was treacherous and cunning. He caught Woods in the collar with his left hand and said, "Though without proof, I believe you are at the bottom of this and if I find proof of it, I will kill you just as I would a snake, and thereby stop your breed. You might as well come out with the truth now, for, rest assured, I will find it out soon." Woods again made stubborn denial.

As the people sensed the trouble between Woods and Buck,

the dance had ceased and the house had become quiet. The air of merriment which had prevailed earlier in the evening had given way to an atmosphere of depression. People spoke in awed whispers. Though many tried, no one could find out what had caused the trouble.

Woods presently returned to the hall and tried to renew interest in the dance, but the music fell on unresponsive ears. The high spirit of the evening had departed. The guests began saying their adieux and leaving for their homes.

Unseen by any one, Buck left the place some minutes before the crowd began to disperse. When Woods asked to accompany Kate to her home, she declined. She had used him for a blind and did not need him any further. Buck made it a point to meet Emmet the next day and asked him for an explanation of Kate's sudden change toward him. Emmet did not want to go into details of the unpleasant subject. Besides, he had promised Kate that he would not discuss the affair with Buck or any one else. In addition to this, he was reluctant to arouse Buck's fighting spirit over a matter that involved Kate, so he said simply, "It is Kate's business and she knows what she is doing. I seriously regret the condition existing, but I know that we could gain nothing by talking about it and I will not do it."

Buck was deeply hurt by Emmet's attitude, because he had believed up to that moment that he had an unwavering friend in him. His most vexing problem now, was to find out what he had done to merit the treatment he was receiving from the Grahams. His many friends who had been quietly investigating had been unable to find a clew. It seemed that only the Grahams knew and not one of them would talk about it.

After seeking for several days, in vain, to uncover proof of Woods' guilt, Buck decided to go to him and force the truth from him. Woods evidently was anticipating this and manoeuvred to avoid a meeting. Upon calling at Woods' boarding-place, he learned that he had gone away on a business trip and was not expected back for a week or more.

Buck had one hope left. He sent a note to Kate, asking for an interview or at least an opportunity to defend himself

against whatever charges she had against him. No answer came. It was over. To say more would be a complete sacrifice of his independence. His romance had flown. He had worshipped a girl, and without giving him a chance to defend himself against charges which he knew were false, without a reason, she had thrown him over. He could not shake off the belief that in some way Woods was responsible for it. His anger at Woods became so intense that he wanted to hunt him down and kill him, but in a saner moment he reflected that that would not help his cause in the least and would bring more trouble.

There was also the scant probability that Woods had nothing to do with it. It might be that Kate's sister Anna had persuaded her to break with him and marry Woods. He knew that Anna had opposed him and favored Woods from the first. He was now sure of one thing. He could not remain in the country if Kate married Woods. The fact that she had declined to speak to him at the dance, and immediately thereafter had asked Woods to dance with her, convinced him that whether or not she cared for Woods, she had made up her mind to marry him.

Little doubt remained now that she had yielded to Anna's advice to marry Woods and thus improve their fortune. After all the vows of love and constancy for him, she had thrown him down for the prospect of money and luxury. If Kate was false, no woman could be true. Involuntarily, he thought of Maggie Parker, the pure, unsophisticated girl who had proven so true to him. He decided the only right thing for him to do was to leave the country. He would go to the limitless West, start life over, and forget the past. Little did he know then, that the surest way to remember was to try to forget.

Without apprising any one of his intention, he quietly began preparation for a long journey. In his melancholy musings, his mind reached back over his checkered past. In fancy, he was again back in his childhood home on the banks of the beautiful Pearl River, his mind full of hope of the great things he was going to do when he reached the wild West.



Once more, now, he was preparing to leave his loved people and country.

He had gladly given four years of his young life to the defense of his people. Kate had been his greatest inspiration and expected reward. She had proven untrue, ungrateful. He must forget this and seek a new goal. His mother, believing that the mystery of Kate's behavior would soon be cleared up, tried to persuade Buck to wait a little while longer, and she went in person to see Kate.

"I sincerely wish," said Kate, "that there were some way to convince you that I am forced into the course I am pursuing, but I cannot explain. It would be worse for all of us if I did. I am immovable in my resolve. Time alone will reveal to you that I am acting for the best." Mrs. Tyler returned to her home and, between spells of weeping, reported to Buck.

Buck said his sad adieux to his people early the next morning and rode away toward the setting sun. As he was passing the Graham place, he caught a glimpse of Kate looking out through a raised window. What a small thing will fire hope anew in the lover's breast. A world of possibilities raced through Buck's mind. Maybe she would call to him. It might be that she had reconsidered. It was possible that she had found out that she had been misinformed and was anxious to tell him about it. It might be that she had defied her sister and her advice to marry Woods and wanted him to come to her. Involuntarily, he raised his hand and waved. There was no response. The window closed slowly, and behind it his new-born hope faded. He looked straight ahead and rode on.

He did not know that if he had looked back, he would have seen Kate watching him from another raised window, her eyes tear dimmed, waiting to beckon him at the last moment to return to her. He could not know that she had moved from the first window to the other side of the house to keep from being seen by her sister when she would beckon to him. In spite of the desires in his heart to look back once more, his will power, braced by a spirit of independence, prevailed and he kept his eyes on the road ahead.

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

At this time hundreds of miles of territory, high up on the Colorado and Concho Rivers of Texas, were uninhabited except by widely separated ranchmen, wandering trappers, and occasionally a band of hostile Indians. Hunting was more of a trade in those days than it was a sport. Hunters dried hides and furs and saved them until they had a sufficient number to carry them to a trading post where they received a good price for them.

Although there were no towns or roads, the frontiersmen felt at home in the wild woods or on the trackless prairies. Slicker and blanket formed his bed; his saddle formed his pillow; a stake-rope, his horse feed, and his gun, his commissary. Into these wide open spaces, into these scenes of natural beauty, unsullied by the hand of art, Buck rode for many days. Except his own people and his close friends, he loved nature's wilds above all things.

This nature had been born in him, had been cultivated and made stronger by years of experience in the wilds of East Texas. No music ever sounded sweeter to him than did the gobble of the wild turkey, the howl of the wolf, or the whispering of the mountain winds. Did he become lonesome? Not often, because he was a philosopher. The mountains, the streams, large rock formations, and the wild things of the prairies, all formed a field of rich study for him.

Was he afraid of getting lost? No, that question never occurred to him. There was nothing to get lost from. Very few of the noted spots in that country today were known by name then. The tallest mountain between the Colorado and Concho Rivers had been named Mount Margaret by some unknown pioneer, and it still bears that name. It served as a landmark and guide to the wayfarer in the early times.

After sixteen days of travel, Buck reached the Concho

country. On the last lap of his journey, he traveled two days without seeing any sign of a white man. To break the monotony, he started talking to himself, but the sound of his voice was so queer, breaking in on the all pervading silence, that he ceased. The sun had set and night was approaching. Near the head of a small stream, he discovered signs of Indians. The signs showed that it had been several hours or perhaps a day since the Indians had been there, still, it naturally made him uneasy. He did not relish the thought of battling single handed against a band of a dozen or more Indians.

If he only had his old Indian friend, Glodoc, and his five hunters who had rescued him from the Negroes two years before with him, he would have felt much safer. He picked his way along the ridges, whence he could see in all directions. He did this to avoid an ambushade, in case the Indians were still in the vicinity. Then he began to look for a suitable place to camp for the night. The requirements were water, grass, and a low secluded spot on which to build a small fire. A place like this was necessary to prevent discovery during the night by an enemy. Failure to observe these rules caused many lone travelers to lose their lives or have their horses stolen.

Buck finally located a place that suited him. He dismounted, and had started to remove the saddle from his horse when he discovered a thin ribbon of smoke curling above a mesquite thicket not more than three hundred yards away. He stopped still, listened and watched for a short time, then decided to travel on, rather than camp so close to an unknown neighbor. Too late, a man stepped from behind a bunch of cactus eighty yards away, with gun leveled on Buck. The latter dropped flat in the tall grass and cocked his gun. "Go slow thar, stranger," warned the other man. "Who are you, where to, and what for?"

"I'm traveling to the Concho country," Buck replied. "As to who I am and what my business is, well—who and what are you?"

"We can talk about that later," came the answer. "Seein'

as how you ain't a Injun an figurin that you ain't a outlaw or you wouldn't be alone, I'll jist say that I've got two dead deer up thar on the ridge. I'd started to camp after my hoss. Make that hoss of your'n toat 'em to camp an you stay with me an the captain tonight. By way of introducin, I will say that my name is Jim Davis an the Captain is named Bowers. We are podners an have been a huntin an trappin on this frontier, nigh onto four years."

"That sounds all right, Mr. Davis," replied Buck as he rose from the ground. "My name is Buck Tyler. I was in reconstruction troubles in East Texas for several years. The Yankees and free Negroes made it so hot for me that I was forced into hiding and scouting for a long time. After that, unfortunate social troubles caused me to leave that country and come west."

They loaded the two deer on Buck's horse and led him into camp and met Captain Bowers. The latter looked to be not less than fifty-five years of age, was as straight as a post, and as active as a boy. At first, he impressed Buck as rather sullen and unfriendly, but in a short time he found that he had a warm heart, full of unselfish interest in his deserving fellow-men. He talked but little of himself and never touched on his early life. Buck learned from Davis that he was a Virginian and had been a captain in the Confederate Army; that he had killed two military officers during reconstruction troubles and had fled to Texas.

The captain was tall and of rather slender build. Davis was of middle height and stout build. He was a happy-go-lucky sort, always in a good humor. Buck decided to become a member of the hunting party for a few months at least, provided they would accept him. He was fond of hunting and he knew that hides and furs were a good price at the trading posts that were situated at different points, from 100 to 150 miles to the east.

When he told the two old hunters of his desire, they withdrew a short distance from camp and counselled. On returning, the captain said, "We like your style and appearance, young fellow, and believe that you are on the square, but we

cannot be sure of this on so short an acquaintance. Several men have tried to edge in with us out here in the last year or two, who proved to be spies. They declared that their purpose in wanting to join us, was to hunt big game, but we found out that their real business was to spy on us. They were in the employ of others who were afraid to come out here themselves. You may be curious to know what became of them—well, never mind about that. Somehow, they got lost and never found their way back to the bunch that sent them. However, we have decided to take you on trial for a while and if you prove to be of the right sort, you may stay as long as you like.”

The evening passed quickly as Buck listened to thrilling frontier stories related by the captain and Davis. Just as the moon crept above the eastern horizon, they smothered out the fire with loose dirt, rolled up in their blankets, and went to sleep.

All were up before daylight the next morning and after a breakfast of broiled antelope, johnny-cakes and coffee, they struck out on the morning hunt, each going a different direction. Buck returned to camp at about eleven o'clock with one Lobo wolf hide and two buck deer hides. Davis had preceded Buck and had brought two bob-cat hides and three deer hides. Neither of them had seen the captain. After waiting half an hour, Davis became uneasy. His eyes closely scanned the flats which were in the opposite direction to that taken by the captain on his departure from camp.

He said that he felt sure that the captain had seen Indians or a fresh trail of them and, in order to play safe, had circled the camp and would approach it from the opposite direction in order to mislead the Indians, if indeed they had seen him. Hardly had Davis concluded these surmises, when they saw the captain sneaking cat-like through the bushes toward camp. He was empty handed, save for his gun.

“Injuns, shore,” Davis exclaimed. “Otherwise, he would be totin some hides. He always gits 'em.”

In a few minutes more the captain reached camp, and reported that he had seen seven Indians, two miles down the

creek at about ten o'clock. They had seen him first, which was as usual, and were circling about him at a distance for the purpose of learning if he had other men with or near him. He had evaded them by sliding into a ravine and walking on rocks for some distance, then crawling into a thicket. After that, he made a wide half circle into camp. He had three lobo wolf hides and two heaver hides when he discovered the Indians and hung them on a tree so as to be unencumbered in case he had to run for his life.

No one hunted during the afternoon. Bowers and Davis did some short distance scouting, but made no new discoveries. The probability was that the Indians were still near with the intention of assailing the camp during the night. At dusk, they brought their horses to a low place near camp and tied them there. Then they prepared to watch through the night.

If the Indians were still around there and were after their horses, they would be apt to come before the moon went down. They would endeavor to get the horses without a fight, but if resistance was made, they would fight to get them. The Indians of the frontiers of Texas did not fight for revenge only. Their main object was to obtain horses, guns, and ammunition. The latter part of the night was their preferred time for sneaking into the white men's camps and securing their plunder.

Perhaps they were at that moment lurking in the nearby thickets, watching the hunters' movements and estimating their numbers. The night seemed unusually calm and peaceful. Only the low chant of the katydid, the occasional hoot of an owl, or the howl of a wolf broke the silence. Buck was placed on first picket, which was to continue until midnight. Davis was to relieve him at that hour. The post of watch was a small knoll, about fifty yards from camp. They had gathered large rocks and built a pen on the top of the knoll. It was about four feet square and three feet high. It was designed to serve as breastworks in case the picket was discovered by the enemy and fired on.

Buck got into the little fort and sat down on the ground.

Only his head from his eyes up, protruded above the wall. In this position he could command a view of every approach. He was very tired and sleepy, but he had the consolation of knowing that Davis would take his place at midnight. He knew that Captain Bowers, who never slept with both eyes closed, would awaken Davis at the right time. The picket challenge agreed upon was one low hoot of the horned owl. The answer was two low hoots.

Several hours passed uneventfully, and Buck at length lapsed into a dreamy reverie. In his mystic mind, the scroll of his earlier life unfolded as time turned backward. He was again in his childhood home in the East. He saw the tall forest trees swaying lazily in the breeze. Gray squirrels skipped nimbly on the limbs of tall oaks, the mellow yodel of darkies in the cotton field, the whistle of the bob white and the clarion honk of wild geese in their flight to the southern coast, came intermittently to his ears.

He saw his loved mother knitting contentedly by the cozy fireside. Now he was in the corn field, plowing old "Spot and Broad." Then—Kate, the sweetest picture of all in this rapidly moving panorama. How his heart ached as he thought of her as the wife of Ben Woods.

The spell was broken by a hand laid on his shoulder. He sat up, wide awake and staring. He had been asleep and dreaming. The captain was at his side, his piercing eyes looking accusingly into his own. "Is this the way you protect your camp and comrades?" he demanded. "You have been asleep on duty, jeopardizing not only yourself, but the lives of those who were trusting you."

Buck acknowledged that he was guilty of the charge and offered to stand guard the rest of the night to atone for the offence or to quit in disgrace and go away. The captain softened a little at this confession and said, "It is too late to mend the matter now. We need you and you need us, at least until we know that the Indians have gone. We will forgive you this time, but do not let it occur again. You were worn out with your long journey and we know it was hard for you to keep awake. You will be all right now, my boy, and I am

sure that you will yet make a good picket and scout. Go to camp and to sleep. Davis will take your place."

Buck was now too wide awake to sleep. At three o'clock in the morning the horses began to stamp the ground and snort in excitement or fear. The three men rose to their feet, guns in hand. The warning given by the horses was unmistakable. Something was wrong.

The low bark of a coyote was heard to the northward. This was answered at once by a similar sound from the west. The hunters all knew that these were signals which were being exchanged between the Indians. There could be no doubt now that the Indians were near and intended to steal their horses, even if they had to kill the hunters to do it. A man of this day may imagine just how he would feel and what he would do if he knew that he was about to be attacked by savages who show no quarter and know no pity. You would realize that you could not afford to surrender under any conditions whatever, for that would mean torture and death. How would you feel? I will tell you. Your first sensation is one of fear. The next is anger, then desperation. Having passed these three stages, if you are courageous, you are ready and eager to fight and slay your enemy.

By the dim moonlight, Buck saw an Indian in a crouching posture start across an opening toward the horses. When he had made half the distance, Davis fired at him. The Indians concealed in the thicket returned the fire. A bullet spat against the rock pen. The Indian who had started toward the horses hastily returned to his comrades. Silence again prevailed. The captain signaled Davis to come into camp. Turning to Buck, he said, "You might be led to believe that those Indians have given up the fight and gone. They have not, but it is just what they intend us to believe.

"They are hiding out there in the bushes expecting us to go there to investigate, then cut us off from the horses. I am so sure that this is their scheme that I'm going to plan against it. Davis and I will slip out toward the north, half circle back, and approach them from their rear. You remain here and fire into the thicket occasionally to hold their attention



and cause them to believe that all of us are still in camp."

"Now, young man, you said you were anxious to fight Indians and your chance has come more quickly than you expected. The next hour is likely to prove your pluck or expose your cowardice. How do you feel about it?"

"The arrangement suits me, captain," replied Buck. "When the battle is over, I will accept your verdict. This seems to be the opportunity for which I have been waiting. You can safely depend on me to carry out your orders." The Captain and Davis slipped away on their mission. About every two or three minutes, Buck fired into the thicket where the Indians were believed to be. No sound came from the thicket or elsewhere. It suddenly occurred to Buck that the way the captain had arranged, they would do the fighting, and leave him out. He wanted to be in it, so he decided to cease firing for a while to see if the Indians would venture out again where he could get a shot at them. Through the stillness came to Buck thoughts of the Custer massacre, the stealing of little Cynthia Ann Parker and the brutal murder of Shorty Brown, by the Indians. The more he thought about these fiendish outrages, the more angry he became and the more anxious to kill Indians.

With large clumps of cactus between them and the thicket in which the Indians were concealed, Bowers and Davis crept steadily forward. For some moments, they did not see or hear anything of the Indians. At length, they saw an Indian rise up in the low bushes. He was looking toward the camp, Bowers and Davis drew their revolvers and charged into the thicket, firing as they ran. The Indians were surprised by the sudden attack from their rear and ran swiftly from the thicket. As they came into an opening, Buck opened a rapid fire on them. He saw two Indians fall. One of them struggled to his feet and continued his flight, while the other was dragged away by his comrades. One bullet from an Indian's gun struck the barrel of Buck's gun and flattened. The Indians circled to the right and disappeared down the creek.

When daylight came, the captain scouted about for half an hour. When he returned, he reported that the Indians had

gone. They had left immediately after the last engagement. How did he know this? That was easy for an old woodsman. Traces of crawling insects in the Indian tracks in dusty places. Grass, which had been mashed down by the Indians in their flight, now partly straightened up and heavy dew on it. There are other signs that woodsmen read as infallible proof of such things.

There was blood on the trail and small pools of blood at places where the Indians had stopped to administer to their wounded. It was the captain's opinion that one Indian had been killed and two wounded. That there were not greater casualties was due to the fact that it had been too dark to shoot accurately. If the battle had been fought in daylight, it is probable that there would have been a different story to tell. Captain Bowers shook hands with Buck and pronounced him a first class scout. All felt reasonably safe again and their regular hunting schedule was taken up. During the weeks that followed many valuable hides and furs were obtained and sold periodically to the buyers at the trading posts. Buck's money belt steadily increased in weight and value.

## CHAPTER XLIX.

When the news that Buck Tyler had left the country, never to return, reached Woods, balm came to his troubled spirit. It brought relief from the strain and dread that he had suffered ever since the day of the tournament exhibition. Soon after he heard this good news, he went to the molasses mill to have a talk with Emmet. Old Jonah was there and told him that Mr. Graham had gone to haul a barrel of water, but would soon return.

"All right, Jonah," said Woods as a triumphant smile played about his lips. "And now what are you and King going to do for some one to back you in your schemes, since your outlaw friend, Buck, has sneaked out of the country? The cowardly pup became afraid that I would thrash him and vamoosed."

"Whut is you talkin about, white man?" Jonah responded. "I is tellin you dat Buck never snuck outen nothin, an ifen he wuz afeard uv you, how comes it dat you go away an hide fum him? How comes it dat he coch you in de collar at de Burton dance and tells you dat you is a pole-cat? I wuz dar at de time and seed him do it."

"I took that insult like any gentleman would have done, to prevent a dirty scene," replied Woods as his anger began to rise. "You did not know that I caused him to leave this country and am going to take his girl away from him, did you?"

"No sah," Jonah replied, "an I don't know it yit. I know's dat party innercent gal loves Buck an when all de truf comes out, an it will, Buck is sho gwine come back to her, an if I noes dat boy, and I sho does, yo hide won't hold shucks when he gits fru wid you."

Enraged by Jonah's declarations, Woods grabbed a stick of cordwood and was fixing to brain the old darky, when he saw

Emmet coming. He dropped the weapon, turned about, and said, "Glad to see you, Emmet. I have just been amusing myself by teasing and joking Jonah, but I find that he does not take a joke kindly. I have been away a few days attending to some important business which, by the way, proved to be successful. It has added considerably to my purse and now if I can win your sister Kate for my wife, my happiness will be complete. I hope you favor my suit and that you will do what you can in my favor. I know that she has entertained a girlish fancy for that fellow, Buck, but now that he is out of the way, I feel that I can win her."

"You have my permission to win her if you can, but I will exercise no undue influence in the matter. Kate knows her own mind and is quite determined in her purposes. I believe she suspects you of having had something to do with the influences that brought disgrace to Buck and caused her to throw him down."

"I thank you, Emmet," replied Woods, "Leave it to me. I can and will win her."

Woods left, happy. To possess Kate now seemed easy. Her sister Anna had been favorable to him all the time. Now Emmet would not object. It is a strange fact that when a coveted prize comes within easy reach of a man, he loses some of his desire to possess it; and Woods began to doubt the wisdom of trammeling himself with a wife, especially a poor one. He studied the matter seriously for some time and finally decided to induce Kate to take a long pleasure trip with him and have a royal time. If he was still pleased with her after that, he would marry her. Otherwise, he would send her home and go his own way untrammled. He would go to see her the next morning and arrange it. He had no doubt that Kate would go away with him. In his estimation, girls were all alike. A few compliments, a lot of flattery, fine clothes, money, and a good time, would buy them.

Early the next morning, while the Colonel was at breakfast, two strange men dismounted at the front gate and requested an interview with him. Colonel Tyler approached them slowly, reading their faces and watching their movements as

was the custom when meeting strangers in the country at that time. When he was near them, one of the men gave him the Clan sign and said, "My name is Moses Seale. I am Sheriff of Rapede Parish, Louisiana. My comrade here is Jake Jackson, and my deputy. We are looking for a man who, I understand, goes by the name of H. B. Woods here. Officers at your county seat directed us to you for information about him. We desire to keep our presence in the neighborhood a secret. Otherwise our man would make his escape. He outgeneraled all of us, three years ago, and got away.

"I am glad to meet you," replied the Colonel. "I have been suspicious of him ever since he came here. He has given me and mine a deal of trouble. Unsaddle and put your horses in the lot. Make yourselves at home, while I locate your man and arrange for the catch."

On the following morning, Anna went to spend the day with Mrs. Porter. Kate was at home, day-dreaming while she sewed, when she heard a gentle knock on the back door. She knew that white people never sought admittance at the rear door of a home in that section, so she naturally thought it was the washwoman who had come for the laundry. Laying her sewing to one side, she opened the door. To her amazement Woods, faultlessly attired, smiled in her face and said, "Good morning, Katie dear; pardon my sudden intrusion. I came this way because I feared some one might be looking and see me if I came in at the front door, and you know how people will sometimes gossip.

"I was so anxious to see you that I could stay away no longer. To me, you are more charming this morning than ever before. If your beauty is so peerless while you are yet in the rosebud state, what will it be when it reaches the class of the full blown rose? Irresistible, exquisite, unsurpassed, the essence of perfection and sweetness. Let me congratulate you on sending that fellow Buck out of the country. You and I can have a good time now, free from his interference. During my recent absence, I made a successful business deal and secured a lot more money. All of it that you can use, shall be yours if you will leave this dull country and go with me

on long pleasure trip to Galveston or some other nice place on the seashore. We will have a wonderful and happy time and we can get married in grand style whenever it suits our convenience."

Partly recovering from her surprise, Kate tried to close the door in his face, but Woods forced it wide open and walked into the room, saying, "I cannot live without you. I confess that I have stooped to some seemingly dark schemes to get rid of that worthless lover of yours, but it was all for your sake. I have wanted you ever since I first saw you. I swear that nothing shall come between us now. When shall we spirit away on our voyage of happiness?"

"How dare you force yourself on my presence and make such villainous proposals to me?" Kate demanded as she stepped back several paces. "Leave me. Get out of my sight at once." Undaunted, Woods caught her in his arms, forced her head back and kissed her on the lips. Kate screamed aloud as she struggled to free herself from his embrace.

At this moment, the front door was flung open with a crash. Colonel Tyler and two other men rushed into the room. The Colonel struck Woods on the head with his gun, and felled him to his knees. After assisting Kate into an adjoining room, he returned and found Woods leaning against the wall with his hands covering his eyes which were blinded by blood that had run down from the wound on his head. He was explaining to the two strangers how he and the young lady had been rehearsing a play and how the sudden appearance of strangers had frightened her into fainting.

"Yes, it was an interesting romance," replied one of the strangers in a deep resonant voice. "We were eavesdropping and heard the dialogue. Now that the romance is over, we'll put on the tragedy part. Ben Darnly! hold out your hands to receive these bracelets. They will always appear well on a thief."

"I cannot see you, but I know your voice, Mose Seale," Woods exclaimed in a trembling voice. So you have hounded me down at last."

"No, Darnly, as hard as I tried, I could never strike your

trail. A letter in Clan cipher code came to me. It described you minutely and asked for your record. There was nothing for me to do but come and get you as soon as I could find the time. The letter was signed by Buck Tyler. I had heard of him several times during the last four years and knew that he was on the square. You are under arrest on three proven charges—embezzlement, theft, and wife desertion. These charges are on record in Rapede Parish and my requisition papers have been granted.”

Calling the sheriff to one side, Woods in a whisper offered him two thousand dollars for a chance to escape.

“No, Darnly,” answered the sheriff, I cannot accept your offered bribe and it would do you no good if I did, for this old neighbor of yours would kill you before you got ten feet away.”

The Louisiana officers left with their prisoner that day, and no one in that section of Texas ever heard of Woods again.

Kate had suffered a nervous shock. She became so restless that Emmet hired old Jonah and his wife Julia to live in a cabin at the rear of the house, so that Kate would not be alone at any time. These sympathetic old darkies did all in their power to cheer and console her. In their simple honest way, they succeeded in a measure in interesting her. They helped her to partly forget the recent past and told her many stories of Buck as a boy hunter. Kate called for, and heard these stories so frequently that she learned to tell some of them in detail, herself.

King came over occasionally and joined Jonah and Julia in their efforts to make Kate cheerful. He was often called upon to tell the story of how he and Buck had fought and killed a large wild cat in a hollow log when they were small boys, and how they were caught in the flood waters and rode a log all night and found land the next morning.

Many an evening, Kate was made cheerful by the interesting stories told to her by her three loyal darky friends. She always felt a sense of security when they were with her. Jonah usually concluded the evening program with consoling words, such as: “Doan you worry no mo’, young mistis. You

is gwine ter find out yit dat Buck nevah wuz guilty of anything ceptin bad luck, and he is sho to come back some time to de little gal he foun in de woods."



## CHAPTER L.

Buck had great sport, hunting with his two congenial comrades. However, after several months, he became restless and wanted a change. Davis and the captain could not prevail on him to remain with them longer. The furs and pelts he had on hand made a pack, the weight of which was about all his two pack-horses could carry.

Early one morning, he bid his comrades goodby and rode away toward the east. He reached the trading post at Camp Colorado four days later, and sold his goods for a good price. He decided to rest his horses a few days and gather what news he could. It had been many months since he had heard from the settlements. While he was there, he met a cowboy by the name of Sam Smith who had rambled north from the San Antonio country. They took to each other from the first and threw in their lot together.

They soon found that they had many things in common. Confidentially, they told each other at least a part of their troubles. Sam had killed a Mexican and a white man in a dispute over stock water rights in the cattle range and had run away to scout around until his father could secure his freedom from the courts. Buck told of his hard experience in reconstruction troubles, but said nothing about what had driven him west.

One day, news was brought to the post by a trapper that a band of Indians were depredating in the country near the head waters of the Gim Ned River. They had killed two ranchmen and were stealing horses wherever they found them. Buck's encounter with Indians a few months before, had sharpened his desire for more of it. Sam was also on edge for a thrill of some kind. Within three days, they were on the scene of the recent Indian raid. The Indians, however, had already withdrawn in front of a force of cowboys who had re-

captured more than half of the stolen horses and killed two Indians. It was too late to overtake the combatants. At last reports, four days before, the cowboys were still in close pursuit of the Indians.

Buck and Sam decided to remain there until the pursuing squad returned, and hear their report. If by chance, more men were needed, they would be ready to go.

The pursuing bunch of cowboys returned and reported that they had lost the Indian trail in a rocky section near Double Mountains.

On learning that there were a few more ranches further North, Buck and Sam made one day's travel in that direction. At nightfall, they made camp on the bank of a small creek, in a grove of pecan trees. Buck was pleased with the country. He liked it for its bigness and wildness. Though the inhabitants of the West were few, their minds and hearts were as broad as their treeless plains. Still, at times, Buck became lonely. It had been nearly a year since he had left his home in the East and he had heard no news from there.

He had not written, and his people did not know where he was. It had been his ambition to make a small fortune, then happily surprise his people by calling them to a comfortable home in the golden West. He had not made the fortune yet, but he had made and saved enough to take care of them in comfort. He began to crave news from home. In mystic fancy, he saw the saintly face of his mother and the bowed form of his once stately father. He heard his younger brothers and sisters calling "Bud," their name for him. They might be needing his help. Some of them might even be dead.

After assisting Sam in fixing camp, he wrote a long letter to his mother. He met a ranchman the next day who was going to the town of Comanche, a hundred miles to the South-east, and gave him the letter, with the request that he mail it there. Realizing that it would take several weeks for the letter to reach its destination and an answer be returned, he decided to remain in this camp indefinitely. If he became tired of resting, he could pick up a job of cattle driving.

They had discovered a small ranch two miles up the creek,

and a larger one about one mile down and across the creek. It was from these that the boys intended to get milk, butter, and whatever else their commissary lacked. Sam went to the large ranch the following evening for milk and to get whatever old newspapers might be found there. They had not seen a newspaper for so long, that one four months old would contain news to them. Sam returned from the ranch a little before sundown, in a very happy mood. He wore a broader smile than Buck had ever seen on his face before. Now and then he laughed softly to himself, then, growing more hilarious, he gave unrestrained cowboy yells. Buck watched him in silence for a while, and believing that he recognised certain symptoms, he asked, "Where did you get it, Sam? You are drunk."

"Yes, ol' podner, I'm drunk, but I've had no whisky. I'm drunk on love. I met the loveliest girl at that ranch that ever curled hair. She is the prize heifer of all the herds. Man!—you ought to see her ride and hear her orate. She is a square shooter and a go-get-er. She doesn't cackle much, but she can tell more in fewer words than an elocuter. I managed to get her separated from the bunch, and right off, I asked her if she was married. She said 'no,' and before I could get in another word, she told me that she had loved and lost and was not aiming to hook up again, but I am a telling you, podner, that she is going to break that resolution or turn down the easiest chance she ever had."

"Better go slow, Sam," Buck cautioned. "I have seen some sure things fail in that line, and it hurts bad. Better let all of the heifers go free than to let a pet one get away with your brand on her."

"That's all right, Buck, but I's sure going to rope this one. In a vision or something, I have seen her lots of times before, but never in reality and alive until this evening. You may see and admire her, but nothing more. How she made her escape from a herd of angels and strayed out here, is more than I can understand." Sam was still declaiming when Buck fell asleep.

Between daylight and sunrise the next morning, Buck sud-

denly threw off the cover, sprang wildly to his feet, and looked strangely about him. Sam, awakened by this unusual performance, sat up, and through sleepy eyes gazed wonderingly at Buck.

"What is it?" he inquired. "Did you hear Indians?"

"No, hush," ordered Buck. Again, the sound that had startled Buck could be heard faintly in the distance. It came from the direction of the big ranch house. Buck cupped a hand behind his ear to catch the sound more distinctly. His eyes were bulging as he listened.

"What's the matter with you, Buck," Sam inquired. "You accused me of being drunk last night, and now here you go locoed over the howling of a pack of wolves before you are awake. Sober down and go back to sleep."

Buck had heard and recognised a voice. He would know it anywhere in the world. It was Maggie Parker, yodling. What sweet memories rushed back to him as those liquid notes vibrated in his ears. Happy times and matchless scenes of the blue jungles came flying back to him. He was about to tell Sam the whole story—then changed his mind. He would see and talk with Maggie first. It was his time to go to the ranch for milk. He was wide awake and there was a song in his heart. He hastily built a fire and prepared breakfast.

Playfully, he awakened Sam with a dash of cold water on his face and neck. "Stop that! you blathering, idiotic, Baptism-essential-to salvation Campbelite," shouted Sam. "You are still locoed." "Yes, Sam, but I am improving some. Breakfast is ready and as soon as I eat, I'm going to that ranch for milk."

"No, no, Buck! you were good enough to let me sleep while you prepared breakfast, so I will take your turn, going for milk. I don't mind it at all."

"It wouldn't be fair to put all of the running around on you," replied Buck. "Besides that, I want to see that ranch and the people there."

"No, I'll tell you what we'll do, Buck," Sam broke in. "We will wash the dishes, water the horses, and both of us will go."

"It's my time to go, and I am going alone," declared Buck. "I know what's ailing you. You can see that girl you were raving about, this afternoon. You don't want me present when you are talking to her nohow, do you?"

"No, I don't, I guess you are right about it, Buck, but don't you stay long. If you do, I will be right down there."

Buck shaved the month's growth of beard from his face, leaving only the long, dark brown mustache on his upper lip. No one had ever seen him appear like this and he felt sure that Maggie would not recognise him, at least not for a while. Then he rode from camp, leaving Sam restless and unhappy.

When within a quarter of a mile of the big ranch house, Buck saw Maggie on her horse, lariat swinging in the air, galloping swiftly after a yearling which was trying to escape toward the creek. Buck spurred his horse into a run, overtook the steer and roped it. Galloping up, Maggie exclaimed, "I thank you, stranger, for catching that rascal. It saved my horse a long run, because I intended to catch him before I quit." Buck raised his hat in answer to her greeting and their horses came to a halt, side by side. Both dismounted to adjust their saddle girths.

Buck pulled his hat-brim low and tried to disguise his voice, but Maggie became suddenly silent as she studied the features of the cowboy. Her arms relaxed and dropped slowly to her side. A rare light came into her eyes as she exclaimed in a whisper, "Buck." Pale and trembling, her knees gave way and she sat down upon the ground. Buck did not attempt to raise her to her feet, but sat down close, placed his arms around her, and rested her head on his shoulder.

"Yes, Maggie, it is I. I heard you yodling this morning. It was so far away that I heard it only faintly, but it was the sweetest sound I've heard since I left the East. Many a time in my lonely rambles in the West, I would have given all I had to hear again that mellow song from your throat."

Maggie had somewhat recovered from the shock and was removing Buck's arm from about her. Gazing intently upon him, she asked in her characteristic, rapid-fire fashion:

"Where is your wife, Buck?"

"When did you come West?"

"How long have you been out here?"

"Did your people come with you?"

"How did you find out where I was?"

When Buck assured her that he had no wife, Maggie exclaimed, "Oh, Buck, is that lovely girl dead?"

"No, Maggie, she is not dead; at least, she was not when I left that country a year ago. I have heard nothing from that country since. I know it will be hard for you to believe, but it is true. Kate threw me over. Here is the last message I received from her."

Buck took from his pocketbook, the worn and faded note given to him by Kate at the Burton dance. "I tried in every imaginable way to find out what it was she referred to in that note, but to no avail. She refused to talk to me. I wrote a note to her asking for an explanation. She never answered the note. As a last chance, my mother went to see her and begged for an explanation. Mother told me that Kate wept and treated her nicely, but refused to explain. I think she has married Ben Woods. When I was leaving the hall, after reading her note, she was smiling and dancing with Woods.

"She was my morning star. You were my evening star. One suddenly refused to shine for me. The other had carried its luster to a far away country, unknown to me." I could not endure the dark shadows that gathered around me any longer, so I lost myself in the heart of the West. You can now imagine my joy when I heard you yodling this morning."

Maggie had listened silently to all Buck said. When he ceased talking, tears gathered in her eyes as her trembling voice mumbled, "My good, brave old pal!—you have suffered too. For a long time after we came out here, I was sick with grief. I was dissatisfied and miserable. I longed for you and pined for the songbirds and the blue jungles. As time passed, I became a little better satisfied with our surroundings here, and a little more reconciled to my separation from you.

"My uncle provides us with the best that can be had in this country, and he has willed to us all of his lands and stock, the worth of which runs into many thousands of dollars.

I had about made up my mind to forget all of it if I could and help my uncle make another fortune. Then, last evening, there came another man, a he-man. He is handsome, brave and splendid. I soon saw that he had fallen in love with me on sight. I said to myself, I believe I could love this man. My second hero had arrived. I felt so well pleased, that the first thing I did after getting up this morning was to yodle my old curley song—it was the first time I had felt the impulse since I left our old home in the East.

“But I was disappointed because there was no ringing echo like there used to be in the blue jungles. Mother and my brothers came hurriedly out of the house, pleased at my cheerful mood. None but mother guessed the cause. She came to me and said, ‘He is an honest, manly looking gentleman, Maggie, and he is big and handsome, I like him.’

“Now, before all of this is a day old, my old pal comes to me. These things have come about so rapidly that I am bewildered. I scarcely know what to think, say or do. There is one thing that I am almost sure of. That is in regard to Kate Graham. Regardless of appearances, I believe she still loves you. I believe there has been some great mistake. I know the peculiarities of girls better than you do. I read that sweet girl through and through. She is not mercenary. She is not vacillating. I am confident that some awful scheme of your enemies is responsible for her conduct. Perhaps, before you were out of sight on your way from that country, she was craving to have you back, regardless of everything. That is just like a girl in love.

“I am going to ask you two more questions. When you answer them, I am going to make you a proposition. You will find that I am no longer the bashful girl you used to know. Do you still love me better than any girl in the world except Kate? If she is married, do you want me?”

Without hesitation, Buck answered yes to both questions, and added, “Since Kate has proven untrue to me and thrown me over without a cause, I think I should leave her entirely out of it.”

“Never mind about that, Buck. Unseen things may have

developed that would change appearances. We have always played fair and let's keep it up. Have you written to any one, back there?"

"No, not until yesterday," Buck replied. "I wrote a long letter to mother last evening and it will reach the post office at Comanche within a few days."

"It is well you did that, Buck; you should have written long ago. If your mother's letter in answer to yours confirms your belief that Kate has married Woods, I will marry you, one week from the day you receive the letter.

"If Kate has not married, you go back to her and I will marry the new man I met last evening. Do you agree to this?"

"Yes, Maggie, bless your honest soul, I do."

"Now, Buck, that is settled, but let's not forget that we must not show our fondness for each other in the presence of Mr. Sam Smith—he told me that was his name."

"You may depend on me, Maggie. I'll not forget. Sam is all man and a dear friend of mine. We have been together for some time. We are in camp together, a mile up the creek. I'll tell him that I am an old friend of the family. Sam is a noble fellow and would make you an ideal husband if he is fortunate enough to get you. I feel half ashamed of the conspiracy we have entered into against him,—but we can't help it, can we, Maggie?"

"No, we can't, Buck, and more than that, I believe he will be glad to get me in any way he can, because I am going to be honest with him."

Buck laughed heartily at the naivete and frankness of this unusual young woman. He leaned over to kiss her. "No, not now," objected Maggie. "They will all be yours if we marry. If we don't, they will all belong to Sam."

Time had flown more swiftly than they had realized. The sun was high in the east. It was nearly ten o'clock. They had been talking for more than two hours. The forgotten yearling, dragging the rope, had wandered back toward the ranch house. Mounting their horses hurriedly, they rode to the house, where they found Sam, who had been waiting an



hour. At first, he looked wrathfully upon Buck, but his good humor returned when Mrs. Parker and Maggie told him of their long acquaintance with Buck in the East where their families were neighbors.

Swift and impulsive at everything he undertook, Sam began courting Maggie without preliminaries. Before the week was out, he had told her about himself and his hopes. His father owned two ranches in the Rio Grande Valley. He was going to give one of them to Sam as soon as he got married. He told her that he had everything he wanted except her, and asked her to be his wife. Maggie promised to give him an answer within six weeks, and Sam, radiating optimism, believed it would be favorable.

## CHAPTER LI.

Colonel Tyler hired several negroes and placed them under King's directions to work the farm and look after the stock. Bennie W., the Colonel's younger son, was developing into a sturdy, manly boy and was a deal of help in the general management of the farm. The country was slowly returning to normal conditions and a degree of prosperity seemed in the offing.

The Tyler home had been improved, and many modern conveniences of that day added. There was an air of sadness, however, as members of the family gathered around the hearth in the evenings. They missed Buck. They had never ceased to think of him, and the evenings were the times for recalling his adventures, his hardships,—and, yes, his romance which had ended so unhappily. His long absence and silence led them sometimes to fear that he was dead. If he only knew of the changes that had taken place and the facts that had come to light after he had gone, he would be sure to return. But they had no knowledge of his whereabouts and no way to find him.

Possibly he had gone into old Mexico and cut the line of communication behind him. He had hinted at such a step the day before he left. They could only wait and hope.

King went to town one day to have some plow-points sharpened and to get the mail. After leaving the plow-points at the blacksmith's shop, he went to the post office and called for the mail. The postmaster handed out a newspaper and one letter. King could not read handwriting very well, but he had an intuition that the letter had come from Buck. Turning to the blacksmith who had also come for his mail, King said, "Please, Sah, read whuts on dis velop." The blacksmith wiped his glasses on his apron and read, "MRS. A. L. TYLER, Mustang, Texas."

"Now, Sah, please read what it sez un in de lef han corner."

Again the blacksmith read, FROM BUCK TYLER, CAMP COLORADO, TEXAS.

That was enough. King, with a broad grin on his face, mounted his mule and galloped away on the road toward home. When within a hundred yards of the house, he began shouting, "Letter from Buck, Letter from Buck."

All the members of the family gathered in a circle to hear the letter read and reread. Smiles were on every face. King, unable to restrain his joy, turned handsprings all over the yard. While the Colonel continued to read the letter to other Negroes of the place who had gathered in, The Queen hurried away to tell the good news to Kate. Kate saw her coming and met her almost half way. They wept for joy in each other's arms.

In her gentle voice, Mrs. Tyler said, "It was you that sent him away, and it is you that can bring him back. He loved his people, his friends, his country, and the great wild forests of Dixie dearly, but his greatest love was for you. I am going to write him this evening and get it off on tomorrow's mail. Will you write, too, and enclose your letter with mine?"

Kate was silent for a moment, apparently in deep thought. "No, I believe it would be better for me not to write," she said, at length. "From what you tell me, I understand that he did not mention me in his letter to you. He may not desire a letter from me. I must wait until I know he has forgiven me for the unpardonable injustice I have done him. Please say in your letter that Kate is waiting for him and his forgiveness. I cannot trust myself to write. I fear that I would break down and forsake all independence."

Far out in the West, round-up time had come. The Parker ranch, being short of men, Buck and Sam were offered employment. They gladly accepted and moved over to the Parker place. They spent the evenings happily with the Parker family. The old uncle sometimes entertained with thrilling stories of his earlier days on the Texas frontier. Maggie had learned a number of cowboy songs and sang them well. Towards the close of the evening's program, Buck al-

ways called for the curlew yodle, and Maggie never failed to respond.

In arranging the men on herd, Maggie influenced her uncle to place Buck on herd duty, from the noon to midnight shift, and Sam, from midnight to noon shift. This assignment gave each of the young gallants an opportunity to talk to Maggie without interference from the other.

After a lapse of four weeks, Buck secured a layoff from work and in company with two other cowboys, journeyed to the post office at Camp Colorado. They arrived there after one and one half days travel over the roadless country. Each of the boys entertained high hope of receiving news from home. They wore expectant smiles as they entered the large log house that served as a trading post and post office.

The postmaster, an old cripple cowboy, thumbed over the small batch of letters, handing one to each of Buck's comrades. Noticing the eager look on Buck's face, he repeated his inspection of the letters. Raising his eyes to Buck's, he shook his head. Buck could not conceal his bitter disappointment. One of the other boys, after reading his letter, let out three loud whoops and exclaimed, "Good-gosh, but I am happy. The three cases in court against me have been nol-prossed or something and throwed out of court. Whoop-pee! Listen here. Mary-Ann says she forgives me everything and if I will come back and settle down, she will marry me on next Christmas day. Yip! Yip! Yip! It's me for the home trail and I am settlin' down every step of the way."

Buck almost envied the boy his happiness. Injustice, hardships, disappointment and hard luck seemed to be his constant lot, and the gulf between him and all he loved best, ever widening. With bowed head, he was walking toward the door. "Hey, thar, young feller," the postmaster called. "If that letter you are a lockin for, is important, you shouldn't be in too big a hurry to go away. Thar haint been no mail brung in here in nearly a week, on account of the mail hack bein' robbed near Comanche. There was a mail hack due here yistidy, an moren likely it will be gitin in tonight or in the mornin. Your letter mout be in that mail."

"Thank you," answered Buck, "I will wait."

The boys that came with Buck left that evening for the ranch. Buck had told them that he intended to remain until the next mail came in if it took a week. They could not wait that long. Buck rode to the creek, about half a mile away, watered and staked his horse, and made his camp. After eating a cold lunch, he went to bed but not to sleep.

He was again thinking of Kate. For a while, he had gotten her partly off his mind, but after hearing Maggie's philosophy about it, hope had again taken hold of him. The possibility that Kate had not married Woods and still loved him, was some consolation. And yet, fate had uniformly been against him all along the way. Could it turn and work to his favor?

How hard he had tried to do what he believed was right—and how inexorable had been luck and fate in their alliance against him. Had the great God of whom his mother had taught him, closed his eyes to justice? No, he could not believe that—yet, if God was to be mindful of him, there must be a turn in the long dark trail, and soon. In spite of his incredulity and doubtings, his new born hope was gripping him. Kate was on his mind constantly. He found himself wishing that he had not made that agreement with Maggie, for he was beginning to believe that whatever he did, he would always love Kate.

A half moon shone softly against the clouds. In fancy, it looked like the bank of great forest trees near his old home. The howl of a wolf in the nearby valley, died away mournfully. The moon hid itself behind the maze of clouds. Silence—peace. He was breathing heavily. He slept.

The belated mail arrived early the next morning and it took old Crip a long time to get the unusual large batch of letters sorted and in place. Buck was first at the window and this time he was not disappointed, for he received a letter from his mother. He did not open it there. He wanted to be alone when he read it so no one could read the distress that would be written on his face if the letter contained bad news. Shoving the letter deep into his pocket, he rode a mile away into the prairie. Dismounting there, he staked his horse to

graze. Even then, he hesitated to open the letter, for fear that it brought ill tidings. He had been away from home so long and so many things might have transpired. If Kate had married Woods—he made up his mind definitely—he never would return, but induce his people to come to him.

If she had not married, he would visit his people, then return to the West and marry Maggie, if his conscience would let him. He had made enough money to provide for his people for some time to come and he could make more. He sat down in the shade of a mesquite tree, tore open the envelope and read.

Mustang Prairie, April 1, 1876.

My dear, dear boy:

We received your long expected letter, this morning. Every minute since it came has been a season of rejoicing. Many of our friends, including the darkies, have joined us in celebrating. King and old Jonah are wearing broader smiles than any that have appeared on their faces since you left home. Your letter is stained with tears of joy. Kate and Emmet are coming over this evening and we will read your letter all over again. Kate flatly rejected Woods' company and attentions the day you left.

A few weeks later, a sheriff from Louisiana came here, arrested Woods, and took him back to that state. He had robbed a quartermaster's store, in which he was a clerk, of four thousand dollars, and had run away with another man's wife, deserting his own wife and two children. It developed that May Castle, the beautiful lure, was the woman who eloped with him. Kate has been sad and dispirited ever since you left. The first time I have seen her smile in months, was this morning, when I told her of your letter. Poor child! She is a wonderful girl and loved you, my boy, and you only.

Not a week has passed since you left that she has not asked me if I had heard from you. It developed, some time after you left, that Woods had caused all of the misunderstanding and trouble between you and Kate. He dug up and resurrected some old court charges which had been made and

proven against you by lying Negroes and military officers, several years ago. Among these charges made against you, was that you abducted a Negro girl and forced her to live with you in the swamp when you were hiding from the soldiers.

Every one who heard of it at the time, knew that it was fabricated, made up and pushed through for no other purpose but to get you out of the way. Our lawyer, Judge Cooper, obtained an order from the Federal Court to have the false charges and testimony expunged from the record and secured papers, exonerating you. When Kate heard of this, she went to town and secured a copy of this order. She showed them to me and, between sobs of grief, told me of the great injustice she had done to you.

I see Kate coming this way now, and must go and meet her. Come home, my boy. All of us miss you so much that we cannot be truly happy again until you return to us.

Your loving Mother.

"Thank God," whispered Buck, with deep emotion. "Mother was right. God is just. He is still mindful of his children."

Buck had drunk so deeply of all of the good news that he was reeling with joy. He ran around in circles and turned hand-springs. He dealt terrific blows with his fists at imaginary forces that might attempt to prevent him from hitting the trail for home. He challenged to combat any and everything, form a wildcat to an Indian brave. He yearned to share the good news with someone or something. As no human was near, he walked to his faithful horse, placed his arms about his neck, and said,

"Old hoss, we are going back to home and happiness. At last, the storm clouds have broken away and the sunshine of peace is beaming. Treachery has been exposed, our enemies vanquished, and truth returned to its throne. Yes, old partner, we are going home, where you spent your colthood. We're going back to where the fairest flower that ever charmed the wild woods is waiting for me. You shall have all of the oats in the stack, but that peerless blossom is mine."

The horse ceased nipping grass and assumed a wise ex-

pression as though he understood all that his master was saying. Buck performed a few more contortions to give vent to an overgrowing energy. From a distance, a lone cowboy, observing Buck's peculiar capers, galloped up to learn what the trouble might be.

"What's ailin you, podner?" he asked. "Oh, I went crazy awhile ago and I am growing worse every minute," Buck replied, as he rolled his eyes, made another handspring and yelled, "Yip! Yip! Yip!—Hurrah for Dixie!"

"Gone bugs!" commented the cowboy, as he looked sadly at Buck for a moment and rode away.

Buck immediately began his return journey to the Parker ranch, arriving there at dark on the second day. As soon as he found a chance, he slipped his mother's letter into Maggie's hand. He then led Sam to one side and told him of his good news.

Maggie, after reading the letter, stepped out of the house and disappeared in the darkness. A few minutes later, the curlew yodle was resounding in greater volume and sweeter tone than ever before, and Buck knew from the richness and buoyancy of those liquid notes that happiness for Maggie, too, was complete. Mrs. Parker read the letter, heartily congratulated Buck on his good fortune, and added, "You richly deserve all of this, my boy, and much more."

All were up early the next morning to bid Buck goodby. He left a little before daylight. Maggie rode with him the first mile of his long journey. As day was breaking, they dismounted and there beneath the dimming stars, they said their adieux. A moment he held her in his arms, implanted a farewell kiss—then they were riding in opposite directions: Maggie, back to the ranch; and Buck, toward the East.

Though much of his road was over rough unfrequented trails, Buck covered the five hundred miles in thirteen days. He reached the old home neighborhood a little after dark. The evening was calm. A full moon shone from a cloudless sky, casting silvery sheen over field and forest. Each tree and other inanimate objects seemed to welcome him back. In the distance, he saw smoke curling lazily from the chimney



of the old home house. With a thrill, he recognised the barking of old Watch, his favorite coon-dog. His heart beat rapidly in anticipation of the happy, happy hours that were in store for him. How beautiful, how peaceful the community which had been so recently the scene of merciless war and bloodshed!

He had entered the yard of the old home, and already his mother, standing on the front steps, had recognised his form emerging from the moon-mellowed darkness, and rushed to meet him.

"Praise the Lord!" she said reverently as Buck clasped her in his arms. "He has always answered my prayers."

The Colonel was now pressing his hand warmly and saying, "My wild boy has developed into a worthy and noble man, of whom I am proud."

The joy of the children knew no bounds. King and Jonah hugged Buck and said, "Dis is de happiest day we has ever seed. Hit sho beats Christmas."

When Buck excused himself and entered his old room to shave and don his best clothes, the members of the family group smiled knowingly and said nothing.

Again, Buck had mounted his horse and was on the road that led to the Graham home. Would he find Kate at home? Had she changed much? Would her heart tell her that he was near? A light was shining from her window. He saw her through the glass, as she was seated at a small table facing the window. Yes, she had changed some. She had become even more beautiful. The slight expression of sadness in her eyes had added composure and dignity to her face. When he had seen her last, she had been a slim girl. Now, she was a fully developed young woman.

She was studying a sketch which lay on the table before her, and there was a smile on her half parted lips. As he drew closer to the window, he recognised the sketch. It was the one he had drawn more than two years before. Of course, his mother had given it to her.

Noiselessly, he walked up the front steps, tiptoed into the front hall, and began singing in a low tone,

Maxwelton's braes are bonnie,  
Wha' early fa' the——

Before he reached the end of the second line, two soft arms were encircling his neck and a dear, familiar voice, choked with emotion, was whispering, "Yes, Buck, she has been true."

THE END