

# MY LADY OF DOUBT

By Randall Parrish

We could see them quite clearly, as they topped the crest, the moonlight revealing men and horses so distinct, I could even guess at their uniforms. Those in advance rode slowly, four abreast, down into the black shadows, rolling in their saddles, voices murmuring, seemingly unconscious of any danger. It was easy to comprehend their state of mind. Delavan had been left alone for a week, permitted to sweep the countryside unmolested. He and his command had naturally grown careless, never suspecting their every move had been watched by keen-eyed scouts. Now, guarded by Grant's troop, they believed themselves sufficiently strong for any emergency; that no force the scattered enemy could gather would venture upon attack. By daylight they would be within sight of the Philadelphia outposts, and serenely confident in their numbers, the night march had therefore become a mere routine. I heard Farrell chuckle grimly to himself as he observed the careless approach of those advance riders.

They were the Queen's Rangers, the white facings of their coats conspicuous, their guns swung at the shoulder in reckless confidence. A slim young lieutenant appeared to be in command.

Ten wagons passed without a movement or sound from the men lying concealed almost within arm's reach of the unconscious guards. Farrell never stirred, and I scarcely ventured to breathe. Then there came a squadron of Rangers, an officer riding alone in front, the black shadow of another section of the wagon train looming over the ridge behind them. The horsemen passed us, the officer turning in his saddle with an order to close up their ranks. I recognized Grant's voice, and then, sharp as a blow, rang out Farrell's whistle at my very ear.

There was a leap of flame from both sides the road, lighting up that flash in the clay bank as though it was an inferno, the red and yellow glow cleaving the night asunder, with ear-splitting roar. I was on my feet, my rifle spitting, yet hardly conscious of any act, stunned by the suddenness of the reports, confused by those black figures leaping forward through the weird glare. I saw and heard, and yet it was all a confused medley, in which I bore active part while scarcely realising its significance. It was fierce hand-to-hand melee so swiftly fought as to be over with almost in a minute, and yet so desperate that the narrow roadway was strewn with bodies. Frightened horses whirled and ran; wagons were overturned; heaped against the high walls, Germans and British made one mad effort to extricate themselves; the advance guard came spurting back, pushing wildly into the rank, the boyish voice of their young lieutenant sounding above the uproar. But our men were between the two, a compact body, each horseman fighting independently, but knowing the game. I heard no word of command, no shout of direction from either Farrell or Duval, yet the ripped them asunder with sweeping rifle butts, and, almost before I could catch a second breath, the few who remained on their feet were helplessly trapped. Farrell saw it was all over, and his whistle sounded again, calling the uproar. Up to that moment he was beside me; with the echoing of the shrill blast he had disappeared.

It was Duval who emerged from the wreck of the train, demanding surrender.

"Who commands here?" he shouted. "Speak up quick."

There was hesitancy, and then out of the black mass huddled against the bank I recognized Grant's voice.

"I suppose I do; has any one seen Captain Delavan?"

"He fell at the first fire, sir," answered some one huskily.

Grant stepped forth into the moonlight, bareheaded, his sword in hand.

"Then I am the senior officer," he announced, his voice shaking slightly. "Who are you?"

"Camden minute men. Do you surrender?"

He took a long breath, glancing about at the dark shadows. Some one held a lighted torch, the red flame casting a sudden gleam over the surrounding faces. It was clear that further resistance was useless, yet Grant temporized.

"Are you in command?"

"No," said Duval; "but I represent the commander."

"I deal with the one responsible in this affair and demand terms. Who is your leader?"

Duval smiled, turning his head inquiringly.

"I don't think you have much choice," he commented dryly. "However, perhaps you are not too proud to talk to a regular who outranks you—present Major Lawrence, of the Continental Line."

Surprised as I was by being thus suddenly thrust forward into supreme authority, I as instantly understood

the purpose, and stepped to the front. Grant stared at my face in the gleam of the smoking torch, almost as though he looked upon a ghost.

"You!"

"Certainly, Captain. It is a pleasure to meet with you again, especially under such happy circumstances. But my men are becoming impatient. Do you surrender?"

"Under what terms?" he parleyed.

"None, but we are not savages. You will be treated as prisoners of war."

His hatred of me made him obstinate, but the utter helplessness of their position was too apparent to be ignored. A Hessian muttered something in German, and Grant dropped the point of his sword with an oath.

"Good," I said promptly. "Lieutenant, have your men disarm the prisoners."

There was no resistance, and the militiamen herded them against the bank, encircled by a heavy guard. Duval singled out the officers from among the others, and brought them forward to where I stood. There were but three—Grant and two Hessians. I looked at them keenly, recalling the slight figure of the young lieutenant with the boy's voice. Could the lad have been shot, or what had become of him?

"Are you three all that are left?" I questioned bluntly. "Who commanded the vanguard?"

The two Hessians looked at each other stupidly, and I asked the question again before Grant saw fit to reply. His manner was excessively insolent.

"That is more than I know. We joined after dark, and I did not meet Delavan's officers."

"He was at you call maybe a volunteer lieutenant," added one of the Germans brokenly. "At Mount Holly we met, yah, and from there he joined."

"Not one of Delavan's men then?"

"I think not; he was Light Dragon. I had the wagon guard—the first wagons—am—see him there. Mine Gott! he come pack vid his mens all right—shoot—his horse rear up; that was the last I see already."

"The lad got away, with three others, sir," broke in a new voice at my back. "They wheeled and rode through us, across the water. We thought the horse guard would get them over there, but I guess they didn't; anyhow there was no firing. The fellows must have turned in under the bank, and rode like hell."

Satisfied as to this incident and not altogether regretful that the boy had thus escaped, I held a short consultation with Duval, seeking explanation as to why the command had been so unceremoniously thrust upon me. A few words only were required to make the situation clear. Farrell's ability to injure and annoy the enemy largely depended on his leadership not being known. While taking part in every engagement, he always required his lieutenants to represent him in negotiations, so that up to this time, whatever the British might suspect, they had no positive proof that he was openly in arms against them. Duval, in turn taking advantage of my presence, had shifted the responsibility to my shoulders.

"But what do you people do with your prisoners?" I asked.

"Send 'em to the Continental lines when we can," he explained, "and if we can't then turn 'em loose. No use paroling 'em, as they consider us guerrillas. If I was you I'd run 'em back to the farm house across the creek, an' hold 'em there till we get rid of this stuff. Maybe it'll take twenty-four hours to hide it all, and burn the wagons. Then the boys can turn 'em loose; an' there's no harm done. I'd like to take that fellow Grant into our lines—he's a mean pillaging devil—but it's too big a risk; Bristol is about the nearest picket post, and the redcoats have got cavalry patrols all along in back of the river."

"But I cannot wait here," I answered, impatiently. "Farrell understood that I have important information for Washington, and only came with you tonight because you were following along my route. I've got to go on."

"That's all right; just give your orders, and we'll attend to the rest. What we want is for these lads to go back to Philadelphia saying they were attacked by a force of militia under command of an officer of the Continental line. That will give Clinton a scare, and turn suspicion away from us. Grant knows you, I understand, so he'll report the affair that way. You can be off within thirty minutes."

It was easy to grasp the point of view, and I saw no reason for refusing assistance. I gave the necessary orders, standing under the torchlight in full view, and waited while a squad of partisans rounded up the disarmed prisoners, and guarded them down the slope to the edge of the stream. Teams were doubled up, and several of the heavy wagons rumbled away into the darkness. Two, too badly injured to be repaired, were fired where they lay, the bright flames lighting

up the high banks on either side the road. I found a big black horse, with British arms on the bridle, and a pair of loaded pistols in the holsters, a fine-looking animal, and came back into the fire glow, determined to lose no more time. Duval had disappeared, but, as I stood there looking about for him to say good-bye, a young country fellow came up hurriedly from out the darkness.

"You're wanted down thar," he said, with the jerk of a thumb over his shoulder. "The Tory officer wants to see ye."

"What officer? Captain Grant?"

"I reckon that's the one," indifferently; "anyhow I was told to fetch ye down thar. Bannister sent me."

I went as he directed down the rutty road, my newly appropriated horse trailing along behind. Grant was pacing back and forth restlessly, but, as soon as I appeared within the fire radius, he came toward me.

"Can I see you alone?" he asked brusquely.

"If there is any reason for privacy, certainly," I answered in surprise. "What do you wish to say?"

"This is a matter strictly between us," evasively. "I prefer not to discuss it publicly here."

I had a suspicion of treachery, yet was not willing to exhibit any reluctance.

"Very good. Bannister," to the partisan in charge, "I want a word with Captain Grant, and will be responsible for his safe return."

The man looked after us doubtfully, yet permitted us to pass beyond the guard lines. There was a stump beside the ford, barely within the flicker of the distant fire, and there I stopped, leaning against my horse, and turned so as to look into the man's face.

"Well, Grant," I said, rather sternly. "We are alone now; what is it?"

He cleared his throat, evidently uncertain how best to express himself.

"Why did you ask so many questions about Delavan's lieutenant?" he began sullenly. "What were you trying to find out?"

### CHAPTER X. A Capture.

What was the matter with the fellow? Could he have sent for me merely to ask that question, insisting on privacy? There must surely be some hidden purpose behind this. Yet if so, there was no betrayal in the man's face. His eyes had an angry gleam in them, and his words were shot at me in deadly earnest.

"The lieutenant?" I repeated, not prepared for a direct reply. "Why, I hardly know—curiosity largely."

He stared at me in manifest unbelief.

"What do you expect to gain by lying?" he exclaimed sullenly. "You saw him, no doubt, or you would not have asked what you did."

"Certainly I saw him," more deeply puzzled than before at his insistence. "That was what aroused my interest. He seemed such a mere lad as he rode past, and later I heard his voice, the voice of a boy."

"Was that all?"

"All! What else could you suppose? It was dark, only a little gleam of moon revealed outlines. I couldn't distinguish the face, but when he failed to appear after the fight I remembered him, and was afraid he had been hurt. Now I want to know what you mean. Who was the lad?"

He had seated himself on the stump, and was leaning forward, his face hidden from the light of the fire.

"Well, go on then," he returned finally. "If that's all you saw of him it's all right."

"No, it's not all right," I insisted, aroused by his peculiar actions. "What is all this mystery about? You told me you didn't know the man."

"I said I hadn't seen him, that we joined Delavan after dark," he corrected sharply. "But you needn't try to interview me, Major Lawrence, stiffening with anger, 'for I haven't anything to say to a spy and leader of guerrillas."

"You requested this interview; however, if you are satisfied I am, and you can return to your men. Shall I call the guard?"

He hesitated a moment, but whatever it was which had first inspired



"If You Interfere in My Personal Affairs Again I Am Going to Kill You."

you escape from Philadelphia," he asked bluntly.

"That is entirely my affair. Why don't you ask the lady herself?"

"See here, damn you!" he burst out. "I haven't seen the lady. When I got back to the dining room she was gone, and then I was ordered out here. But you knew you were being sought after, and I cannot imagine who else told you."

"You do not exhibit very great faith in the lady—the daughter of a loyalist."

He drew a quick breath, suddenly aware that he had gone too far.

"It is your sneaking spy methods, not the girl. She is innocent enough, but I suspect you dragged the truth out of her. Now see here!" and his voice took on the tone of a bully. "You are in power just now, but you won't always be. You can't hold me prisoner; not with these ragamuffins. They'll turn us loose as soon as they loot those wagons. I know how they work in the Jerseys. But first I intend to tell you something it will be worth your while to remember. Claire Mortimer is going to be my wife—my wife. War is one thing, but I will interfere in my personal affairs again, I am going to kill you."

"Indeed," smilingly. "Is Mistress Mortimer aware of the honor you are according her?"

"She is aware of the engagement, if that is what you mean. It has been understood since our childhood."

"Oh, I see; a family arrangement. Well, Grant, this is all very interesting, but I am unable to conceive what I have to do with it. I met Mistress Mortimer by accident, and then was fortunate enough to dance with her once. 'Tis scarcely likely we shall ever meet again. The daughter of a colonel of Queen's Rangers is not apt to come again into contact with an officer of the Maryland Line. I don't know why you should single me out in this matter. I don't even know the lady's brother."

"Her brother?"

"Yes, the family reregade; the twin brother on Lee's staff."

I could not perceive the expression of the man's face, but he was a long while answering.

"Oh, yes. She told you about him?"

"It was mentioned. Would I know the boy from any resemblance to his sister?"

"Y—yes, at least I should suppose so. You must have become very intimate for her to have told you that. You see it—it is a family secret."

"Nothing for Tories to boast over, I should imagine. However, it came up naturally enough while we spoke of the sufferings of the American army during the winter. It is a sad thing the way this war has divided families, has Mistress Claire any Colonial sentiments?"

"How the devil do I know! She would not be likely to air them before me. I don't know what fool trick you played on her last night, but she's on the right side just the same."

"I think so, too."

His manner was so disagreeable that I instantly determined to have an end. I had more important work before me than quarreling with this fellow, and, somehow, his claimed intimacy with Mistress Mortimer grated upon me strangely.

"If that is all you requested an interview for, Captain Grant," I said coldly, "I'll trouble you to return to your men."

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