

No Patriot There

By RICHARD SALE

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In blind terror, the boy saw Booth stare him straight in the eyes, raise a carbine to his shoulder . . .

(From an old engraving)

Out of the darkest night of American history comes this story of two boys and a dog whom the Nation will never know—and whom the Nation will never forget

DOWN in the hollow where the black earth was damp and succulent, where the slimy water of the swamp to the north penetrated as far as it could physically, and then sent on its spirit in the high putrid stink which was born in the bogs, Stumbledown had treed a possum.

At any rate, it sounded as if he had. The hound's wail of delight came up the

slope toward the Port Royal road like the eerie cry of a lonely banshee. The dog had a sad sort of voice. He never yelped when he treed anything: just sat back and howled his heart out mournfully as if he had sat down to mark the place of a lost bone or a found corpse.

There was something essentially Russian about him, although the briefest glance would have shown that no austere wolfhound blood had ever mingled with his pure mongrel strain. Back through his lineage, there was no corruption except that which had gave him life, uncontaminated by superior strains.

On the hill behind the hollow, the two

boys sat, poking at a small fire which they had built behind the twin oaks just off the highway. Jasper Benson, the older of the two, a gangling sort of boy with big ears and buck teeth, said, more elated than sarcastic, "Lawd in a barr'l, jest lissen to thet tail-wagger go! I do declar', Tassle, thet dawg is th' noisiest tail-waggin' cuss this side o' the Potomac."

Tassle Whitcomb, a year younger, better-looking, and vaguely white beneath his copper coat of freckles, said briefly, "Ain't so." And he poked a sharpened stick into the black hide of a potato which lay in the fire atop the bed of coals.

Jasper Benson grinned. "Ain't so? Shucks, Tassle, yo' got eahs, ain't you? Why, thet ole dawg is bein' heerd from hyar to Fust Manassas."

"Ain't so that he's a tail-wagger," Tassle said tersely, "He's a good dog. Ain't many dogs could scare up a possum that quick. We no more than got the spuds in the fire before he let go."

"Let go? Thet walkin' bandwagon didn't let go. He just went off, lak a firecrack'r."

"Well," Tassle said defensively, "what would you expect? Want him to sing *Dixie* for you? Want him to find a possum and come back and get us and then go back to the possum? He's just telling us that's he's got one treed."

"He's tellin' us all right. God res' ole Jack, he's tellin' us. Fo' all we know, he cud be tellin' us theah's devils and spooks in th' hollow, he cud be tellin' us he was sittin' on a skeleton down chonder theah. Lawd, Tass, you got t'admit no dawg ever made them kind o' sounds fer jest treein' a possum. Thet dawg—well glory—"

Tassle Whitcomb rose slowly to his feet and stared down into the black-dark reaches of the hollow. "Does seem funny. He's making a lot of noise for just one possum." He stooped down and picked up his small rifle and tucked it under his arm. "Let's go see."

"Maybe a b'ar," Jasp said. "Pick yo'self a good tree when we cum down theah. What about th' spuds heah?"

"Ain't half-done yet," Tassle said, pushing back the long blond cowlick which hung over his face to give him a mane. "We'll be back here before they ever burn."

THEY left the fire, banking it with more wood; and they went off into the thick darkness, striding down the mild slope of the hill into the misty hollow where the sound of Stumblebum lurked weirdly. The Virginia earth grew soft beneath their naked toes and presently they were on a level and moving toward the howling dog warily. Jasp Benson stopped, and Tassle, missing the soft sound of Jasp's feet upon the earth, stopped too. "Come on," he said impatiently. "You scared, Jasp?"

"I jest was thinkin'," replied Jasp slowly. "Yo' don't reckon thet crazy dawg o' your'n is treed a Yankee soljer?"

Tassle considered it. It was a thought. "Don't think so. What would Yankees be doing up here in this stretch of the woods? They're all down around Richmond. What difference would it make? The war's over. Lee surrendered more'n a week gone now. Supposing it was a Yank?"

"He cud hart us," said Jasp. "Lawd, he cud shoot'n th' knees off'n us if'n he hadda mind."

"I've got a gun here," said Tassle. "You know I can shoot as good as any Yankee. But that ain't no Yank. That's a possum. The war's over, Jasp, and we might as well get used to it. There ain't no more Confederacy, says my mom, and we got to get used to it. It's just one country now like it was before. My mom says we got to forget all about fighting and hating and get to be friends again."

"Friends with Yanks?" Jasp said darkly. "And them bumpin' down mah pap and unk? Not me."

"Your pap and unk done downed plenty of Yankees before they pushed up daisies," Tassle said quietly. "It was give and take, says my mom, and now it's over. If she says so, it oughta mean something. I'm

the last man Whitcomb she's got left . . . Light a torch and let's go on. You got a match."

Jasp had brought the makings, and he ignited the faggot, tipped with dry grass and twigs which had been sopped in kerosene, and then held the torch aloft, and they went on. "Lawd," he murmured, "yo' speak th' truth theah. Five men Whitcombs, and yo' th' last one. All th' rest o' them daid. Can't git ust to it, Tassle, jest can't. Twin Oaks ain't ever goin' t'be th' same."

"It ain't that," Tassle said soberly.

"I 'member when I was a kid," Jasp said, "Mah pap, he usta point at yo' pap, and he'd say, 'Jasp,' he'd say, 'theah goes Marse John Whitcomb, th' fines' southern gen'leman in Twin Oaks.' Yo' pap was *some* folks, Tassle. Mah pap 'n' me, I guess we jest trash."

Tassel nodded, accepting the fact. "Sure you were. Just trash. You didn't go to school. Why, you even talk like trash, Jasp. I had to go to Liberty School at Port Royal, and I couldn't ever go possum hunting like you did with your father. I used to think that being trash wasn't so bad."

They walked on. Stumbledown had settled himself into a low, ghostly howl now, not exerting himself too much. They were closer. They could hear him distinctly.

"If'n th' war's over and they ain't no mo' Confed'racy," Jasp said suddenly, "I reckon Jeff Davis, he ain't pres'dent no mo'."

"Abe Lincoln is president again," Tassle said. "He's president of the whole dang shooting match now."

"Black Republican!" Jasp growled under his breath. "Black damn radical!"

Tassle stopped walking instantly. "Jasp, you're just plain ignorant. You sure are. You know what my father said when he went to war. He said the only reason he couldn't fight for the North was because he loved Virginia more. Just like General Lee said to the State Assembly. But my father said Abe Lincoln was right just

the same, right in keeping a union. Two countries here would both be weak, said my pap, and one country would be able to lick the world if need be."

"Tassle," said Jasp darkly, "yo' go tawkin' like a nigger-lovin' Yankee, yo' do."

"Why, shucks," Tassle replied heatedly, "Abe Lincoln went and freed the slaves in '61, and everybody thought that was something. My own pap had freed his own slaves before the war ever started . . . Jasp, look ahead there!"

THEY peered through the misty gloom, Jasper Benson holding the torch out ahead of him. They saw a yellow figure. "Stumbledown!" Tassle cried, raising his gun for any eventuality. They came in closer.

The lopsided yellow dog, with great sad eyes and ears that hung to his chest, heard them come but did not look at them. He was on his haunches with his muzzle pointed at a bigger bulk beyond him.

"Yah!" Jasp Benson snapped. "Tole yo' it wasn't no possum!"

They hesitated, attempting to make out the bulk, a little afraid to come much closer. It dawned on them, finally, that Stumbledown, who was not exactly fearless and intrepid, was standing by without anything more than the hackles raised down the length of his spine to the tip of his tail. So the two boys trod in closer, pushing the torch out ahead of them and smoking the way.

In the clearing, beyond Stumbledown, there were horses. Two of them. They lay on their sides, a heavy brown horse and a roan. They were both dead. That was why Stumbledown howled his heart out. They had both been shot in the head and there was blood from the wounds which raised the dog's hair on his back. Tassle and Jasp went closer, poking the torch down. The brown horse was blind in one eye.

"Lawd," Jasp whispered. "Glo'y!"

Tassle, overcoming a violent sense of repugnance, reached down and touched a

haunch. "Golly," he said. "Warm!"

"This heah blood," said Jasp hollowly, "it's red, not black. Dawgone, Tass, these heah beasts ain't been daid a coupla hours!"

Tassle pointed at the inscription behind the nub of the saddle. It read, *John Fletcher, Liveryman, Washington, D. C.* "From Washington!" he said. "They came all the way from Washington. Why was they shot?"

"Ain't Army hoses," Jasp said. "Thet's a fack. Musta come by th' Port 'Baccy road an' crost th' P'tomac by th' ferry at Pope's Crick. Looka heah, Tass, looka right heah!"

Tassle joined him. Jasp held the smouldering torch close to the earth. In the soft dirt, they saw a hole. Four feet away, heading southwest, there was another hole. Beyond that, another. They followed these holes for fifty feet, then stopped warily.

"Crutch made those holes," Tassle said.

"Ahuh," said Jasp Benson. "And them holes is headin' down th' road t' Mr. Garrett's farm."

"Want to track 'em down?" Tassle asked, not wanting to himself, but putting Jasp in the position of showing fear first.

"Reckon not," Jasp Benson said. He shivered as Stumbledown howled again. Tassle turned and yelped at the dog who fell to the ground as if stricken, and then remained silent.

"If you ask me," Tassle Whitcomb suddenly said, "I think there's something funny going on, and that it's dangerous, and that you and me had better get out of here as quick as we can and get home and keep our mouths shut about the whole thing."

Jasp nodded, then added, "Yo' don't think we oughta tell no one, Tass? No one a-tall?"

"No. If my ma heard about it and thought something was happening out here in the night, she'd never let me go possum hunting again."

"Ahuh," Jasper Benson nodded. "L-let's—let's—" He jerked his head toward the slope, toward the road, toward Twin Oaks

and home, and in moments, the three were scurrying back up that dark hill—the two boys and the ill-proportioned dog—making such haste that they forgot both the fire on the summit, and the spuds on the embers.

The spuds were charred throughout before the unattended fire finally died past midnight.

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THE following morning, there was mail. At the Whitcomb home, that is; for Jasper Benson had never had but one letter in his life, and if he had had more he would not have been able to read them. When Jasp received news of his father's death at Lookout Mountain, that one epistle in his experience, Preacher Daniels had to read it to him.

Not so Tassle Whitcomb. He could read pretty well. When he went down to Mr. Robinson's general store which was also the Twin Oaks post office, Mr. Robinson had mail for the house; and besides that, bands of women from the village had gathered in the store and were engaging in horrified conversation. Later Tass was to remember their horror, not their satisfaction.

There was a letter from Mrs. Whitcomb's sister in Atlanta, full of news of privation and General Sherman; and there was a newspaper from Richmond, the *Whig*, dated April 17. It had taken several days to come seventy-two miles north, despite the fact that since Lee's surrender travel between Richmond and Washington was supposedly open, clear, and free of the necessity of passports, at Lincoln's own order.

There was also a copy of the Petersburg *Express* of the same date.

When Mrs. Whitcomb finished the letter from Tassle's aunt in Georgia, she wiped a quiet tear from one eye, brought on by allusions in the missive to her husband, who had died at Sharpsburg; and she opened the Richmond *Whig* to see the war news. They heard so little in Twin

Oaks that was founded in fact; mostly sharp and scurrilous whisperings and rumors which never proved themselves. In March of that same year, four weeks before the surrender at Appomattox, rumor in Twin Oaks had had it that Grant was suing for peace after his frightful losses in the Wilderness campaign. So you couldn't believe what you heard in Twin Oaks.

Mrs. Whitcomb read through the front page of the paper silently, while Tassle waited to hear the news. He saw his mother's soft face harden with stupefaction and quick repugnance. "No!" she cried softly. "Oh my God, no! Now we are truly finished!"

She slumped back into her chair, letting the paper drop into her lap. Tassle reached out and took it and spread it before his eyes. There it was. Beneath the state seal of Virginia with its motto *Sic Semper Tyrannis*, was the news. A black headline—

ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT LINCOLN!

And then the intelligence below,

The heaviest blow which has ever fallen upon the people of the South has descended. Abraham Lincoln, the President of the United States, has been assassinated! The decease of the Chief Magistrate of the nation, at any period, is an event which profoundly affects the public mind, but the time, manner, and circumstances of President Lincoln's death . . .

ATTEMPTED MURDER OF SECRETARY SEWARD AND SONS

Dispatches From Secretary Stanton

Tassle Whitcomb devoured the words—Ford's Theater, Abraham Lincoln, the shot, the madman who sprang to the stage, the cries from the audience, "Booth! Wilkes Booth!", the confusion . . . "Ma!" he cried suddenly, "Ma! What does it mean? Is it true?"

Mrs. Whitcomb dabbed at her eyes and took the newspaper back again. She

searched it. She found the words she had seen before, after the surrender of Lee: "The publication of the *Whig* is resumed with the consent of the military authorities. The proprietor has had a conference with the Military Governor, who has assented to the publication of the paper on conditions which will be cheerfully and faithfully complied with . . ." That made it true enough. The *Whig* was under the thumb of the Federal Army.

To make certain, Mrs. Whitcomb opened her other newspaper, the Petersburg *Express*. There too, on the third page, the confirmation. She read,

PAINFUL RUMOR

. . . The assassination . . . is said to have occurred on Friday night last at 40 minutes past 10 o'clock. The version which seemed to gain most credence is, that while the President was retiring from Ford's Theatre, he was fired upon from a crowd . . . At the time of this writing, we have no means of ascertaining the truth . . .

"It's true, John," she told her son. His name was John after his father. "It's the truth. He's dead. Shot down by this Booth . . ." She shivered. "It means the end of us, the end of the South."

Tassle didn't understand. "Why do you say that, mom?"

"Because," she replied, "our mercy has been destroyed. What can we hope for now except the blackest reprisals? Would you expect mercy from that beast Stanton. or from those Congressional savages whom Stevens leads? Reprisals, son, terrible reprisals! They'll make a military territory of the South unless Andrew Johnson fights them and he won't dare, he won't dare—"

IT WAS not exactly over Tassle's head, but it was too political to hold his interest. He had often heard his mother speak in the same vein: the mercy of Lincoln who was their rock, despite the mutterings of the hard-bitten oldsters of Twin Oaks about the black Republican.

And oddly, it had tempered him into mild defenses of Lincoln when Jasp Ben-

son started cussing the president. Jasp, annoyed by one such defense, even accused Tassle of being a Yankee lover.

"Ain't so," Tassle had said. "You wouldn't want any Yank to go shooting Jeff Davis in the back, would you? That ain't proper warfare, nor fair fighting. Well, it works the other way around too."

So Tassle didn't want politics and talk of reprisals and of Union congressmen or Vice-president Johnson whose name he was hearing for the first time. Tassle wanted the sanguinary viewpoint; and presently, down Main Street, he searched out Jasp Benson and got it.

"All ovuh town," Jasp said. "I got the story right. Jed Gantry, he jest cum back from Washin'ton by th' Port Tobacco road, th' back door. He was in Washin'ton when it happ'ned. He tole me everythin'. This man, John Wilkes Booth, he shot Abe Lincoln in th' head and then he leapt on the stage and tripped er somethin' and he shouted somethin' they couldn't make out and then he run fer it. Lincoln, he went daid th' next mornin', and this Booth, he got away clean."

"He got away?" Tassle said. "How in glory could he get away after shooting the President of the United States?"

"Dunno," Jasp said. "But they ain't ketched 'im yet."

"But how could he get away? They musta closed every road from Washington as soon as it happened!"

"Jed Gantry says they was talk thet this Booth, he bust his laig when he fell onter th' stage! A bust laig too, and he got away."

"Golly," Tassle breathed, "how could he get away with all them roads closed?"

"Mebbe," said Jasp, "mebbe they fergot to close th' Port 'Baccy road. Lawd, Tass, yo' know th' goin's ons 'bout thet road. 'Fore the war was ovuh, yo' cudn't tell who yo' was goin' t'meet in th' way o' spies. I heerd Jed Gantry say oncet it was th' back door t' Washin'ton and Richmond. Fed spies and Reb spies usin' it alla time. Mebbe this Booth, he got away clean and

cum south—mebbe by Pope's Crick."

"Only one?" Tassle said thoughtfully. "Only this one Booth?"

"Ahuh. He was an acktor," said Jasp.

"An actor!" Tassle grunted derisively. "A crazy actor! A soldier would never have done a thing like that."

"Soljers got honor," Jasp said.

"We got honor too," Tassle said tersely. "My father said a Virginian had more honor than anyone in the world."

Jasp was fired with the thought. "Honor, honor, thet's what we's jest full o', Tass. Know what we oughta do? We oughta ketch thet Booth and fry 'im in a bonfire."

"What would you do if we really caught him?"

"Why," Jasp said, "I'd shoot 'im fulla holes, and hamstring 'im and burn his foot and—" He paused and shivered. "Lawd, Tass, I'd be skeered."

Tassle didn't look scared though. His face was thoughtful. "Those horses, dead. There were two of them. Not one. I was thinking maybe this Booth had shot his horse to hide it in the woods, and then gone on afoot. But two horses—"

"Well, mebbe there was some one with 'im."

"That crutch-mark—"

"Lawd God yea! Th' crutch-mark! And th' man what shot th' black Republican—he bust his laig—"

Tassle and Jasp Benson stared at each other, wide-eyed at their own wealth of evidence, trembling at the possibilities which such facts portended. Both were suddenly apprehensive and afraid. They wanted to go, but it took nerve. They gulped. "I bet," Tassle said, "you're afraid to go follow those crutch marks."

"Who, me?" Jasp said. "Not me."

And so, by jockeying half-hearted taunts at each other, they finally placed themselves in advanced positions from which neither could retreat with dignity, and they were thus compelled to whistle up Stumbledown and make the trek out the highway south toward the slope above Garrett's farm.

But this, really, was what they had wanted in the first place, having needed some moral force to back up their wary curiosity.

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BY DAY, the slope and the low ground in the hollow did not look ghostly at all. The jagged strata of low mist had disappeared in the heat of the morning, and although the sunlight could not penetrate much in the hollow—directly that is—there was plenty of light, and they soon came, in some high trepidation, upon the carcasses of the two dead horses.

Here the boys planned to halt and waste some time getting up more nerve to follow the indentations of the crutch which had passed there; but Stumbledown put his ludicrous tail between his yellow-haired legs and slunk off toward the Garrett land, plainly showing that he would have none of the spot where death had overtaken the mounts.

After that, it was up to Tassle Whitcomb and Jasp Benson to follow the dog. Stumbledown made no pretense of following a spoor. Tass knew that the dog was not much good at scent. Even hunting possum, Stumbledown would usually run across a possum by pure accident and then set up a bellow to warn his master. It was never a case of scenting the beasts.

And the dog now followed the crutch-marks only because they themselves followed the most open route out of the thick woods. It was an animal trail which led south and west toward Mr. Garrett's place, where they could see golden sunlight beyond the fringe of forest. Stumbledown, uneasy in the dankness of the woods, wanted some of that sun.

Behind him, Tassle and Jasp followed the crutch marks. On one soft spot of black earth, they found four footprints.

"Ahuh," Jasp, said. "Ahuh."

"You see?" Tassle said in a low hushed voice. "Two of 'em."

As they reached the edge of the woods, Stumbledown growled ominously and

Tassle grabbed the yellow dog by the collar and held him. Stumbledown was no bird dog, but he was pointing none the less, his usually limp tail extended behind him like a ramrod. He was pointing the barn which lay across the freshening meadow. Garrett's barn.

The boys both knew that barn. They had been in it often with young Bob Garrett. It was full of old furniture. It had one entrance, the front door; but it had not been built too accurately, and the walls were full of broad cracks so that you could easily see inside. Still in the woods, Tassle and Jasp crouched and eyed it. Every now and then there was a movement past one of the cracks.

"In theah," Jasp said. "Some one."

"Yes," Tassle nodded. "Over left, one sitting down, the other one keeps pacing."

"Take a close look?" Jasp said.

Tassle shook his head. "Might get caught. We'd better not, Jasp."

Jasp was older and he felt a little more confident. "Reckon I cud angul up to thet theah barn and have me a good see-to," he said slowly. "Angul up like a worm on muh belly. Dare me?"

Tassle thought it was dangerous, but his curiosity got the better of him. "Dare you."

Jasp took a long breath and then began to wriggle through the grass toward the barn, taking advantage of every little niche and hollow in the ground. He did remarkably well, and reached the rear of the barn in something under ten minutes—unsuspected and undetected.

He lay very still for a long time, then took a look, and finally came back. He made the whole trip safely but was panting when he pulled up in the woods, and his face was a little white.

"They're in theah all right," he rasped. "Two o' 'em. This Booth, he's theah, sittin' on a floor. Got a crutch. Left laig all busted, gotta splint on it. Lawd, he's heeled too. Got a dagger, got a pistol, got a carbine and he touchin' all three. Little sorta man with a black *mustache*. Other man, he got a mustache too, but he's

skeered. He got a pistol. This Booth, he called t'other man Herold. Dave Herold. Whew!"

"Let's go," Tassle said. "Let's go home quick. This ain't any of our business, Jasp, honest it really ain't."

They suppressed Stumbledown who was fearless enough as regarded the inhabitants of the old barn on Garrett's land, and they retreated through the woods up to the slope, and back to Twin Oaks on the pike.

BY MID-AFTERNOON the news was around that there were Federal soldiers in the vicinity. When Mrs. Whitcomb heard it, she kept Tassle indoors, under threat of violence to his person. "I don't want my son out running around with Union cavalry in the streets. It's a dangerous time to be abroad, John, do you understand me?"

"Jasp—"

"I don't care about Jasp Benson. You're staying in the house. It's a searching party, and they're looking for the man who killed Mr. Lincoln. They're apt to be heated and liable to do something terrible, and you couldn't blame them. They're mad, and the innocent are apt to suffer as much as Mr. J. Wilkes Booth when they catch him. And they'll catch him."

"Yes, Ma," Tassle said. "But if Jasp comes over, can't he come in and play with me?"

"He may do that, if he's clean."

Jasp was not clean when he showed up, but he managed to get in. He had awful important things to tell Tassle, and when the boys had gained their wanted privacy Jasp unburdened himself. "Tass," he whispered, "didja know theah was a reward out'n for this Booth and this Herold?"

"How much?" Tassle said.

"Twenty thousand dollars in hard money. Not Rebel paper. Hard Union money. That's a lot, ain't it?"

"It sounds like an awful lot."

"Lawd, Tass, jest think of it! You 'n me knowin' wheah them skonks is hidin' and twenty thousand dollars waitin'."

"A dagger, a pistol, and a carbine, you mean," Tassle said sourly. "Best thing we ought to do is tell the soldiers and let them go up and catch those men."

"And then we'd lose all theah hard money," Jasp said, horrified. "Golly, Tass, yo' ma is rich, but I never had no decent money. Seems like this is a real chancet fo' some."

"It's a chance to get shot in the head and killed," Tassle said. "Why those men would cut you into little pieces, Jasp, if they knew you was onto them."

"Not if'n I had me a gun."

"You don't have a gun."

"If'n yo' could lend me your'n, I'd walk right inter the barn and tell 'em to grab air or I'd right pulverize 'em, and I'd walk 'em back inter town a mite richer fo' th' trouble. Come on, Tass, come on. We cud do anythin' with money like thet."

"No, sir," Tassle said. "Not me."

"Ain't skeered, are yo'?"

"My ma," Tassle said firmly, "says that I can't go out of the house on account of the Union soldiers around town. And that's all."

Jasp looked crestfallen. "I'd go muh-self if'n yo'd lend me yo' rifle and Stumbledown."

"Take them if you want," Tassle said, "but I think you're silly to try it. You'll get in trouble."

Jasper Benson pondered this, but the gleam of gold decided him. "If'n I wasn't back by sundown with yo' gun," he said slowly, "wouldja raise up'n them theah Yank soljers t'come a'ter me, Tass?"

"All right," said Tassle dubiously. "But I think you sure are crazy to try and do a thing like that."

"Yo' won' tell no one? Or yo' word."

"On my word."

"Give me th' gun then."

And the last Tassle Whitcomb saw of him, he was going down Main Street south toward Garrett's farm with the rifle stuck down his trouser leg to hide it, and Stumbledown lurking by his dusty bare heels.

Jasp never came back at sundown.

iv

AT EIGHT P.M., Tassle Whitcomb was frantic. The street, now dark, showed no sign of his friend, gave out no sound of those bare feet clumping along in the dirt. Stumbledown's bark, full and lazy, was missing. No sign of him either. And sundown was two hours old.

Tassle had pleaded in vain with his mother. He could not, of course, tell her the truth; so he had asked to possum-hunt. Mrs. Whitcomb said, in horror, "Possum-hunt on a night when the hills are filled with vengeful searching soldiers? You might be mistaken for—" She shuddered and cast off the terrible thought. "No, absolutely not. You're to go to bed and not another word, do you hear me, Son?"

"Yes, I hear you," he said, and retired upstairs.

But when, at eight, the night failed to disgorge the bony body of Jasp which it had swallowed alive, Tassle knew that he had to disobey his mother and act as a man should act. He had the consolation of knowing that his father would have agreed with him; women were different.

Into the study of Lieutenant Colonel John Whitcomb, Army of Virginia, deceased, Tassle stole quietly. In the desk there, preserved as his father had left it the day he went to war with the other gallant men who followed Lee, Tassle found the pistol. Loaded, it was a formidable weapon. To Tass, who had never fired such a gun, it looked big, and he wondered vaguely at the power of its recoil.

Also in the desk, he found his father's field glasses, which he strung around his shoulder. The gun he slipped into his blouse. "Effects" they had called these things when they were delivered home to his mother. To this equipment, he added a handful of three-inch lucifers; and then, holding his breath, he opened his window and went down the galvanized iron drain-pipe which descended to the ground from the roof.

... Tassle found Stumbledown twenty minutes later. He did not go the long way by the slope and hollow, but he headed directly across the fields from Twin Oaks toward Garrett's farm, thinking there might be Federal cavalry on the road. It was the night of April 26; Abraham Lincoln had been cold for eleven days. It was dark and pleasant.

Tassle reached the open meadow and he could see the tobacco shed across from him, but he was looking at it from a side now, instead of from the rear where he and Jasp had seen it in the afternoon.

Tass shivered. He was afraid and he knew it. But Jasp was in there, Jasp was. He'd been warned, he'd been told, and now he was in trouble. Twenty thousand dollars' worth of trouble. Tassle wondered vaguely if there really was a reward and if it were really that amount. He, too, was wary of Twin Oaks' rumors which seldom smelled the truth. He took a deep breath of night air into himself, and started across the meadow.

Fifty yards from the house, he tripped over Stumbledown.

Stumbledown was dead. Tassle saw that when he struck one of the lucifers he had brought along, shielding its glare from the shed with his coat. There was a bullet-wound across Stumbledown's spine. He had not died at once, for Tassle could see the trail of blood which led away from the shed for a hundred feet before the ball paralyzed the dog and forced him to drop there in his tracks and expire.

Tassle did not feel grief for a moment; he was too stunned. Then when full realization crept through him, when he felt the cold firm rigor of death in the yellow dog's body, tears broke from the dikes of his eyes and he wept quietly and completely, unabashed.

He imagined what had happened: Stumbledown running to the shed, growling and barking, and one of the two men firing a single shot. He harassed his mind with pictures of the pain and torture which the animal had borne—none actually, since the bullet had paralyzed his nerve centers

—and when his grief had dissipated, intense smouldering anger set in.

He suddenly rose and was off across the meadow boldly and daringly, his father's big pistol swinging recklessly in his right hand. Jasp's in there, he thought; Jasp's in there and by the beard of Lee and the beard of Jackson and the beard of Beauregard, if he's got one, I'm going to get him out!

And if Jasp is dead, they'll die, both of them.

He strode up to the barn, swaggering soundlessly, and at a crack he went on his hands and knees and peered in.

He saw them, the man with the crutch and high forehead, and the other man pacing to and fro with a gun in his hand. There was a kerosene lamp burning. It smelled. There was no sign of Jasper Benson.

Tassle looked beyond the piled furniture into the small loft on one side of the barn. It came to him that Jasp had been murdered and stuck up in the loft by the man who could still walk—Herold, his name would be. The other, Booth, with the dagger in his belt, had a bad leg. His face was white and drawn and he seemed to be in pain.

And staring, Tass knew what his father would have said: "No patriot there, son. He struck no blow for the South. Only one mad act for himself, to please his ego, thinking to become ageless in the pages of history for the killing of a tyrant when he himself was the tyrant . . ."

"Pap," Tassle breathed, as if in pain. "Oh, Pap . . ."

HE DID not raise the pistol. Jasp might be alive. Up in the loft, bound and gagged, but breathing still. Alive. He didn't want to kill anybody. I'm only a boy, he thought, as if his mother might have prompted him: a little boy.

He stole around behind the barn and looked up at the second story where the loft door was. No second story really; but there was an opening up there, even

in this small shed. He picked the holes and protruding knots and he climbed until he reached the gap and then he wriggled in.

No sign of Jasp here either, no corpse of Jasp or breathing Jasp. And just below him, the two of them, armed and tense and murderous. Tassle hardly breathed. Get out, *get out*, his mind hammered. He turned to go, and stopped.

It was midnight. Midnight of the 26th of April, 1865. And all around the shed, he saw the shadows creeping, the Union soldiers surrounding the shed. He was trapped with those men. He was trapped with the murderers of Lincoln.

He wanted to scream out; but his throat was dry and tough and he was terrified. He stared down at the two men below him. He could have spit on them. Presently the door shook with hammering and a voice cried out in terrible tones that the place was surrounded. Tassle shuddered.

Then he saw young William Garrett come in. Will Garrett had been in the Confederate cavalry and was now paroled. He heard Garrett attempt to persuade the men to surrender their arms and come out.

He saw Booth rise, the lamplight glistening on his high forehead. "Not I," he said tragically. "I'll stay and shoot it out with them! They won't take me alive!"

But Herold gave in; Herold decided to surrender. Tassle watched, saw Herold go out with Garrett. The front door closed. It was unlocked. And then Tass smelled smoke. He stuck his head out the opening and saw fire. They were firing the shed to force Booth out, and already the dry old wood of the barn, in the rear, caught and began to cough flames toward the roof.

Tassle moved in terror and rattled furniture. Booth heard him. Booth started for the door, limping, a cripple, and he turned his head up to stare at Tassle Whitcomb straight in the eyes. In blind terror, Tassle saw Booth raise a carbine, throwing it to his shoulder.

And then, somehow, the gun of Lieutenant Colonel John Whitcomb exploded; and when the smoke cleared from before his eyes Tassle saw the cripple prostrate

on the floor. Garrett was kneeling over him, and a man they called Lieutenant Baker was beside him; and soldiers were all swarming in the front door, some calling, "Conger got him!" and others yelling, "It was Boston Corbett, not Conger!"

They carried Booth out. Tassle could see the man was still breathing. In awe at the horror of his own deed he forgot the fire, until presently its very crackling brought him to his senses. The soldiers were going up to the Garrett house, carrying J. Wilkes Booth. The flames were mounting the rear wall.

Tassle jumped out into the good green earth, above the flames. It was a big jump for him; it stung his soles, but did little else. And in a moment he found himself running hard for the hollow and the slope, and the rendezvous of the dead horses. He had hardly entered the woods when he heard his name called, sharply. "Tass! Tass!"

It was Jasp Benson, on the ground, still holding the gun.

Tassle wailed, "I thought you were dead—"

"Lawd, Tass, am 'bout daid. Stumble-down, he got shot, and me runnin' like a woodcock, I bust muh ankle. Twist'd it. It's all swoll. Guess it's fulla sprain. I couldn' walk back muhself but if'n yo' help me, I can go."

Tassle gulped. "Jasp—" he said hollowly, "I—killed him! I shot him dead! Oh Lord! With my pap's gun! Here! Oh, Jasp!"

Jasp bit his mouth. "Ain't fo' me to tell on yo'," he said quickly. "You 'n' me, we'll keep it a secret. Ain't fo' me to say. Yo' cum out to save me, I ain't never gonna say on yo'. Yo' my friend, Tass, yo' are."

"If mom ever knows—"

"Till th' day I die," Jasp said solemnly, "I ain't the one t' say on yo', Tass, so help me, Lawd. They ain't no one 'd ever believe yo' anyhow. They wouldn't believe our sayso in a thousand yeahs!"

They stumbled home in the dark, shiver-

ing and petrified; and behind them, they left the strangest question of the times: who killed the man at Garrett's farm?

"

HISTORY credits the killing of Booth to Sergeant Boston Corbett. And then history doubts its own credence by saying that it might have been some one else, or that Booth might have shot himself.

For the thing which history cannot understand is written in these words among its pages: *The bullet that killed the man in the barn entered his neck on the right side and, taking an oblique downward course at an angle of about twenty degrees, penetrated three vertebrae and passed out the left side.* This, from the records of the Smithsonian Institute, in Washington.

Then if the bullet ranged downward at twenty degrees, how else could Booth have been shot except from above? And how then could a soldier on his own level have fired the shot which killed him?

History cannot understand this, and rightly.

The man who could give the answer, unfortunately, died the morning of the 27th on the Garrett porch; as the sun was crossing the footbridge of the East.

Being boys, Tassle and Jasp did not keep to their sacred words not to disclose their secret ever; but Jasp was wise when he said they would not be believed. They weren't, of course. And as he grew older and wiser, Tassle found it prudent to be still, for there were dark and powerful men in that tragic era who did not want the truth of any of that strange affair brought into the light.

So history, blind to a frightened boy, a yellow dog, and the moral fibre which binds a strength of adolescent friendship, will go down through the ages, confused, tripped up in the very facts which give it its name, never quite understanding how very simple explanations can be when evidence is most compound.

WOMEN of

CLIMBER

SHE MEASURED HER ACHIEVEMENTS IN ALTITUDE AND PHYSICAL ENDURANCE AMID ICE AND SNOW. SHE HAS BEEN FAMOUS FOR 30 YEARS AS THE WOMAN WHO CLIMBED MOUNT HUASCARAL IN PERU — THE HIGHEST POINT EVER REACHED BY ANY PERSON OF EITHER SEX IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE! THE GREATEST CLIMBER, MAN OR WOMAN, IN THE AMERICAS.

SHE ALSO CLIMBED THE MATTERHORN OF SWITZERLAND, AND SCALED MT. KODOPUA IN PERU, WHEN SHE WAS 60!

SHE CLIMBED ORIZABA AND POPocatePETL, THE MEXICAN VOLCANOS, AND MOUNT SORATA IN BOLIVIA. — AND, BECAUSE OF THE UNRELIABILITY OF THE INDIAN GUIDES, SHE MADE MOST OF HER ASCENTS IN SOUTH AMERICA ALONE.

WHEN THE NEW YORK SCHOOL TEACHER FIRST STARTED THE SPORT, A MAN TOLD HER, "WHY DON'T YOU GO BACK WHERE YOU BELONG?" LATER HE WROTE A BOOK ABOUT HER.

AS SHE LOOKED HALE AND HEARTY AT 84! (UPPER LEFT FROM A PICTURE OF 30 YEARS AGO.) (DIED 1935)

MISS ANNIE S. PECK

SHE TOOK UP AVIATION AT 60 AND FLEW OVER MOST OF THE PEAKS SHE HAD CLIMBED. AT 68 SHE FLEW OVER THE ANDES AND TRAVELED 14,000 MILES AROUND SOUTH AMERICA!

HER WORST ACCIDENT HAPPENED IN A NEW YORK STREET CAR. SHE BROKE 3 RIBS! ANNIE PECK RECEIVED THOUSANDS OF AWARDS. THE LIMA GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY NAMED ONE OF THE PEAKS OF HUASCARAL, "GUMBRE ANA PECK."

A True Story in Pictures Every Week