

Castlemon Harry

Frank Before Vicksburg. The Gun-Boat Series



Harry Castlemon

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The Gun-Boat Series**

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CHAPTER I Home Again

After all the tragic adventures which Frank Nelson had passed through, since entering the service of his country, which we have attempted to describe in the preceding volume of this series, he found himself surrounded by his relatives and friends, petted and fêted, enjoying all the comforts of his old and well-beloved home. Only those who have been in similar circumstances can imagine how pleasant that quiet little cottage seemed to Frank, after the scenes of danger through which he had passed. He looked back to the memorable struggle between the lines; the scene in the turret during the first day's fight at Fort Pemberton; the privations he had undergone while confined in the prison at Shreveport; his almost miraculous escape; and they seemed to him like a dream. All his sufferings were forgotten in the joy he felt at finding himself once more at home. But sorrow was mingled with his joy when he looked upon the weeds which his mother wore, and when he saw the look of sadness which had taken the place of her once happy smile. She seemed ten years older than she looked on that pleasant morning, just fifteen months before, when, standing in the door, she had strained her son to her bosom, and uttered those words which had rung in Frank's ears whenever he felt himself about to give away to his feelings of terror:

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"Good-by, my son; I may never see you again, but I hope I shall never hear that you shrank from your duty."

Frank shuddered when he thought how intense must have been the suffering that could work so great a change. But now that he was safe at home again, there was no cause but for rejoicing. His presence there afforded abundant proof that he had *not* been shot while attempting to run the guards at Shreveport, as had been reported.

And how great must have been the joy which that mother felt at beholding him once more! Although he did not move about the house in his accustomed noisy, boyish way, and although his cheek had been paled by his recent sickness, from which he had not yet wholly recovered, he was still the same lively, generous Frank whom she had so freely given up to the service of his country.

During the short time that they had been separated, he had been placed in situations where his courage and determination had been severely tested, and had come safely through, never forgetting his mother's advice; and that mother could not suppress the emotions of pride that arose in her heart, for she knew that her son had done his duty.

Numerous were the questions that were asked and answered, on both sides. Frank was obliged to relate, over and over again, the story of his capture and escape, until Aunt Hannah thrust her head into the room, with the announcement that supper was ready.

When the meal was finished, Frank removed his trunk into his study. Every thing there was just as he left it: the fore-and-aft schooner, and the box inclosing the scene at sea, still stood upon the bureau; his sporting cabinet hung on the frame at the foot of the bed; the little clock on the mantel-piece ticked as musically as in days of yore; and the limb of the rose-bush that covered his window flapped against the house just as it did the night when it was broken off by the storm.

After he had taken a fond, lingering look at each familiar object, he went into the museum, accompanied by his mother and sister, while Brave ran on before. Julia opened the door, and there stood the wild-cat, just as he looked when the young naturalist had encountered him in the woods. Frank remembered how the cold sweat had started out from every pore in his body when he first found himself face to face with this "ugly customer," and he could not help smiling when he thought how terrified he was. As he walked slowly around the museum, examining all the specimens, as though he had never seen them before, he thought over the little history of each. There was the buck that he and Archie had killed in the lake, when they lost their guns, and the latter had wished they "had never seen the deer." Then came the owl, which Frank had shot on that rainy morning when Archie had felt so certain of his prize. Then there was the white buck, which the boys had rescued from the wolves only to have him killed by a panther. Next came the moose with which Frank had struggled so desperately in the woods, and from which he had been rescued by the trapper and his dog. The skin of the bear, which he had trapped, and followed to the cave, and that of the panther that killed the white buck, still hung on a nail behind the door, where he had left them after his return from the woods.

After examining every thing to his satisfaction, he went into the shanty behind the museum, where he kept his pets. The raccoons, which had become so tame that Julia allowed them to run about, started away at his approach; but the squirrels and otter recognized him at once; and while one ran down into his pockets in search for nuts, the other came toward him, uttering a faint whine, and looked up as if expecting the piece of cracker which Frank, in former days, had always taken especial care to provide for him. While Frank was caressing the little animal, the king-birds and crow flew into the shanty. The former were now five in number, the old birds having raised a nestful of young ones, which were no less efficient in driving every bird from the orchard, or less lenient to the crow, than their parents. The old king-birds lit on Frank's shoulders, while Daw seemed to prefer his master's uniform cap, and was about to take possession of it, when his enemies straightway commenced a fight, and the poor crow, after a desperate resistance, was driven from the shanty.

Perhaps the reader would like to know what has become of the young moose and the cubs which Frank captured during his visit at the trapper's cabin. Well, they have good quarters, and are well provided for at Uncle Mike's, the same who assisted the young naturalist on the morning when we saw him trying to get his scow up to his work-shop. The moose has about an acre of pasture allowed him. He is as tame and gentle as ever, never attempting to escape. Uncle Mike has put this entirely out of his power, for he is surrounded by a ten-rail fence. The animal more than pays for his keeping, and many a load of wood has he drawn up to Mike's door for the use of his family.

The cubs, which are considerably larger than when we last saw them, are a source of a great deal of annoyance to the honest Irishman. They are still as playful as ever, and amuse themselves all day long in turning somersaults and wrestling with each other; but Mike has learned to "stand from under." He can generally defend himself against the attacks of one of the cubs, but the other

is always ready to lend assistance, and the Irishman is invariably worsted. He keeps them confined in a building that once served as a smoke-house; and not daring to trust himself within reach of their paws, he gives them their food through the window.

It was dark before Frank had seen and heard enough to satisfy him to return to the cottage. The evening was spent in listening to his stories of gun-boat life on the Mississippi, and it was midnight before he retired to his room. The Newfoundlander, which had been close at his master's side ever since he returned, scarcely leaving him for a moment, followed him into his study, and took possession of the rug before the door. After winding up the clock that stood on the mantel, and setting the alarm, Frank put out the light, and tumbled into bed. Although he was pretty well tired-out, he did not hesitate a moment to answer the summons of the little bell that rang at four o'clock, but was out on the floor almost before the notes of the alarm had ceased. In a few moments he was dressed; and taking his fish-pole and basket, which hung on the rack at the foot of the bed, accompanied by Brave, set out with the intention of paying a visit to the lake in the swamp, which had been the scene of the fight with the buck.

As he walked along up the road, the associations connected with each locality were recalled to his mind. Here was the place where the black fox, which had so long held possession of Reynard's Island, had crossed the creek with Sport – "the dog that had never lost a fox" – following close on his trail. There was the tree leaning out over the creek, behind which Archie had crept for concealment when in pursuit of the canvas-backs; and a little further on was the bridge which they had crossed on that rainy morning that the geese had taken refuge in the swamp.

Frank feasted his eyes on each familiar object as he walked along, until he arrived at the end of the road, where stood Uncle Mike's rustic cottage. As he approached, that individual appeared at the door, shaded his eyes with his hand, gazed at our hero for a moment, and then sprang out, and greeted him with —

"Arrah, Master Frank! is this you, me boy?"

"Yes, Uncle Mike, it's I," answered Frank, extending his hand to the man, who shook it heartily, while tears of genuine joy rolled down his cheeks. "I'm back again, safe and sound."

"It's me ownsilf that's glad to see you," said Mike. "I heered you was kilt intirely by the rebels; bad luck to the likes o' them. But come with me, Master Frank; ye's been fightin' rebels, but I've been fighting them varmints ye ketched in the woods."

The Irishman led the way to the building in which the cubs were confined, and opened the blind which protected the window, to allow Frank to look in. He could scarcely recognize in the large, shaggy forms that were tumbling about over the floor, the small, weak cubs which he had carried for twenty miles in the pocket of his overcoat.

As soon as the window was opened, they raised themselves on their haunches, and endeavored to reach Uncle Mike's red-flannel cap, an article he had worn ever since Frank could remember.

"Aisy, aisy, there, you blackguards!" exclaimed Mike, endeavoring to ward off the blows which the cubs aimed at him. "Can't yees be aisy, I say? That's the way they always do, Master Frank; me old cap seems to give 'em a deal of throuble."

After amusing himself for some time in watching the motions of the clumsy animals, Frank followed Uncle Mike to the pen in which the moose was kept. He had grown finely, was nearly as large as a horse, and his head was furnished with a pair of wide-spreading antlers, the sight of which made Frank shudder, and recall to mind that desperate fight in the woods, and his narrow escape from death. The moose was very gentle, and allowed his young master to lead him about the yard, and would come at his call as readily as a dog.

After seeing the animal "shown off" to his best advantages, Frank got into Uncle Mike's skiff, and pulled up the creek toward the lake. Half an hour's rowing brought him to the point behind which he and his cousin had captured the eider-ducks, and where they had first caught sight of the

buck. After making his skiff fast to a tree on the bank, he rigged his pole, baited his hook, and dropped it into the water. Almost instantly a sudden jerk showed him that the "old perch-hole" had still plenty of occupants, and in a moment more a fish lay floundering in the bottom of the boat.

We need not say that Frank enjoyed himself hugely during the hour and a half that he remained in the lake. The fish bit voraciously, and the sport was exciting, especially as it had been so long since Frank had had an opportunity to engage in his favorite recreation. But his conscience would not allow him to "wantonly waste the good things of God," and, when he had caught enough for his breakfast, he unfastened his skiff and pulled toward home.

Frank spent the forenoon in recounting some of his adventures to his mother and Julia, of which they seemed never to grow weary. When Aunt Hannah announced that dinner was ready, he lingered for a moment on the portico to watch the movements of a flock of ducks, which, in company with the old ones, the same that he and Archie had captured in the lake, were swimming about in the creek in front of the house; but, as he was about to follow his mother into the dining-room, he heard a loud scream, which seemed to come from above him, and looked up just in time to see a bald eagle swoop down upon the ducks. The old ones uttered their notes of alarm, and, rising from the water, flew over the cottage toward the barn, while the ducklings darted under the leaves of the lilies. But one was too late; for, as the eagle arose in the air, he bore off his prize.

Frank immediately ran into the house for his gun, determined that the life of the eagle should pay for that of the duck; but on his return he found that the robber was already being severely punished for the mischief he had done. Daw and the king-birds, which seemed to have an idea that something unusual was going on, had attacked him with a fury that Frank had never before witnessed. The eagle was flying, zigzag, through the air, but was met at every point by his tormentors. Frank, who dared not fire for fear of wounding his pets, ran down the walk, sprang over the fence, and awaited the issue of the fight, hoping that the eagle would be compelled to take refuge in one of the trees that grew on the bank of the creek. Nor was he mistaken; for the robber, finding that he could not escape his enemies, settled down on a limb but a short distance off, and, after deliberately folding his wings, snapped his beak, as if defying them to keep up the contest. The king-birds seated themselves on the branches above his head, and commenced their angry twittering, and Daw joined in with a loud "caw, caw."

This seemed to be the first intimation that the king-birds had received of his presence, for they straightway flew at him, and Daw, although he had lent effective assistance in fighting the eagle, did not stop to resist, but beat a hasty retreat toward the cottage. This seemed a favorable moment for the eagle; he leaped from his perch, and was flying off with his booty, when the report of Frank's gun brought him to the ground. The young naturalist shouldered his prize, and was starting toward the house, when a voice called out:

"Halloo, there! At your old tricks again so soon?"

Frank looked up, and saw Harry Butler coming toward him. Neither had dreamed of the presence of the other in the village, and the cordial manner in which the two friends greeted each other proved that their long separation had not lessened their affection. But Frank noticed at once that his friend was greatly changed. He looked haggard and careworn; he was no longer the wild, impetuous Harry; he had grown more sedate; and his face, which had once beamed with a smile for every one, now wore a look of sorrow, for which Frank could not account. It is true that he noticed that Harry carried his arm in a sling, but he knew that it was not bodily suffering that had caused that look of sadness.

"Harry, what is the matter with you?" was his first question. "You look completely worn out."

"So I am," was the answer. "Let us sit down on this log, and I'll tell you all about it. I've often been here to visit your folks," he continued, "never expecting to see you again, as I learned that you had been captured, and afterward shot, while trying to escape. You say I look worn out; so would you if your only brother was a prisoner in the hands of the rebels, held as a hostage, and

every moment expecting to be hung. George is in that situation, and I look upon his death, not only as a possible, but a very probable thing. It has been a hard task for me to convince myself that, if I should live to return home after the war, I should be alone, as I certainly thought I should be when I heard that you had been shot, and that George was not much better off. I had made up my mind to pass my furlough in the house, for I didn't want to have any one near me; but, now that you are here, I want to visit all our old haunts again. Let us take a walk in the woods. Bring your dinner along with you; I haven't had mine yet."

In accordance with Harry's suggestion, a basket was filled with eatables, and the boys bent their steps through the orchard toward the meadow that lay between the cottage and the woods. As they walked along, Frank related some of the interesting incidents of his life in the service, and Harry finally began to recover his usual spirits. At length they reached the cabin in the woods, that had been the scene of the camp on the day of the raccoon hunt, and here they stopped to rest and eat their dinner.

CHAPTER II

Harry on a Scout

When they had finished every thing in the basket, the boys threw themselves on the grass in front of the cabin, and Harry said: "I shall never forget the last time we made our camp here – on the day we had that 'coon-hunt, and Archie fell into the creek. I've thought of it a great many times since I left home to go into the service, and it makes me feel sad to see how things have changed. From school-boys and amateur hunters, who started and turned pale when we heard the howl of a wolf or the hooting of an owl, you and I have grown pretty well on toward manhood; have become experienced in scenes of danger, and have had more narrow escapes than when we climbed up that tree to get out of the reach of the wolves that were in pursuit of the white buck. But there are some who have not been as fortunate as ourselves. There has been a thinning out of our ranks, and two good fellows who have hunted with us in these woods, and slept under the same blankets with us in this cabin, we shall never see again; and the probabilities are, that, if we live to return home again, after peace has been restored, and we go tramping around through these woods, to visit all our old hunting and fishing-grounds, we shall miss a third. Ben Lake and William Johnson are dead; my brother is suffering in a rebel prison, and, from what I have seen and heard of the manner in which Union prisoners are treated at the South, I never expect to see him again, even if he is not executed. Ben Lake, you know, was a quiet, good-natured fellow, scarcely ever saying any thing unless he was first spoken to, and I had an idea that he would be a little cowardly when he heard the bullets whistling around him; but I was never more mistaken in my life, for he won his promotion in the very first battle in which our regiment was engaged. When I was made captain of our company, he received the appointment of first lieutenant, and an excellent officer he made. He was a splendid rider, and when mounted on his horse – 'Thunderbolt' he called him – he made a fine appearance. He was no band-box officer, however, for he never shrank from his duty, and he was above ordering one of his men to do what he was afraid to undertake himself. He and I were prisoners once for about forty-eight hours, and the way it happened was this:

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"Our regiment, after the battle of Pittsburg Landing, was detached from the Western army and ordered to the Potomac. We had scarcely been there a week before we were sent out on a scout, with orders to capture Mosby, who was constantly harassing us, and scatter his command. We were out about ten days, without accomplishing our object. Not a single glimpse did we get of a reb, and finally we turned our faces toward the camp. Our horses, as well as ourselves, were nearly jaded, and the way we do there, when a horse gives out, is to put a bullet through his head, shoulder our saddles, and trudge along after the column on foot, until we can find another animal to ride. I had command of the rear guard; and when we had arrived within a day's march of camp, my horse suddenly gave out – laid right down in the middle of the road, and couldn't go a step further. I was in something of a fix, and my feelings were none of the pleasantest when I found myself sprawling in the dusty road, and saw that my horse was used up. It was something of an undertaking to find my way back to camp, through a country infested with guerrillas, and with which I was entirely unacquainted. It is true that I could have had a horse, as several were at once offered me by my men; but I could not be mean enough to save my own bacon by leaving one of those brave fellows behind; so I told Ben to go ahead with the company, keeping a good look-out for a horse, and if he could find one, to send it back to me. I then shot my animal; and it was a job I hated to do, I tell you, for he was as fine a horse as ever stepped; he had carried me many a long mile, and being my constant companion for almost a year and a half, I had become very much attached to him. But there was no help for it; our orders were strict; and I shouldered my saddle, and marched after the column, which was soon out of sight.

"I walked along at a pretty lively pace, keeping a good look-out on each side of the road for horses, and now and then looking behind, half expecting to see a squad of Mosby's cavalry in pursuit, until I was startled by the report of a pistol directly in front of me, and, coming suddenly around a bend in the road, I found Ben sitting beside his horse, which had also given out, waiting for me to come up. As I approached, glad enough that I was not left to find my way back to camp alone, Ben picked up his saddle, and glancing sorrowfully at the work he had done, said:

"'There's an end of poor Thunderbolt – the best horse in the regiment. It has no doubt saved him many a long scout, but I never felt so sorry for any thing in my life.'

"It was hard work, walking along that dusty road, carrying our heavy saddles, and we anxiously scanned every field which we passed, in hopes that we should find some stray horse; but without success. About three o'clock in the afternoon we reached a cross-road, and then we knew where we were. We had frequently been there on short scouts; so, without stopping to keep any further look-out for horses, we quickened our pace, and about two miles further on, arrived at the house of a lady with whom we were well acquainted, and who, as we had always considered her loyal, had been allowed to remain in undisturbed possession of her property, which our regiment had once defended against Mosby's men. Here we halted, and asked the lady if she could furnish us with some dinner. She replied in the affirmative, and we deposited our saddles in one corner of the room, while the woman began to bustle about. In half an hour as good a dinner as I ever tasted in that part of the country was served up, and Ben and I sat down to it with most ravenous appetites. Before sitting down, I should mention, we took off our belts, to which were fastened our sabers and revolvers, and laid them in the corner with our saddles; a very foolish trick, as it afterward proved; but, as we were within fifteen miles of camp, we did not apprehend any danger.

"After our hostess had seen us fairly started, she said:

"You will excuse me for a few moments, gentlemen, as I would like to run over to see my sister, who is very sick. Will you keep an eye on the baby?" she continued, pointing to the small specimen of humanity in question, which lay fast asleep in the cradle.

"Yes," answered Ben, 'I'll see to him,' and the woman started off, leaving us to finish our dinner and attend to the child.

"She hadn't been gone two minutes before the young one awoke, and, of course, began to yell. We didn't know what to do, for it was new business to us. After trying in vain to make it hush, Ben took it out of the cradle, and began to trot it up and down on his knee. But it was no use, and he finally put it back, determined to let it cry until it got ready to stop, when I happened to think of the sugar-bowl. That was just the thing. Ben took good care to keep its mouth so full of sugar that it couldn't yell, and we succeeded in keeping it pretty still.

"In about half an hour the woman returned, and, in reply to our inquiries, informed us that her sister was considerably better, and she hoped would be well in a few days. She then commenced talking on indifferent subjects; and we finally finished every thing on the table, and were thinking about starting for camp, when some one suddenly called out:

"Here! here! Get up, you Yanks. Get up from that table."

"We looked up, and there, standing in the door-way, with their revolvers leveled at our heads, were two rebels – Colonel Mosby and a corporal.

"I've fixed you!" exclaimed the woman, triumphantly. 'You didn't think that while you were stealing my chickens, and abusing me, that I would ever have the power on my side.'

"The old hag had betrayed us. She had invented the story of her sick sister, in order that her absence might not cause us any suspicions, and had left the child for us to take care of, so that we should be obliged to remain until she returned. The story of stealing her chickens, and abusing her, was a mere pretext; for our orders to respect her property were strict, and we had not dared to disobey them.

"There's only one thing that I am sorry for, madam," said Ben, coolly, 'and that is, that I didn't choke that young one of yours.'

"Come, come, there!" interrupted the colonel. 'Get up from behind that table at once, or you are dead men!'

"We're gobbled easy enough, Harry," said Ben, in his usual careless manner, as we arose from our chairs. 'Well, I suppose there's no help for it, seeing that we have no weapons. What do you intend to do with a fellow, Johnny?'

"Take you direct to Richmond," was the encouraging answer, made by the corporal, as he walked across the room and took possession of our arms. 'Come out here!'

"We had no other alternative; so we marched out in front of the house, our captors mounted their horses, and we trudged along before them on foot toward Centerville.

"You have been a prisoner, and can easily imagine the thoughts that passed through our minds. We saw before us a long, fatiguing march, with hard fare, and harder treatment, and the dreaded Libby looming up in the background. But we were not allowed much time to commune with our own thoughts, for Mosby immediately began to question us in relation to the forces we had in different parts of the country. Of course we told him some of the most outrageous stories, but he seemed to put some faith in them; and when we reached the cross-road he left us, after ordering the corporal to take us to Culpepper.

"As soon as the colonel had got out of sight, the corporal began to abuse us in the worst kind of a manner, swearing at us, and calling us Abolitionists and the like; and said that if he could have his own way he would hang us on the nearest tree. We told him that it was a mean trick to treat prisoners in that way, and advised him to keep a civil tongue in his head, as the tables might be turned on him some day; but he paid no attention to us, and kept on jawing, until finally, just before night, we reached Centerville.

"We stopped at a house near the middle of the town, where we were treated very kindly by the people, who gave us plenty to eat, but told us that we were fighting on the wrong side. After supper, the corporal took us out to the barn, where he proceeded to 'go through' us pretty thoroughly. He robbed me of twenty dollars in greenbacks, a watch, comb, several letters – in short, he did not leave me any thing. After overhauling Ben's pockets, he ordered him to 'come out of his coat,' which he did without a grumble; and after cutting off the shoulder-straps – because Ben 'wouldn't need 'em any more,' he said – he put the coat on his own back, locked the barn, and left us to our meditations. As soon as the sound of his footsteps had died away, I said:

"Ben, I'm going to get out of here, if I can."

"All right," said he; 'feel around on the floor and see if you can't find something to force that door open with. How I wish I had that young one here! I wouldn't feed it with sugar, I tell you.'

"We commenced groping about in the darkness, but not a thing in the shape of a club could be found. Then we placed our shoulders against the door, and pressed with all our strength; but it was too strong to be forced from its hinges, and the floor was so securely fastened down, that it could not be pulled up; so, after working until we were completely exhausted, we sat down on the floor to rest.

"We're in for it," said Ben.

"But I'm not going to Libby, now I tell you," I answered. 'To-morrow we shall probably start for Culpepper, under guard of that corporal; and the very first chance, I'm going to mizzle.'

"Ben made no reply, but I well knew what he was thinking about. After a few more ineffectual attempts, we then lay down on the hard boards, and tried to go to sleep; but that was, for a long time, out of the question.

"Our situation was not one calculated to quiet our feelings much, and as we rolled about the floor, trying to find a comfortable position, I could hear Ben venting his spite against 'that brat.' He did not seem to think of the woman who had betrayed us.

"We passed a most miserable night, and at daylight were awakened with:

"Come out here, you Yanks. It's high time you were moving toward Libby."

"That rascally corporal seemed to delight in tormenting us; but there was only one thing we could do, and that was to 'grin and bear it.' After a hasty breakfast, we again set out, the corporal following close behind us on his horse, with a revolver in his hand, ready to shoot the first one that made an attempt at escape. We kept on, stopping only once or twice for water, until we reached the Bull Run bridge. Here the corporal stopped, and called out:

"Come here, one of you fellers, and hold my horse."

"I did as he ordered, and the rebel dismounted, bent down on one knee, and commenced fixing his spur. My mind was made up in an instant. It was now or never. Giving a yell to attract Ben's attention, I sprang at the rebel, caught him around the neck, and rolled him over on his back. He kicked and swore furiously, and if I had been alone, he would most likely have got the better of me; but Ben, being close at hand, caught up the revolver, which the rebel had laid on the ground beside him, and in a moment more I had secured his saber. He saw that further resistance was useless, and bawled out:

"Don't shoot, Yank. Don't shoot me, for mercy's sake!"

"Nobody's going to hurt you if you behave yourself," said Ben. 'Get up.'

"The rebel raised himself to his feet, and I at once began to 'sound' him, as we call it. I got back my watch, money, and every thing else he had taken from us the night before. We then ordered him to travel on ahead of us, and, as Ben's feet were so badly swollen that he could scarcely move, I told him to get on the horse, while I walked along by his side. We passed back through Centerville, keeping a good look-out for rebel scouts, which we knew were in the vicinity, but we did not meet with any of them until along toward night, when we heard a yell, and, looking up, saw half a dozen cavalry charging across the field toward us.

"I guess we're gobbled again, captain,' said Ben.

"Not if our legs hold out,' I answered. 'Get down off that horse, quick. We must foot it, now.'

"Ben hastily dismounted, and, catching our prisoner by the arm, we pulled him over a fence, through the woods, and into a swamp, where we fastened him to a tree. We then tied a handkerchief over his mouth, to prevent him from making his whereabouts known to his friends, and made the best of our way to the camp, which we reached about daylight. We at once reported to the colonel, who sent us back with our company after the prisoner; but he was gone. His friends had doubtless discovered him, and released him from his unpleasant situation. The woman who betrayed us paid the penalty of her treachery. Her house was burned over her head, and her husband, whom she had reported to us as dead, but who was found concealed in the barn, was taken back to the camp a prisoner."

CHAPTER III

On Duty Again

By the time Harry had finished his story, it was almost sundown. Putting the cabin in order, and fastening the door, the boys then started for home. After a hearty supper at the cottage, different plans for their amusement were discussed and determined upon. If time would allow, we might relate many interesting incidents that transpired during the month they spent together; how, one day, the young moose ran away with Uncle Mike's wood wagon and upset the boys in the road. We might, among others, tell of the hunting and fishing expeditions that came off, and the trials of speed that took place on the river, when the Speedwell showed that she had lost none of her sailing qualities during the year and a half that she had remained idle in the shop; but one incident that happened will suffice.

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It was on the morning of the last day that they were to pass together, as Frank's sick-leave had expired, and he must soon bid adieu to home and friends again, perhaps forever. This day had been set apart for a fishing excursion; and, bright and early, Frank was at Captain Butler's boat-house, where he found Harry waiting for him. When the bait and every thing else necessary for the trip had been stowed away in the skiff, the boys pulled into the river, and after spending an hour in rowing about the bass-ground, during which time they secured half a dozen fine fish, they started toward the perch-bed, and anchored outside the weeds.

Although they were remarkably successful, they did not seem to enjoy the sport. Frank's thoughts were constantly dwelling on the parting that must come on the morrow. It could not be avoided, for duty called him; and although the idea of disregarding the summons never once entered into his head, he could not help condemning the circumstances that rendered that call necessary. Harry, on the other hand, was impatient to recover his health, as he wished to rejoin his command. While he was free, and enjoying the delights of home, his brother was languishing in a Southern dungeon – held as a hostage for a notorious guerrilla, who had been sentenced to death – not knowing at what moment he might be led forth to execution. Often, during the time that he and Frank had been together, living over the scenes of their school-days, had Harry's thoughts wandered to that brother, and it had done much to mar the pleasure he would otherwise have enjoyed. He imagined he could see him, seated in his loathsome cell, loaded with chains, pale and weak, (in consequence of the systematic plan of starvation adopted by the brutal authorities at Richmond to render our brave fellows unfit for further service, if they should chance to live until they were exchanged,) but firm in the belief that he had done his duty, and ready at any moment – for George was far from being a coward – to be sacrificed. Harry's thoughts, we repeat, often wandered to the dreaded Libby, and especially did they on this morning. And as he pictured to himself the treatment that his brother was daily receiving at the hands of the enemies of the government, is it to be wondered if he indulged in feelings of the deepest malice toward the inhuman wretches who could be guilty of such barbarity?

"There's only this about it, Frank," he said, suddenly breaking the silence that had continued for half an hour; "there's only this about it: if one hair of George's head is injured, Company 'M' of our regiment never takes any more prisoners; and if I have no friendship for a traitor, neither have I for such men as these who are now approaching."

Frank looked up, and saw Charles Morgan and William Gage rowing toward them.

"Here is the very spot," continued Harry, "where we met Morgan when you first became acquainted with him, on the morning when he told such outrageous stories about the fishing there was in New York harbor, and about his fighting Indians in the Adirondack Mountains, in the northern part of Michigan. William Gage, you know, used to be first lieutenant of the "Midnight Rangers."

"Yes, I remember them both," answered Frank. "But it seems to me that I heard some one say that Mr. Morgan is a rebel sympathizer; and Charley, of course, not having brains enough to think for himself, is following in his father's lead."

"So I have heard; but he has never said a word against the government, and he'd better not, for I feel just like choking somebody this morning; and if I hate a rebel, I hold a domestic traitor in the most profound abhorrence."

"Hullo, boys!" exclaimed Charles, at this moment, coming alongside and stretching out a hand to each of them, "how are you? I'm glad to see you back again, Frank. But why haven't you been around to see a fellow? You've kept yourselves very close since your return."

"Yes, Harry and I have spent most of our time in the woods," answered Frank. "But we part again to-morrow."

"Going back to your ship, eh? Well, when do you suppose you will be home again for good?"

"I don't know. If I live, however, I'm going to see this war settled before I come back to civil life again."

"You've had some pretty hard times since you have been in the service, from what I hear."

"Rather tough," answered Harry.

"Well now, you see Bill and I were too sharp to go into any such business as that," said Charles, knowingly. "The old man said, from the start, that you never could whip the South."

"Well, your father was never more mistaken in his life," answered Frank. "We *are* going to bring back the seceded States, if it takes every man and every dollar at the North. But I don't see why you don't volunteer. How can you stay at home?"

"O, it is the easiest thing in the world," answered Charles, with a laugh. "In the first place, I think too much of my life; and then again, I don't care a snap which whips. I am not interested either way – I'm neutral."

"You're no such thing," answered Harry, angrily. "You never saw two dogs fight in the street, without wanting one or the other of them to whip, and your sympathies are either one way or the other. There's no such thing as a neutral in this war."

"Besides," said Frank, "if I were in your place, I should be ashamed to say that I was neutral. But I hope that you will be compelled to go into the army. Since you have neither the intelligence to determine which side is in the right, nor the courage to fight for that side, I hope that you will be drafted, and that you can't find a substitute."

"Thank you," replied Charles, sneeringly. "You are very kind. But I, of course, know that this is a free country, and a man has a right to talk as he pleases."

"You have no right to utter treasonable sentiments," said Harry; "and another thing, I am not going to sit here and listen to them."

"You are not, indeed! I don't see how you can hinder it," replied Charles. "I say now, and it makes no difference who hears me, that I hope the South will whip, unless the North will allow her to go out of the Union peaceably. I haven't any thing against the South."

"Well, *I* have," answered Harry, scarcely able to control himself. "My brother is now starving in a rebel prison."

"I can't help it. I have not the least sympathy for him. The South said, at the commencement, that they only wanted to be let alone; and if George hasn't any more sense than to meddle with them, I say, let him take the consequences;" and, as Charles ceased speaking, he dropped the oars into the water, and was about to row off, when Frank seized the gunwale of his boat.

"Avast heaving, there, for a moment," he said, quietly. "Charley, take back what you have said."

"No, sir; I sha'n't do it. I mean what I have said, and I won't take back any thing. Let go of that boat, or I'll hit you," and he raised his oar as if about to strike Frank.

But Harry was too quick for him. Springing lightly into Charles's skiff, he easily wrested the oar from him, and then, seizing him by the collar, exclaimed:

"Take back every word you have said, or I'll wash some of the vile rebel sentiment out of you. I'll dump you overboard. Come, take it all back – quick."

"Help! help! Bill," whined Charles, writhing like an eel in Harry's strong grasp, "are you going to sit there and see me abused in this manner? Help, I tell you."

William looked first at Harry, then at Frank, who had grown exceedingly tall and muscular since the last time he had measured strength with him in friendly contest, and made no reply.

"Come, take it back," urged Harry.

"No, I won't," replied Charles, who, finding that he was left to fight his own battles alone, now began to struggle desperately. "I tell you I won't take back any thing."

"Then overboard you go," said Harry. "I'll see what effect cold water will have on you;" and, easily lifting Charles from his feet, in spite of his struggles, he threw him headlong into the water.

"How is it now?" he coolly inquired, as Charles appeared at the surface, looking very forlorn, indeed. "Any more rebel sentiment in you that wants washing out? Come in here, you young traitor;" and, as he spoke, he again seized him by the collar, and drew him into the boat.

"Unhand me," shouted Charles, as soon as he could regain his feet; "I'll fix you for this."

"Are you ready to take back what you said?" demanded Harry, tightening his grasp.

"No; nor shall I ever be," was the stubborn answer.

"Well, then, down you go again."

"No, no! don't," screamed Charles, who now began to be really frightened; "I take it all back."

"What do you take back?" asked Harry.

"I don't want to see the Northern prisoners all starved."

"Well, what else?"

"I don't want to see the Union destroyed."

"Go on; what next?"

"But I *do* wish the South could be whipped to-morrow, and be made to stay in the Union."

"Well, now you are talking sense," said Harry, releasing his hold of Charles's collar. "Of course, I know you don't mean what you say, but I was bound to make you say a good word for the Union before I let you off. I have one more favor to ask of you, and then I am done. Will you oblige me by giving three cheers for the boys who are fighting our battles – every day risking their lives in defense of the old flag?"

Charles hesitated.

"I sha'n't ask you but once more, then," and here Harry pointed to the water, in a very significant manner.

Charles, knowing that he was in earnest, and that there was no escape, gave the required cheers with as good a grace as he could command.

"That's right," said Harry, approvingly. "Now I have done with you, and you can thank your lucky stars that you have got off so easily. If you had been in the army when you said what you did

a few moments since, the boys would have hung you to the very first tree they could have found. Now, take my advice, and don't let me hear of your uttering any more such sentiments as long as I remain in the village; if you do, I'll duck you as often as I can get my hands on you."

Harry then sprang into his own skiff, and Charles sullenly picked up his oars, and pulled toward home.

"There," exclaimed Harry, "I feel better now. I worked off a little of my indignation on that fellow. The rascal! to tell us that George ought to be starved for helping to maintain the government, and that he didn't care whether the Union went to ruin or not. Now that I think of it, I'm sorry that I let him off so easily."

"He was pretty well punished, after all," said Frank. "It will have the effect of making him a little more careful."

At noon, the fish stopped biting, and the boys started for home. They parted at the boat-house, after Frank had promised to call and say "good-by" before he left in the morning.

When the latter reached home he found his trunk packed, and every thing in readiness for the start, so that he had nothing to do but roam about the premises, and take a last look at every thing, as he had done on a former occasion. His mother and sister tried to look cheerful, but it was a sorry failure, for Frank could easily read what was passing in their minds.

Morning came at length, and at eight o'clock, to Frank's great relief – for he wished the parting over as soon as possible – he saw the carriage approaching which was to take him to the steamer. A few embraces and hastily-spoken farewells, and Frank was whirling away from his home. At Captain Butler's he stopped for Harry, who met him at the gate with an open letter in his hand; and, as he sprang into the carriage, he exclaimed, joyfully:

"It's all right, Frank. Here's a letter from George. He has been exchanged, and is now in the hospital at Washington. The rebels, he says, tried to starve him to death, but couldn't make it. He is only waiting until he gets strong enough to travel, and then he's coming home. He's pretty well used up. When I get back to the army, with Company 'M' to back me up, I'll make somebody smart for it."

By the time Harry had finished venting his anger against the enemies of the government, the carriage reached the wharf, as the steamer was moving out into the river. Frank had just time to get on board, and a few moments afterward the Julia Burton carried him out of sight of the village. He stopped only a short time at Portland; and, four days after leaving that place, found Archie waiting for him as he sprang off the train at Cairo. He reported to the fleet captain, who ordered him to "take passage down the river on the United States dispatch steamer General Lyon," which was to sail at four o'clock that afternoon. The cousins passed the day together. When four o'clock came, Archie returned to his high stool with a sorrowful countenance, and Frank waived his adieu from the steamer that was to carry him back – to what? It is well that the future is hidden from us, for Frank would not have trod that deck with so light a heart had he known what was in store for him.

In a few days he arrived at his vessel, which he found anchored at White River. Time makes changes in every thing, and Frank saw many new faces among the ship's company. The old mate was still on board, and greeted him in his hearty sailor style as he came over the side. After he had reported to the captain, and had seen his luggage taken to his room, he was joined by one of his old messmates, whose name was Keys; and who, in answer to Frank's inquiry, "How is every thing?" proceeded to give him a statement of the condition of affairs.

"The ship still floats on an even keel," said he, pulling off his boots, and taking possession of Frank's bed. "The old man is as eccentric and good-natured as ever, sometimes flying off into one of his double-reefed topsail hurricanes, which don't mean any thing. All goes right about decks, but you will find some things changed in the steerage. There are only five officers left in our mess that were here when you went away, and we have three new Johnny master's mates. They all came down in the same box; and the express man must have left them out in the damp over night, for they are the softest fellows I ever saw. They must have been brought up in some country where

such a thing as a steamboat is unknown, for they don't know the starboard from the port side of the ship, call on deck 'up stairs,' and the captain's cabin goes by the name of the 'parlor.' It wouldn't be so bad if they would only try to learn something, but they are very indignant if any one undertakes to volunteer advice; and, besides, they stand on their rank."

At this moment supper was announced, and Frank and his friend repaired to the steerage, where they found the mates of whom the latter had spoken. While they were eating, the whistle of a steamer was heard, and one of the new mates (whose name was French, but who was known as "Extra," from the fact that he was perfectly useless as an officer,) ordered the waiter to "go up stairs and see what boat it was." The boy did not move, for it was a regulation of the mess that when there was only one waiter in the room to attend to the table, he was not to be sent away. Besides, the mate had no right to give such an order without first obtaining the permission of the caterer.

"Do you hear what I tell you?" he inquired, in a rage.

"Mr. French," said the caterer, quietly, "you can find out the name of that boat after supper, by asking the officer of the deck, or the quarter-master on watch."

"But I choose to send this boy to find out for me," replied Mr. French. "Come, go on, there, and do as I tell you, or I will see if you can not be made to obey the orders of your superiors."

"Stay where you are," said the caterer, addressing the waiter, "and don't start until I tell you to." Then, turning to the mate, he continued, "You have no right to order him to do any thing in this mess-room without first consulting me."

"I haven't, eh? I wonder if this darkey ranks me? My appointment reads that I 'am to be obeyed by all persons under me in this squadron.'"

"That boy is not subject to your orders, as long as I am in the mess-room."

"Well, I shall take pains to inform myself on that point. I'll ask the captain."

"Do so," said the caterer, quietly; "and if you don't get the worst raking-down that you have had since you have been on board this vessel, then I am greatly mistaken."

The mate made no reply, but, after he had finished his supper, went on deck.

"Now, Frank," whispered Keys, "just come with me, and I will show you some fun."

Frank, always ready for any mischief, followed his companion on deck, where they found Mr. French in animated conversation with his two friends.

"See here, French," said Keys, approaching the latter in a confidential manner, "are you going to put up with such abuse as you received from that caterer?"

"I'd see, if I were in your place, whether or not I had authority to command my inferiors," chimed in Frank.

"Certainly, so would I," said Keys. "Go and report the matter to the old man."

"That caterer ought to be brought down a peg or two," said Frank.

"Well," said the mate, "I know that I have got the right on my side; but I'm afraid, if I report the matter, the captain will give me a blowing up."

"O, that's only one of that caterer's stories," said Keys, contemptuously. "You see he's afraid you will report him, and he told you what he did to frighten you. Every body on board the ship is trying to run down us mates; they don't seem to care a fig for our orders; even the men laugh at us, and the sooner they find out that we have some authority here, the better it will be for us. I wish I had as good a chance as you have; I'd report the whole matter."

"I believe I will report it," said the mate, encouraged by the sincere manner in which Mr. Keys and Frank spoke. "I can't have a man trample on my authority, when it comes from the admiral. Is the captain in the parlor?"

"Yes," answered Frank, making use of his handkerchief to conceal his laughter; "I saw him go in there just a moment since."

The mate accordingly walked aft, and without waiting to speak to the orderly, who stood at the gangway, he opened the door without knocking, and entered the cabin.

As soon as he had disappeared, Frank and his companion ran on to the quarter-deck, and took a position at a grating directly over the captain's cabin, where they could hear all that went on below.

"My eyes!" whispered Keys; "I wouldn't be in Extra's boots for the whole squadron. Won't he get his rations stuffed into him?"

The captain, who was at supper, looked up in surprise, as Mr. French entered unannounced; and, after regarding him sharply for a moment, said:

"Well, sir!"

"I came here, sir," began the mate, "to tell you" —

"Take off your cap, sir!" vociferated the captain.

The mate, not in the least embarrassed, did as he was ordered, and again commenced:

"I came here, sir" —

"Do you know what that marine is standing out there for?" again interrupted the captain. "If you don't, your first hard work will be to go to the executive officer and find out. Now, don't you again ever come into my cabin in this abrupt manner. Always send in your name by the orderly. It seems impossible to teach you any thing. But what were you going to say?"

"I came here, sir," began the mate again, "to see if I have any authority to command my inferiors in rank. My appointment says" —

"O, hang your appointment!" shouted the captain. "Come to the point at once."

"Well, sir, while at supper, I ordered our steward to go up stairs and execute a commission for me, and he wouldn't go."

"Are you caterer of your mess?"

"No, sir."

"Then sir, allow me to inform you that you have no more authority over those waiters in that mess-room than you have to break open my trunk and take out my money. If you should need the services of one of the boys, go to the caterer and get his consent. But I wish you would try and learn something. You have been on board this ship now three weeks, and are of no more use than an extra boiler. Go to somebody else in future with your foolish complaints. You may go, sir."

The mate left the cabin, feeling very cheap, and wondering what was the use of having any rank, if he couldn't use it, and more than half inclined to believe that the captain had no right to address him in so rude a manner.

"Well, what did the old man say?" inquired Keys, who, with Frank, had hurried forward to meet him at the gangway.

"He says he will fix it all right," replied Mr. French, averting his face, for he knew that he was uttering a falsehood. "I knew I would get satisfaction."

So saying, he walked off, shaking his head in a very knowing manner, while the two friends retreated to the steerage, where they gave full vent to their feelings. The circumstance was related to the caterer, who came in a few moments afterward, and after enjoying a hearty laugh at the mate's expense, Frank retired to his room and turned in.

About two o'clock in the morning a steamer came down and reported that a regiment of rebels had posted themselves behind the levee at Cypress Bend, and were holding the position in spite of the efforts of three gun-boats to dislodge them, rendering navigation impossible. The matter was reported to the captain, who, after making himself acquainted with the facts, ordered the Ticonderoga to be got under way and headed up the river.

CHAPTER IV

The Fight in the Woods

On the next day they arrived at Cypress Bend, where they found three "tin-clads" anchored, paying no attention to the perfect storm of bullets which the concealed rebels rained upon their decks from behind the levee. As soon as the Ticonderoga came within range, the guerrillas directed a volley against her; but, although her decks were crowded with men, the fire was without effect. The boatswain's whistle, and the order, "All hands under cover," rang sharply through the ship, and the decks were instantly deserted. The second division – the one which Frank commanded – was at once called to quarters, and as soon as the gun could be cast loose and pointed, an eleven-inch shell went shrieking into the woods. It burst far beyond the levee. The rebels sent back a taunting laugh, and their bullets fell faster than ever.

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The levee which lines both banks of the Mississippi forms a most excellent breastwork; and behind this, a party of determined men can easily hold twice their number at bay, unless a position can be obtained where they can be brought under a cross-fire. The formation of the river rendered it impossible for such a position to be taken, and it was evident that to anchor before the levee and attempt to dislodge them with big guns, was worse than useless; neither could they be beaten back with their own weapons, for the rebels were very expert in "bushwhacking," exposing but a very small portion of their persons, and the best marksman would stand but a poor chance of hitting one of them. Some more decisive steps must be taken.

So thought the captain of the Ticonderoga, as he paced up and down the turret, while Frank, divested of his coat, was issuing his commands with his usual coolness, now and then catching hold of a rope and giving a pull at the gun, all the while sending the shells into the levee, making the dirt fly in every direction.

"Cease firing, Mr. Nelson," said the captain, at length. "It is useless to think of driving them off in this manner."

"Cease firing, sir," repeated Frank, showing that he understood the order. "Run the gun in, lads, and close those ports."

The captain then ordered his vessel to be run alongside of the Rover, (one of the tin-clads,) and, after a few moments' consultation with her commander, some plan seemed to have been determined upon, for Frank was again ordered to open a hot fire on the levee. Under cover of this, signal was made for the other two vessels to get under way, and proceed down the river.

"Mr. Nelson," said the captain, as soon as he had seen the signal obeyed, "give the command of your division to the executive officer, and come down into the cabin for orders."

As soon as the executive could be found, Frank gave up the command to him, and as he entered the cabin, the captain said to him:

"I have ordered the tin-clads to go down the river and land as many men as they can spare, to get around in the rear of those rebels, and get them out from behind that levee. They must be

got out of that, if possible, for navigation is virtually closed as long as they remain there. I shall also send our two howitzers and forty men, of which you will take command. I need not tell you to do your best."

The captain then went on deck, selected the men, and Frank succeeded in getting them and the howitzers safely on board the Rover, which still lay alongside. The smoke from the gun of the Ticonderoga completely concealed their movements, and the rebels were entirely ignorant of what was going on. As soon as the men were all on board, the Rover steamed down the river and joined the other vessels, which were waiting for her to come up.

About five miles below was a point which completely concealed them from the view of the rebels, and behind this point the vessels landed; the crews disembarked, and commenced marching through the woods toward the place where the rebels were posted. They numbered two hundred and fifty men, and were commanded by the captain of the Rover, who, although a very brave man and an excellent sailor, knew nothing of infantry tactics. The second in command was Mr. Howe, an ensign belonging to the same vessel. He had never been in a fight; and when he first entered the navy he knew no more about a vessel than he did about the moon. His appointment had been obtained through some influential friends at home. He had served in a company of state militia, however, before the breaking out of the war, and considered himself quite a military genius.

The sailors marched in line of battle – with skirmishers in front and on each flank, and Frank, with his battery, was in the center. In this manner they marched for about an hour, and then a halt was ordered, and the captain, with several of his officers, went forward to reconnoiter, while Mr. Howe, who was left in command, ordered the men to "stack arms." Frank was astounded when he heard this command, and, approaching the officer, saluted him, and said:

"I object to this, Mr. Howe. I think it would be much better, sir, to keep the men under arms; for it is by no means certain that all the rebels we shall be obliged to fight, are in front of us."

"I believe you were put in command of that battery, sir," replied Mr. Howe, haughtily, "while I was left in charge of these men. I would thank you, then, to attend to your own business, and to let me alone."

"Very good, sir," answered Frank. "I did not intend to give any offense, sir, but merely to offer a suggestion. But if I command that battery, I intend to have it in readiness for any emergency. Cut loose those guns, lads, and stand to your quarters!"

The reports of muskets in their front proved that the rebels were yet keeping a hot fire directed against the Ticonderoga. But still Frank was not deceived; he knew that all the fighting would not be done at the front. Scarcely had these thoughts passed through his mind, when there was a rapid discharge of fire-arms in their rear, and two of the men fell. As Frank had expected, the rebels had been informed of what was going on, and had sent part of their force to cut the sailors off from the river. For a moment the greatest confusion prevailed. The men, who had been lying about in the shade of the trees, made a general rush for their weapons, and after delivering a straggling and ineffectual fire, hastily retreated, with the exception of Frank's men, and a few of the more courageous of the infantry. The latter concealed themselves behind trees and logs, and deliberately returned the fire of the rebels, while the former, who were old seamen, and had long been accustomed to the discipline of the service, stood at their guns awaiting orders. Mr. Howe, for a moment, stood pale and trembling, and then, without waiting to give any orders, disappeared in the bushes. Frank, who was left alone with but sixty men, was astounded when he witnessed this cowardly conduct of his superior, and he had hardly time to recover from his surprise, when the rebels, after firing another volley, broke from their concealments, with loud yells, and charged toward the guns. This brought Frank to his senses. With the handful of men he had left, he could at least cover the retreat of his timid support.

"Steady there, lads!" he shouted. "Aim low – fire!"

The howitzers belched forth their contents, and, as Frank had taken the precaution to have them loaded with canister, the slaughter was awful. The muskets had also done considerable execution, and the rebels recoiled when they witnessed the havoc made in their ranks. Frank, who was always ready to take advantage of such an opportunity, immediately ordered a counter-charge. The sailors sprang at the word, with a yell, and, led by Frank, who fixed his bayonet as he ran, threw themselves upon the rebels, who at once fled precipitately, leaving their dead and wounded on the field.

"Back to your guns, lads," shouted Frank, "and give 'em a shot before they get out of range."

The men worked with a yell, sending the shells rapidly in the direction in which the rebels had retreated, until a loud roar of musketry at the front told them that they had other enemies with which to deal.

While this fight at the rear had been going on, the sailors who had retreated had been met by the captain and his officers, who were returning from their reconnoissance, and, as soon as order could be restored, an attack had been made on the rebels who were still posted behind the levee. In a few moments Mr. Howe came running up, and addressing himself to Frank, exclaimed:

"What are you doing here, sir – shooting into the woods where there are no rebels? Why are you not at the front, where you belong? If you are afraid to go there, you had better give up the command of that battery."

Frank thought this was a nice way for Mr. Howe to talk, after the manner in which he had behaved a few moments before, but, without stopping to reply, he ordered the guns to be secured, and the men, catching up the trail-ropes, commenced dragging the battery toward the place where the fight was raging, while Mr. Howe again suddenly disappeared.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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