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Two Knaves Of Hearts

And the Result of Their Meeting

By ARNOLD HORTON

The soldier boy of 1861-65 was a very different personage from the white haired, wrinkled, tottering old man of the present day. Bob Meriden entered the Union army at eighteen and came out at twenty-two. When he was mustered into the service he was a rosy checked boy with a perpetual smile on his face. To look at him no one would have thought that he was going south to stand up to be shot at. Yet the only time when he looked serious was at being ordered north on recruiting service. He was afraid he would miss a fight.

But this was in the beginning of it. The enthusiastic young men of that period got quite enough of fighting before they were through with campaigning, and those who struggled with disease and wounds had a harder time still. But this story is of the earlier, reckless, devil may care period when the youngsters who went into the war felt that they were off on a picnic.

Bob Meriden was as full of the romance of war as any soldier in the northern army. He had read stories of spies and their doings and was especially ambitious to do secret service work. So he told his captain that if there was any call from headquarters for volunteers to go south for information to let him know. One day Bob was notified that such service was required, and if he cared to undertake it he was to report in person at headquarters. He lost no time in doing so, and the general after looking him over said to him:

"Can you talk like a southerner?"
"Reckon," was Bob's reply.
"Let me hear you say New York."
"Nien Yauk."

"I expect you'll get on in that respect. Have you ever done any secret service work?"
"No, general."
The general was silent for a few moments. He realized the dangers the boy was about to meet and hesitated to send him. He told Bob that he ran a considerable risk of being hanged and advised him not to undertake the job. But the young soldier begged to be permitted to go, and the general finally consented. Bob was to proceed south to the Confederate lines, note the positions and numbers of the troops and secure such other information as would be valuable to his commander.

That evening after dark the spy, dressed in a suit of "butternut" and a faded straw hat, presented a pass at the picket line for Abner Shock. He was permitted to go forth and after walking a few miles, in order that he might not be found near the Federal lines, went into bivouac in a wood.

In the morning he was awakened by the sun shining through the trees and, sitting up, looked about him. The birds were chirping in the trees, the air was balmy. Indeed, the scene was as peaceful as any the young man had ever experienced. It was difficult for him to realize that he was between two armies, whose business it was to slaughter each other, and that if he were known to be a Union soldier in disguise he would be swinging off from the limb of a tree.

Arising from his earthly bed, he made his way to the turnpike and walked southward. Coming to a farmhouse, he asked for a breakfast and received some corn pone and a cup of chicory in lieu of coffee. Being asked where he came from and where he was going, he said that the Yanks had destroyed his father's farm and he was going down to enlist in the Confederate army.

After breakfast, for which he paid in Yankee shillings of the period, he took to the road again. He had not gone far before he met a slip of a girl walking in the opposite direction. She was a country girl of the better class and quite pretty. Bob, who had seen nothing but men since he came to Virginia, was not minded to let this young creature go by without a word with her. She was carrying a basket on her arm containing eggs and butter, and Bob, by way of opening conversation, asked her if they were for sale. She replied that they were not, but he was at liberty to help himself. He had no use for either at present and declined. Then they sat down beside the road and began to chatter like magpies.

The girl, much to Bob's surprise, told him that she belonged to a Union family; that they were all being treated very badly and that she would like to go north to Harrisburg, where an aunt of hers was living. But she feared she would not be permitted to pass through the Union lines and wouldn't know how to travel if she were. Bob asked her where she lived, and she said her home lay within the Confederate lines not far below. She was taking the butter and eggs she carried to a house she pointed out. What she would do next she didn't succeed in making clear to Bob.

The upshot of the dialogue was that Bob changed his mind about enlisting in the Confederate army and told the girl that he would be back that way in a day or two and he thought he might help her on her way to her aunt in Harrisburg. To this she replied that

he might find her on her return and he might not.

Leaving her, Bob pursued his way down the road, thinking more of her than his mission. Just before coming to a depression in the road that would hide her from him he turned for a last look. She turned at the same moment, and they both smiled. Then Bob, seeing a cluster of white tents before him, began to remember what he was there for.

The next evening about dusk Ella Carneal, the girl Bob had met on his way south, looking out through a window, saw half a dozen Confederate troopers riding rapidly up the road. One of them left the others and, coming to the house, called. Ella opened the window, and he asked if she had seen anything of a young fellow in a butternut suit. She said she hadn't, and, riding on, he joined his comrades.

Some twenty minutes later, when it was quite dark without, she saw a face at the window. It was very pale and wore a frightened look. Moreover, it was the face of the young man in butternut she had met on the road the morning before.

Bob Meriden had got within the Confederate lines through a gap in the pickets, had gone about gathering information, but had excited suspicion. He had become aware of his danger and hid himself in a wood from whence he had seen the men who had suspected him riding rapidly on the road and felt sure they were after him. Finding a picket dozing on his post, Bob effected an exit and, skulking over wooded ground, had brought up at the house in question.

The two youngsters held a conference, and Bob told Ella that the Confederates had tried to force him to enlist in their cause, but he had succeeded in getting away from them. He did not dare remain in the house—he would skulk in the woods—but if the next morning she would meet him on the road within range of the Federal pickets he would see what he could do toward getting her north through the lines and sending her north to her aunt. She thankfully accepted his proposition, and Bob skulked away to hide from those seeking him.

It was about 10 o'clock in the morning that Bob, having passed through a cornfield, mounted a fence at a rise in the ground and looked about him. On the road he saw walking a figure that he judged to be Ella Carneal. Descending from his point of observation, he made toward her, and she waved her hand to him. He soon joined her, and they walked together toward the Union picket line.

Bob knew that at that time his commander, who was preparing for a movement, was very particular about allowing citizens in his camps. So, concluding that it would be necessary, in order to get his protege through and send her on her way north, that he should vouch for her, he told her that he would tell the general that he had found in her a cousin and instructed her as to the part she should play. She was very grateful to him for this, though she regretted that the deception should be necessary. On coming to the picket Bob asked the officer in command to inform the general of his coming and ask permission to bring another person to headquarters. The officer was directed to bring the two in at once.

Bob had gathered just the information his commander required. Ella remained outside the tent while Bob went in and reported. As soon as he had done so he informed the general of his meeting with his cousin and asked permission to send her north. The general was surprised at the coincidence and looked incredulous. But Bob assured him that the girl was an unsophisticated little thing, barely sixteen, and the commander gave his consent. He suggested, however, that one of his staff take the girl in charge.

Bob winced at this, but was forced to obey, and bade goodby to his little cousin with regret, promising that as soon as the war was over he would look her up.

That was the last that Bob saw of Ella Carneal till the next day, when he received an order to report in person at general headquarters. What was his astonishment to find his cousin there with a soldier on each side of her.

"In you two," said the general, "are a pair of knaves. You go south to do secret service work for me and bring back a 'cousin' to do secret service work for the enemy."

"What do you mean, general?" cried the astonished Bob.

"I suspected your 'cousin,' whose story was very flimsy, and gave her the run of our camps. But I set a watch upon her. She was taking down notes of our forces and making sketches of our defenses when she was interrupted in her work and brought to me."

"You don't mean it, general!" exclaimed Bob.

"According to the rules of war, it is my duty to order a drumhead court martial and hang her."

"Great heavens!"
"There was an impressive silence, which was broken by the general. 'The information you brought me is very valuable. What reward do you ask for getting it?'"

Bob took the hint and said eagerly, "I ask a pardon for this little girl."
"That let's me out," replied the general. "It is my duty to hang her, but since you claim her life as your reward for a service in which you risked the death that is due her she is pardoned. When the information she has acquired shall have become useless she shall be permitted to go where she likes."

After the war Captain Robert Meriden looked up his "cousin," though he did not go to Harrisburg to find her. He married her in Virginia, and they were for years known as the two spies.

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