

Ellis Edward Sylvester

The Frontier Angel: A Romance of Kentucky Rangers' Life



Edward Ellis

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Содержание

CHAPTER I.	5
CHAPTER II.	9
CHAPTER III.	15
CHAPTER IV.	19
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	22

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CHAPTER I.

THE NIGHT BEFORE THE DEPARTURE

In the western part of Pennsylvania, near the commencement of the Ohio river, stands a small town, which, at the close of the last century, numbered about thirty dwellings. Although properly a border settlement at the time mentioned, there were so many others beyond, that it was hardly regarded as being in the "Mighty West." The inhabitants were mostly farmers, possessed of large and beautiful farms, who commenced their labors in the morning, and retired to rest in the evening, without much fear of the molestation of their savage brethren. True, a few years previous, the latter had committed murders and depredations even farther east than this, and the settlers never allowed themselves fully to give way to an undue sense of security. But, unless a most unexpected triumph should crown the struggles of the Indians, there was little occasion for apprehension upon the part of the whites.

The time on which we visit this village, is an evening in the spring, toward the close of the last century. The night is dark and cloudy, and the houses are invisible in the deep gloom; but there are numerous twinkling lights in the different dwellings, which give it the appearance of a constellation set in the vast sky of darkness around. Broad fields of cleared land stretch for a long distance into the background, while there are numerous other dwellings further eastward, toward Pittsburg, and many cabins further westward in Ohio and Virginia; so that they are not without neighbors, and may properly be said still to be in the land of civilization.

Near the western end of the village, stood a large frame house, in the lower story of which a bright light was burning. Within, and seated around a large, crackling fire, were four individuals engaged in conversation. The first was a pleasant, middle-aged man, rather portly and good-natured; the second was his wife, a few years younger, with an equally pleasant face, and a cheerful, musical voice. Upon the opposite side of the fire sat a young man, of a hardy, muscular frame, and a rather handsome appearance. Beside him was a maiden of eighteen or twenty years, who, without the least exaggeration on our part, might be pronounced beautiful.

The first couple, as said, were man and wife. The second two intended to be at some future time – that is, they were lovers.

The name of the parents was Abbot, and the maiden was Marian Abbot, their daughter. They were farmers, who, not having succeeded as well as they anticipated, had come to the determination to emigrate further west – in fact, into the very heart of Kentucky. A flat-boat was to start the next morning down the river, in which a number of their neighbors were going, and in which they intended to send Marian; but, the parents themselves were compelled to wait several months in order to bring their affairs to a settlement. Their resolution had been taken rather suddenly, but, as said, they were compelled to wait before fulfilling it.

The flat-boat which was to start on the morrow, carried with it more men than Abbot expected would accompany him, and hence he deemed it much safer for Marian that she should go with it, and, in their western home, wait for his coming.

The young man to whom we have referred, was Russel Mansfield, the only son of his parents, as was Marian the only daughter of hers. An attachment had existed between them for a year or two, and it was generally expected by the parents of both, that, as soon as they were in a proper condition,

they would be united for life. The parents of Mansfield united with Abbot in their resolution, and it was their intention to depart at the same time with him. The same causes that led to his detention, produced theirs; and, as it was their wish that Russel should remain with and accompany them, he had consented. The young man disliked very much the idea of a separation, even for so short a period as a few months, from his beloved; but reflection and sober sense told him it was best that it should be so. Nearly a dozen well-armed and courageous men would protect her, while should her going be deferred until his, there would hardly be half that number. Thus it was that the present turn of affairs came about.

"If we have a storm at the commencement of our journey, it will be a bad omen, will it not, father?" asked Marian with a smile.

"Tut, tut, dear, don't speak of such foolish things. I would that your mother had such a body-guard when she follows you."

"Oh, well, I meant nothing. I am sure I have no apprehension."

"There is danger it is true," remarked Mansfield, "but it only threatens weakness and inexperience. Your party are strong, and they surely have had enough experience, to avoid all stratagems and decoys of their enemy."

"Yes, darling, don't let such thoughts trouble you. There is One who is able to protect the weakest in the hour of the greatest peril. Dangers will beset you on every hand, but there will be strong and friendly hearts around you, and a strong and friendly Heart overhead," added the mother.

"There is but one thing that seriously troubles me," remarked Abbot, gravely, "and that is the thought of that McGable. He has now been absent a year, and you remember, Marian, that he threatened vengeance against you when he left."

"Why, father, how can *he* injure me?" asked Marian in surprise; "who knows where he has gone?"

"I have been told that he was in the West," answered Abbot, quietly.

"Well, and what of that? I am sure there is nothing in that, that need frighten us."

"I have heard a darker story of him," added the father in a lower tone, and glancing around as if he feared other ears might hear him.

"What was it?" asked Marian breathlessly.

"I have been told by those whose word could not be doubted, that he has turned renegade, and that his atrocities are equal to those of Girty, McGee, Proctor, and the other similar fiends."

"Where does he generally commit his outrages?" asked Mansfield.

"I do not wish to alarm you, Marian, and I think there is no reason for your being alarmed; but, as all the others who will accompany you, know the same thing, there can be no harm in warning you. At first, when he joined the British and Indians, he united with the parties who attacked the defenseless settlements and travelers; but he is cowardly, and there was too much danger in that. He is now a decoy along the Ohio river, and uses all the means in his power to entice the passing flat-boats to shore. The devil himself seems to aid his invention, for he has contrived such ingenious schemes that it is said he has outwitted some of the old backwoodsmen and hunters themselves."

"What does he do with his prisoners?"

"He has never been known to give quarter to any one. All are consigned to the tomahawk or the stake, and the women perhaps to a still more dreadful fate."

"What induced him to turn traitor?"

"His own devilish disposition, I suppose. He has more than once given out that you will suffer, daughter, for your rejection of him; and next to you his especial enmity seems to be against Mansfield here."

"I only ask Heaven that we two may meet on equal ground. He would never shame the race to which he belongs, again," exclaimed our hero, indignantly.

"Perhaps you may, Russel – perhaps you may. Ah! is that thunder?"

All listened for a moment, and heard the distant booming of thunder, and the sighing of the wind through the trees that stood near the house. A storm was, indeed, gathering. Dark, tumultuous clouds were wheeling through the sky, and, as Mrs. Abbot looked out, she could discern by the aid of the fire blazing on the broad hearth, the tops of the trees swaying, and hear the night wind howling through and around the village.

"There is a storm gathering, but I am in hopes that it will pass off before morning," she remarked, as she resumed her knitting and seat in the family rocking-chair.

"I guess it will not last long," added Mansfield.

Silence now reigned for a time in the house. Abbot sat in the corner slowly smoking his pipe, and gazing meditatively in the fire, watching the glowing embers as they fell apart, and conjuring up pictures and images in the coals. The mother continued knitting, her chair gently rocking, and giving out the same pleasant squeak that it had for years. Now and then she raised her eyes for a moment to glance at her husband or daughter, and then let them fall again to the work before her. A kitten was tumbling over the floor, playing antics with her ball of yarn, or whirling around in a circle in an attempt to grasp the end of its tail. Failing in this, it stood a moment, as if in meditation, and then with a plunge, lit upon the back of a big maltese, quietly slumbering at the feet of Marian, and fixed its claws in his head, eyes, or any place that offered. The fellow bore it unflinchingly for a moment, until becoming unendurable, he grasped the mischievous creature by the head and holding it thus a moment, gave it several digging kicks that sent it into the middle of the floor, and then quietly resumed his half-sitting posture and shut his eyes again.

Upon the other side of the fire was stretched Hero, the house-dog. He was of the hound species, and a noble fellow. As he lay, his long nose was dropped upon the hearth, between his two paws, and turned toward the fire. Probably he suspected mischief, for now and then he slowly raised the corner of one eyelid, and glanced at the kitten, and then with a twitch and start, slightly shifted his position. Once or twice he flapped his long ears as if to give warning that he was not yet asleep, and it would be dangerous to trifle with him.

But the demon of mischief seemed to possess the young kitten. It walked straight up to him, laid its paw on his cold nose, and then scratched terribly. The dog in turn, raised one of his huge paws, and gave it a cuff that rolled it to the middle of the floor again. The kitten rose demurely and had recourse to the ball of yarn once more. Hero seeing this, dropped his head with a threatening look, and again slept.

The old clock ticked loudly upon the mantel, and the wind roared down the chimney, and moaned around the house. Soon several drops of rain rattled against the window, a terrific crash of thunder burst overhead, and the storm came in all its fury.

It lasted but a short time when a lull occurred. Just at this moment, the clock struck the hour of nine. Abbot knocked the ashes from his pipe, took down the old, wooden-covered Bible, and commenced reading a chapter. The mother laid aside her knitting, folded her hands upon her lap, and Mansfield and Marian paid a respectful attention.

The chapter finished, all sank devoutly upon their knees, and the earnest monotone of Abbot ascended to the Protector of all. The desolate moaning of the tempest, added solemnity to the scene, and gave a beautiful appropriateness to the petition that was offered.

As the parents arose, they bade Russel good night and retired. Our hero left alone with Marian, glided to her side, took her hand within his own and pulled her head over upon his bosom.

"What are you thinking of, Marian?"

"I was wondering at what father said."

"What? about McGable?"

"Yes."

"Are you alarmed?"

"I feel some apprehension, I confess. You know what a wicked man he is, and what terrible passions he has. I know more of him than you do, Russel."

"I suppose you do," he replied in a tone of slight reproof.

"What do you mean by that?" she asked, looking up in his face with a reproachful expression in her mild blue eyes.

"Oh, nothing!" he laughed, kissing her glowing cheek.

"I mean I know more of him, Russel, because he has plagued me more with his presence than he has you. I dreaded him as I did a serpent, and when I, at last, told him I never wished to see him again, he left me with a curse. O Russel! it was not me alone that he cursed, but *you*! He swore that he would kill you, for he knew you were the cause of it, and he said I should suffer, too."

"You are not alarmed for me, Marian?"

"Yes, for I shall fear his power as long as he lives. I almost wish that father would remain here, but there is no persuading him, and I shall not falter at the last moment."

"I cannot share your apprehension. You are going to a settlement which is well-guarded, and whose inhabitants are experienced in Indian warfare. I can see no reason for fear."

"I trust there is not, but if I ever get there I shall look anxiously for my parents and your arrival."

The two conversed longer upon the departure tomorrow, and discussed their plans for the future, until, when the storm had ceased, our hero took his departure.

As perhaps the reader has surmised, the person referred to by the parents and the lovers, had once sought the hand of Marian. He had made his appearance in the village a year or two previous, and gave his name as Tom McGable. Further than this, nothing was known. He professed to belong to the Eastern states, and had no relations or acquaintances in the village. He was a thin, nervous, sharp-featured man, with long Indian hair, dark, restless eyes, and a forbidding cast of countenance. He was a person of awful passions, and was dreaded by all who knew him. Marian turned from his advances with loathing, but he pertinaciously persisted until he was driven from her house. He left, vowing revenge; and rumor shortly after reached the village that he had gone further west and united with the Indians against the whites. There was good reason for this report, as all knew that he was a man who would stop at nothing that might gratify his vindictive feelings.

CHAPTER II. THE FATE OF THE FLAT-BOAT

As was predicted, the storm soon cleared away, and the morning dawned bright and beautiful. Birds were singing and flitting from limb to limb, the water sparkled upon the grass and twigs, and by the time it was fairly light, the whole village was astir.

Down in the water, but safely moored to shore, rested a flat-boat, waiting for its living freight, before being loosened from its fastenings. As the commotion in the village increased, numbers commenced wending their way toward the river, and in a short time nearly all stood upon the shore. The majority carried furniture and utensils with them, which, by passing over several planks, were deposited upon the boat.

The farewells were now given. There were ten men, seven of whom had wives, besides Marian, so that the entire number was eighteen. With the exception of the latter, these had embarked all of their wealth and possessions upon this perilous undertaking.

Marian embraced her parents, received their last advice, and, as she passed over the plank, encountered Mansfield.

"Good-by," she said, gayly; "I shall soon expect you."

He took her hand, and, holding it a moment, said:

"I trust we shall be separated but a short time, dear Marian. I have lain awake all night thinking of this, and I believe there *is* danger – danger not only upon the river, but after you have reached your destination. You know to whom I refer – and oh! let me beseech you to be careful of exposing yourself. God bless you! Good-by, and may we soon meet again."

He wrung her hand, as she passed over the boat; the plank was drawn on board, the fastenings unloosened, and the flat-boat commenced slowly moving with the current.

"Good luck to you!" called out Abbot. "Look out for danger; have your eyes open for decoys, and don't, under any pretense, be induced to leave the center of the stream. If you are betrayed, you will have no one to blame but yourselves, for you are now warned."

The flat-boat slowly swept out into the stream, and, after a time, gaining the center of the current, moved forward with greater rapidity. Numbers yet stood upon the shore, waving their farewells; but the boat soon rounded a bend, and they all disappeared from view.

Those on board now withdrew their eyes from the shore, and made preparations for the perilous journey before them. The flat-boat was a large, unwieldy affair, built like all similar ones, so as to float with the current alone. The sides were bullet-proof, and the shape of the thing was similar to a box. About three-fourths of the length were taken up as the cabin, which communicated with the other part by means of a small door. A long, sweeping oar was hung at each end, and balanced so as to dip into the water. There was a small space at either end of the boat which could be reached by passing through the cabin. The latter was divided into two compartments, and as regarded comfort and convenience, probably the flat-boat could have been little improved.

The occasion and season of the year were such that none could help feeling buoyant and hopeful. The sun was now up in the heavens, shedding its warm and cheering rays upon forest and river. The rain-drops hung like pendent jewels, and the river glistened like molten gold. A thin mist was rising along the shore, as the sun's warmth grew greater. Now and then a woodsman's cabin was passed, and it could be seen nestling in the small clearing, and apparently as comfortable as though no enemy had ever threatened it. Perhaps the settler himself came forth with his wife to wonder and view the passing boat, and exchange salutations with the first white persons they had seen for months. Toward noon they detected a solitary form standing below them, upon a bend in

the river. A nearer approach, showed him to be a hunter. He waved his coon-skin cap over his head as they came abreast, gave a cheering hurrah, and called out:

"Keep a powerful look-out for reds, you, fur they're thick as flies in August down toward the Big Sandy and Sciota. Wal they is, strangers; and if you gits through without gittin' a taste of thar compliments, why, here's as will stand treat all round."

After giving this warning, the hunter watched them a few minutes longer, and then turned and disappeared in the forest.

Some miles farther down they passed a small settlement which had been commenced but a few months before. A block-house, however, was erected and stood at one end, as if to ward off all approach. It was a clumsy, awkward building, but abundantly able to answer every purpose for which it was intended. It was two stories in height, the upper one so much smaller than the lower one, that it had the appearance of standing upon a platform. The outer edge of this projection was protected by palisades, inclosing it, except at one point where the gaping mouth of a swivel gave warning of the resistance it was capable of giving. The instrument was of brass, and so brightly burnished that it could be seen gleaming in the sunlight by those upon the flat-boat. A sentinel was pacing slowly around the block-house, a long rifle resting upon his shoulder, and his keen eye sweeping the horizon at a glance. As he caught sight of the flat-boat, he raised his cap and saluted it; and shortly after several others appeared beside him and did the same. Our friends returned the salutation, and continued watching the tiny settlement until the intervening forest hid it from view.

This block-house was constructed somewhat differently from those generally upon the frontiers, although now and then a similar one is found even at this day.

The settlements and solitary cabins were still passed at long intervals, and the night proved so dark and cheerless, that they put into shore near a small cluster of houses and spent the night. As they were hardly yet in dangerous territory, they committed no indiscretion in doing this.

At sunrise the boat was loosened, and our friends were once more floating forward, a day's journey nearer their destination. Nothing worth noting occurred through this day. The settlements became more rare, and the faces of their kindred scarcer. Late in the afternoon they passed the mouth of the Muskingum, and at night a small river which put in from the Virginia side. There was a slight moon this night. A vigilant watch, of course, was maintained, but nothing to excite alarm took place.

In the morning they were opposite the point where the Great Kanawha debouches into the Ohio. The settlement here was termed Point Pleasant, by which name it is known at the present day. It was at this point that they were joined by a man who stated that he was a ranger going to Massie's Station down the Ohio. Without the least mistrust or suspicion, our friends took him on board, and continued floating hopefully down the beautiful river.

This day, when at the mouth of the Big Sandy, and just at the elbow of the great bend in the Ohio, an attempt was made to decoy them ashore. The stranger whom they had taken on board, instantly warned them of their danger, and told them that they must pay no attention to the entreaties from the white men. The emigrants, as the case stood, would not have deviated from their course, but the earnestness of their new-found friend made them esteem him highly and congratulate themselves upon having secured such a valuable ally.

All, we say, thought thus; but there were two exceptions – Marian and a tall, bony, unmarried man by the name of Peterson. This fellow looked upon their new acquaintance with distrust the minute he stepped upon the boat.

"I'll be darned, Marian," he said, in an undertone to her, after they had passed the decoy, "ef I don't s'picion that chap. He's mighty clever, and the trouble is he is a *leetle too clever*."

"Do you really fear him?" asked Marian, frightened at finding that another shared her suspicions.

"Fear him? I'd like to see the man *I'm* afeared of. All I'd ask would be to just git them are paws on old Simon Girty or that McGable that people allow is out in these parts, or that man thar, if he ain't what he orter be, which I allow is the case."

"At any rate, watch him, Jim, for it won't do to have a traitor within when there were so many without."

"I'll watch him, I reckon, Marian; and by the Eternal, the first real genuine sign of treachery I see, I'll shoot him! You may bet on that."

As these words were uttered by the indignant Jim Peterson to Marian, he stood looking upon the object of his remarks with flashing eyes, and gesticulating earnestly with his long, bony, muscular arms as though he ached to get him once fairly within his grasp. In fact, Jim Peterson would have been a dangerous customer for any man. He was now about thirty years of age, and eight years of his life had been spent as scout and ranger. He had served under St. Clair and Gen. Harmar, and when the former suffered such a disastrous defeat, he became so disgusted with the generalship of his leaders, that he left the country and settled down in the village mentioned at the commencement of this work. Here he had remained until the present time; but the daring, wandering, reckless spirit was so strong within him that he could resist no longer, and he joined the present party with the full determination of taking to the woods again as soon as they arrived at their destination.

He was over six feet in height, of a thin, attenuated frame, capable of panther-like strength and activity, with a keen, restless gray eye, and a sharp-featured visage.

Marian, after the conversation with him, descended to the cabin; but her mind was in such a tumult of fear and apprehension that she could not restrain her agitation. She now firmly believed that the stranger above was an enemy, and that, even with the shrewdness of Jim Peterson to protect them, they were all still in the utmost peril. But she knew of no course to pursue, except to invoke Divine protection. Should she impart her suspicions to the females around her, they would either ridicule her or become so terrified themselves, that the case would be infinitely worse. She concluded, at last, that there was nothing she could do, and, under Heaven, the case must be left to Peterson.

In a short time night commenced settling over the woods and river. The emigrants had now made such progress upon their way, that they were about half way between the Big Sandy and Sciota. The dense forests of Kentucky and Ohio shut down upon either hand, and not a sign of civilization met the eye.

Before it was fairly dark, the flat-boat was suddenly hailed from the shore. A white man, limping and apparently in great distress, besought them to run in and take him on board before the Indians reached him.

"He's a decoy," remarked the stranger, who had intently watched him from the first.

"How do you know he is, colonel?" asked Peterson, who had intently watched the stranger all the time.

"How do I know he is?" repeated the latter. "I reckon as how any fool as has one eye could tell the same mighty quick."

"You're sure of it then, eh?"

"In course I am, ain't you?"

"Yas, sir."

With this the ranger turned on his heel, satisfied that they had a traitor on board. This may seem strange to the reader, but it would not be to a backwoodsman who understood the case. The eagerness and quickness this man had evinced to point out danger, ever since he joined our friends, was good reason in itself for suspicion. Had he been a genuine ranger, he would have hesitated before giving his opinion, and not defeat his own ends by showing too much knowledge of what was unknown to the rest.

Peterson walked away from him, and communicated his suspicions to several of his friends. Just as he expected, they laughed at him, and accused him almost of meanness. Stung by this rebuke, the ranger became silent and sullen and left them.

In the meantime, the man upon shore was bellowing louder than ever. Not content with being once refused, he was limping along shore, and he

"I declare, it looks queer anyhow. I never knowed one of them decoys to hang on like that."

"You have no notion that he is anything else but one, or that he has any object except our own destruction?"

"I didn't think different at first, but it begins to look doubtful. Just let me say a few words to him."

With this, he stepped to one side of the boat, and called out, "What's your name?"

"John Haggart."

"How come you to git in such an ugly fix?"

"I was out scouting it, and was cotched by the Shawnees, and have just got away from them. For God's sake, come and take me off, for they're after me."

"Jump into the river and swim out to us."

"My hurt is too bad; I've got a bullet clean through my thigh, and can just drag the leg after the other. Yonder is the smoke of their wigwams up on the hill and they ain't fur off. My God! don't leave a white man thus! Heaven would curse you if you did."

Our friends looked in the direction he indicated, and could faintly discern in the gathering gloom a thin wreath of smoke rising from the trees. The suffering man, as if aware of their thoughts, called out:

"That is whar' they are, and their runners are out after me. May God forever curse you, if you leave me here."

"What do yer think?" asked the stranger, turning round with an air of perplexity to the others. "I believe that man ain't a decoy, not at all; and ef he isn't, we orter not leave him there to be cooked by the red devils. Still, I shouldn't say nothing, but leave it with you."

"It will never do to run the boat ashore," said several of the men, firmly.

"Oh, I didn't mean that. In course, it would be all-fired foolish to do that ar' thing. But I've been thinking" – and the man dropped his eyes, as if in great perplexity – "that we orter help that man off. To do sich a thing we ain't compelled by any duty to expose ourselves to any danger. What is your views, friends?"

"Why, if the thing can be done without imperiling ourselves, it is our Christian duty to do it; but we are at a loss at present to understand how we could manage it thus."

"Oh, easily enough; just run the boat in about half way where the water is so shallow that the fellow can wade out to us. Keep your eyes open, and if there is the least sign of treachery, we can fall into the current again and float off."

"A good plan, and I see no reason for not carrying it out."

All echoed this sentiment, with the exception of Peterson, who still stood apart, in a sullen, pouting mood, leaning against the side of the boat, with his head dropped upon his breast.

"Come, Jim, what do you think of it?" asked one of the emigrants, and the others all turned toward him for a reply.

"I think, in the first place, you are all a set of the thunderingest fools I ever heard of, not to see you've got a sneaking decoy right among ye, who's doing his purtiest to git you into shore to please that other trap."

"Outrageous! shameful!" exclaimed several, horrified at the blunt, plain-spoken answer they had received.

"Go on, and do what you please, but don't ax me nothin' more, for I've got nothing at all to say," added Peterson, who was touched to the quick by what he had heard in reply.

The stranger, it was observed, said nothing at all, except, after a few minutes, to urge the matter upon our friends. It was now quite dark, but the shadowy form of the man on shore could be seen struggling along, and calling out in tones that were really heartrending. The men consulted together a while longer, and then it was determined to follow the suggestion of their friend.

The long, guiding oars were dipped into the water, and with a loud plash swung a few feet, when the unwieldy flat-boat began slowly sliding in toward shore. It moved very tardily, however, and it was noticed that its progress down stream was continually growing less and less. This was accounted for by the fact that they were getting out of the current, and moving in shallow water.

The man, all this time, was limping and gesticulating on shore, imploring them to hurry, as his life stood in imminent danger every moment, and the whites, to their credit be it spoken, worked with a good will.

They had hardly commenced rowing, when Marian asked Peterson whether there was not another person upon the bank.

"It is a female, and see how motionless she stands! She is just below that man."

"Yes, I see her – she is waving her hands. Hark!"

"Keep off! keep off! You will all be killed! This man is a decoy!" called out the person alluded to in a beseeching voice.

"Who is she?" asked Marian, growing more excited every moment.

"Ah! she's the Frontier Angel. Haven't you heard of her? When *she* warns a white, he can depend on it she means what she says. This ain't the fust time she has done that thing."

"O Jim!" implored Marian, "this is awful; tell them before it is too late. They cannot but heed you."

The ranger hesitated a moment, as he remembered the cutting rebuff he had received; but the imploring voice of Marian, together with his own sense of duty, conquered. He turned his head and looked at the oarsmen. They had paused as the warning voice reached them.

"What does that mean?" asked one.

"That gal is the Frontier Angel that you've heard the boys talk about at the settlement. Ef any of you wants red night-caps, don't mind her; ef you doesn't, jest get back into the channel as soon as them oars will take you."

"*I've* heard that that gal you call the *Frontier Angel* is nobody but a crazy squaw," said one of the oarsmen, still hesitating.

"Go on, then," said Peterson, stung to the quick by this second repulse. "I shan't say no more," he added, in a lower tone, to Marian.

"Didn't you know that gal is a crazy fool?" said the stranger, sneeringly. "Of course she is, and I thought you knowed it. Ef you're going to help that dyin' feller, you've got to be quick about it, 'cause the reds can't be far off."

Thus appealed to, the oarsmen commenced, although it cannot be said all were free from misgivings. But in the face of the suspicious actions of the man upon shore, and the continued warnings of the Frontier Angel, the flat-boat gradually approached its doom. Several of the men already half-repent their rashness, and stood with their eyes fixed upon shore, and an expression of painful doubt upon their features.

Peterson saw all these manifestations, and thus communed with himself.

"No use of talkin', they're all goin' sure, and, Jim Peterson, the question is what you purpose to do. You can tend to yourself well enough, but how 'bout Marian? It won't do to leave her. You hain't forgotten, Jim, the time them same reds butchered *your* gal. No, Jim you never forgot that, and *you never will*; and how do you s'pose Mansfield will feel ef you leave his gal in the same fix? 'Twon't do, 'twon't do, Jim. Can you swim, Marian?" he asked, turning toward her.

"Yes; why do you ask?"

"It's what has got to be done, Marian. You see, we'll be inshore in a few minutes. Stick by me, and I'll take you overboard."

"Why not now, Jim?"

"You see it's getting dark fast, and every minute will help us. By the eternal! do you know that feller on shore? It is McGable! Hello! the boat has struck!"

Such was the case, and what was more alarming they were but a few rods from shore. It was noticed, too, that the wailing tone of the decoy had changed to a more commanding one, while the Frontier Angel had disappeared.

"What does this mean, sir?" asked one of the oarsmen, thoroughly alarmed.

"*You're my prisoners, sir!*" replied the stranger. "Don't get excited – it's no use. That man is McGable, and the Shawnees are waitin' fur yer ha'r. Ef you undertake to fight, you'll be tomahawked in a minute; but ef you give in nice like, p'raps some of yer'll be let alone. Ef you've no objections, I'll give the signal for 'em to come aboard."

All except Peterson were paralyzed with horror, and seemed utterly speechless. He stepped deliberately forward and said:

"I'd like to ax a question afore you does that thing. What yer going to do with *me*?"

"Burn and toast you as soon as we get ashore."

"I rather reckon not, old hoss. *How does that suit?*"

Before even his victim divined his intention, the ranger brought his rifle to his shoulder and fired, his ball passing clean through the breast of the villain. The latter gave a spasmodic start and gasp, a groan, and sucking the breath through his teeth, fell forward, the blood spouting in a stream from his wound.

"Hyer's as opines as how it won't be *you* that'll toast Jim Peterson just yit," remarked the ranger, coolly fastening his rifle to his back.

"O God! what shall we do?" frantically wailed the settlers.

"Fight! you was so anxious to see McGable, you'll have the chance now. Ef yer'd a minded what me and the Frontier Angel said, you wouldn't got into this fix. It won't do no good to touch the oars. You're fast in the mud, and have got to fight it out!"

Instantly the shore became alive with savages. Yells that might have curdled a demon's blood rent

Peterson saw the critical moment had arrived, and catching Marian by the waist, he sprang upon the gunwale, intending to leap over. But that instant a volley was poured into the boat, and a bullet struck her. The ranger felt her become a dead weight, at the same moment that a stream of hot blood poured over his hand. He bent his head down, and peered into her face. The dark, blue eyes were slowly shutting, and her head dropped heavily.

"I am dying, Jim," she murmured. "God bless you for your effort. Give my last love to Russel, mother, and father – good-by!"

"Heaven bless you!" said the ranger, laying her gently upon the deck, in spite of the wild scene that had commenced. "You've escaped that McGable, anyhow."

Peterson again sprang to the gunwale, and, with an almost superhuman leap, bounded outward in the darkness and disappeared.

CHAPTER III. THE TWO SCOUTS

One day in spring, a border ranger was making his way through the cane-brakes of Kentucky, in what is now called Lewis county.

All through the frontier wars, such men were employed by the generals and leaders of the different forces, and they formed no insignificant part of their power. Of the American scouts is this especially true. A more daring, reckless, and effective set of men the world has never known. Scores of names have come down to us, whose record is but one long, brilliant array of thrilling acts, any one of which would have sufficed for the lifetime of an ordinary individual.

For a period of nearly half a century, the valleys of the Ohio, Sciota, Miami, Mad, and numerous other rivers, were constantly ranged by these characters, who generally went alone, but sometimes in couples, and very rarely in larger companies. Their whole duty was to spy the hostile Indian tribes. The warlike, revengeful Shawnees, a mighty and powerful nation in themselves, had so stirred up the other tribes, that nothing but eternal watchfulness could guard the settlers from the knife and tomahawk. Many long years was the government compelled to keep an independent force to protect the frontier. The disastrous results of many of these campaigns but prolonged the painful war; and the final success of our arms is much more due to the prowess of these border rangers, than we are apt to imagine. Every artifice was adopted by them to secure the necessary information. Should the tribes collect in unusual numbers in any village, there was sure to be a pair of keen eyes watching every movement from some hiding-place. Their deadliest enemies ventured in disguise among the Indians, dogged their trail for days, or lay concealed in such proximity that only at night did they dare to creep forth. All perils were undergone by these hardy men.

Such a character we have now to deal with.

Had we been in close proximity to him, we might have heard a slight rustling now and then, and perhaps the breaking of a small twig. The scout was proceeding with caution, but it was evident that it was more from habit than from any suspicion of danger. Were there savages in the vicinity, not the slightest noise would have betrayed his presence to the most watchful one.

A moment after, the bushes parted, and the ranger, in a half-crouching position, emerged into the open wood. Here he straightened himself up, and disclosed a frame wondrously like that of Peterson. Tall, sinewy, graceful, and thin almost to emaciation, with a sharp-featured face, half-covered by a thin, straggling beard, and small twinkling eyes of such glittering blackness that they fairly scintillated fire in excitement – these were the noticeable characteristics of the man.

After coming into the open wood, he stood a moment, as if listening, and then strode rapidly forward, trailing a long nitid rifle as he did so. Reaching the edge of the river, he suddenly halted and darted behind a tree. His quick eye had discovered "sign." From this point he peered cautiously out, and then instantly jerked his head back again. This movement was repeated several times, until, at last he held his head in a stationary position. After gazing a few minutes, he muttered:

"Yes, it's a flat-boat aground, sure as my name's Dick Dingle. Things look s'pishus the way it's sticking in the mud thar. Some of the blasted Shawnees' work, I'll swar; and I'll bet my head that

For over two hours Dingle reconnoitered the flat-boat, and all the time kept himself carefully concealed from it. He glided around in the wood, viewing it from every imaginable position that could be reached from the shore. At last he seemed satisfied.

"Whosomever is in that flat-boat ain't *livin'*, that's sartin; and whosomever is watching it from shore ain't nigh enough to hurt you, Dingle, so hyer goes."

With this, he stepped softly into the water, and waded out toward the flat-boat. After reaching it, he again paused a moment, glanced toward the shore, and then placing his hand upon the

gunwale, bounded over into the boat. The ranger, probably the first time in his experience, instead of alighting firmly upon his feet, slipped and immediately fell flat upon his side; but he instantly sprang up again, and then saw the cause of his mishap. He had alighted directly in a pool of dark, thick, sticky blood! The sight that met his eye was enough to freeze with horror, for a moment, even him who was used to meeting death in every repulsive shape! The deck was slippery with blood, and from the cabin came the sickening smell of death. Blood and brains were scattered around, against, and upon everything, but not a corpse was visible!

"They've tomahawked 'em all, and pitched 'em overboard. Ef that ain't enough to make a minister or even a scout swear, then my name ain't Dick Dingle, that's all. That ar' McGable's been hyer, sure; 'cause whar *he's* been nobody lives, and I ca'c'late nobody of them poor whites has lived in these parts. Wal, wal, it's bad business. I like scouting it when the killin' is all on our side; but it ain't, by a heap. Ef it wan't, why we wouldn't need to scout; but that ar' McGable is bound to squar' accounts with me yit for this night's business."

The ranger remained a short time longer, examining the flat-boat, which, as the reader has probably supposed, was the one whose sad fate was recorded in the preceding chapter. He was satisfied that not a soul had survived the frightful massacre, and after a few minutes' further delay, he again dropped into the water, and made his way to land. He stepped cautiously ashore, and, as was his invariable custom, commenced talking to himself.

"Old Mad Anthony sent me down in these parts to find out what the reds ar' drivin at, and reckon as how I've found – hello, Dingle, what are ye about?"

With the last question, uttered in a hurried whisper, the ranger disappeared like a shadow. Had any one been beside him, he would have been at a loss to understand the cause of the sudden movement, for not the least noise was audible, nor the slightest movement visible. But the truth was the scout, all at once, became aware that some person beside himself was in the wood. The instant of discovery he dropped upon his hands and knees, and glided swiftly and noiselessly away, and commenced reconnoitring the stranger to ascertain his identity and intentions.

Now, it so happened that the latter was in precisely the same situation, and it was a singular coincidence that both should make the discovery of the other's presence, and commence seeking to know him at the same moment.

But thus it was, and the stratagems, maneuvers, and artifices resorted to by each to accomplish his ends, were extraordinary. For nearly two hours they dodged and feinted, glided and retreated, without coming any nearer success, and finally made the discovery by accident. Dingle came to the conclusion that whoever his rival was, he was certainly a genuine woodsman, and, if an Indian, one who was well worthy of coping with him. But the consummate tact and skill displayed, led him to suspect the other was a white man, and for this reason he became more careless in his movements. The consequence was that, after he had flitted from one tree to another, he began to doubt whether he had accomplished the movement successfully; and, while thus doubting, he heard his name called.

"Shoot me, if that ain't you, Dick Dingle! Why don't you come out and shake paws with an old friend?"

And the next minute Jim Peterson stepped boldly forth.

"Wal, Jim, I might've knowed that was your ugly picter. Whar'd you come from?"

The two grasped hands, and gave, what Edward Everett terms, the genuine *tourniquet* shake. They had been brother rangers through Gen. St. Clair's war, and had ever been together, encountering all imaginable dangers, and were the joint heroes of the most wonderful escapes. And when we say that neither had seen the face of the other for over six years, it may well be supposed that their meeting was of the most pleasant kind. As they stood, grasping hands, and smilingly exchanging jocose remarks in their characteristic way, the resemblance between them was most remarkable. In fact, they had often, when in service, been taken for brothers, and their identity was

often confounded. The Shawnees, who knew them rather more than they cared about, termed them the "Double Long-Knives." Both were tall, graceful, and sinewy, as straight as arrows, and with faces sparsely bearded, and, to increase the perplexity of separating them, they dressed precisely alike. But Dingle had small, black eyes, and a sharp Roman nose, while Peterson had eyes of a light gray color, and a nose a perfect Grecian in cast.

"Come, Dick, what are you doin' in these parts?" asked Peterson.

"I'm out fur Mad Anthony, as you might know, and have been taking a look at the flat-boat there. Ah! bad business! bad business, Jim!"

"Yas, if you'd have only seed it, Dick, you might say so."

"Do you know anything 'bout it? Who the poor wretches was? – when 'twas done? – how they came to do it? – and *who* done it?" asked Dingle, excitedly.

"I war on that boat, and the only one who saved his hair."

"The only one, Jim?"

"The only one; and when I got clean off, I jist clapped my hand on my head to see ef my hair was thar still, fur I had strong doubts of it. I was the only one! I took a long jump and a dive fur it."

"How was it, when you was on, that they come in for one of the all-fired decoys?"

"I couldn't hender them;" and Peterson proceeded to give, in a few words, what is already known to the reader.

"Let me ax you one thing," said Dingle, when he had finished. "Do you know whether that renegade McGable had anything to do with this business?"

"He was the decoy himself; but a feller come on board up at the Kanawha who got the poor fools to run into shore."

"Was he a short, squashy-looking imp?"

"He war exactly so."

"Then 'twas Pete Gammock. I know him. He and McGable have hung together fur three – four years that way. That's his plan; he's tried the same trick afore. He goes on the flat-boats, at some place up that way, and purtends he's one of us going down the river to the 'Three Islands', Marysville, or some of the forts. After he gits on, he fixes so as to pull the wool over thar eyes, and when McGable bawls out fur 'em to come ashore, he persuades 'em to do it."

"He'll never do it agin, fur I settled the business with him soon as he owned up he'd come the gammon game. I feel sorry, Dick, mighty sorry fur them poor whites that was sarved that mean trick; but thar was one among 'em that went under, and I ain't ashamed to own it makes me feel watery to think on it. I left her dyin' on board just as I jumped over and the imps clambered up."

Peterson drew the sleeve of his hunting-shirt across his eyes, and Dingle, with respect to his feelings, remained silent a moment, when he returned: "P'r'aps she ain't gone under, Jim; maybe the reds have gone off with her."

"No they haven't; she's out in the river yender somewhar. The reds tomahawked every one. I kinder had a faint hope she might be among 'em, and I've been follerin' them to find out. I seed all the Injuns, and that infarnal McGable among 'em. They had plenty of hair hangin' to their girdles, but they hadn't a captive among 'em. That ar' McGable tried to get Marian Abbot, and because she wouldn't have him, he has done this. I b'lieve he fired the gun that killed her, when I had her in my arm just goin' to jump overboard to take a swim for it. And, Dick, I swear that I'll never rest till that renegade McGable pays for this."

"I jine you in that!" said Dingle, taking his hand. "We'll hunt him together. He's murdered enough of his own blood, and we'll stop it *right off*."

"I've got to go and tell the old folks of it, and young Mansfield. I know it'll break their hearts, and I'd rather be shot and burnt than do it; but it's got to be done, and I must do it."

"Are you goin' now?"

"Yas, right away. As soon as I see 'em, I'll be back agin. I'll wait fur you down at the fort below."

"And what then, Jim?"

"We'll start off on that hunt," said Peterson, in a low tone, and with this, the two rangers separated, and took different directions in the forest.

CHAPTER IV. THE FAINT HOPE

There is a scene that we must not dwell upon. There are some that awaken emotions which no pen can describe, no imagination conceive. When Peterson, the ranger, communicated the dreadful intelligence of the fate of Marian to her parents, the shock was terrible. The mother swooned away, and for nearly a week remained more in death than life. The father received the shock like the oak when riven by the thunderbolt – firm and unbending, but still shattered to the very heart. He groaned in spirit, but, for the sake of his wife, bore up with superhuman calmness. But it well-nigh killed him; and his wife, when she was pulled from the grasp of death, felt that she could never, never recover from it. Her heart was broken.

Russel Mansfield bore the affliction like a man. He held up in the presence of others; but there were moments when alone in which he gave way to his great woe. We have no desire to dwell upon this painful scene, but hasten forward.

The resolution of Abbot to emigrate still farther to the west, instead of being weakened by this sad calamity, was strengthened into a determination. Why it was, he would almost have been at a loss to tell. We all know that when death, for the first time, strikes down some one near and dear to us, it is difficult to believe that such is the case; it is a long time before we can bring ourselves to realize it. There is a singular, lingering doubt, the faint shadow of a hope that, after all, it is not death, and that through the subtle power of medicine the lost one will still return to us. And even, after burial, for a long time, there will be moments when we give way to the same extraordinary hope and find ourselves indulging in dreams of fancy in which the lost one is again found.

Those who have had a similar experience to this, will appreciate the feeling that led Abbot and his stricken wife to emigrate to the scene which was so full of horror to them. The same motive strengthened the determination of Mansfield, although his parents now refused to accompany the party. Several of the other families also refused, so that the company bid fair to be alarmingly small. Peterson had whispered to Mansfield the intention of Dingle and himself of seeking out the renegade McGable and revenging themselves upon him, and he was anxious to either join them or be so situated that he could receive the earliest intelligence of their success.

Accordingly, one morning in September, another flat-boat floated away from the village referred to at the commencement of this work, and carrying with it four families only, together with young Mansfield. The weather continued fine all the way, and they experienced no difficulty in reaching their destination. Just before they reached the Sciota, a desperate attempt was made to get them ashore. Mansfield, shrewdly suspecting that it was McGable himself who acted the part of a decoy, raised his rifle with the intention of shooting him; but the wily demon was too quick for him. He suspected something, and secreted himself before Mansfield could secure his aim. The latter, however, fired, and came so uncomfortably close, that the decoy ceased his entreaties, and, by way of a return for the compliment, a whole volley was fired at the flat-boat by the concealed savages. Some of the bullets struck the boat and the others whistled overhead, but they did no further damage.

The settlement, which was the destination of our friends, was a few miles further down the river, and they came in sight of it about the middle of the afternoon. As Peterson had given the settlers notice of their coming, they were expected and joyfully welcomed. The flat-boat was swept into shore and fastened, and, with the aid of the willing settlers, its contents removed in an incredibly short space of time. The boat itself was then hauled as far up the bank as possible, and taken carefully apart, and its timbers preserved for building purposes.

As this village is to be the location of many of the succeeding incidents of our story, we will here briefly describe it, and then hasten forward to the incidents that follow.

The settlement consisted of about twenty cabins, and numbered a hundred inhabitants. A small block-house was erected near the lower end of the village for immediate refuge in case of sudden attack; but the governor of the territory had ordered a large one to be erected and continually manned by men well-skilled in border warfare. This block-house was erected in advance of the settlement itself, so as to better guard the approach of an enemy. It stood in a broad clearing, protected on the one hand by a marshy swamp, and the other by the Ohio river. The block-house consisted of two stories. The lower one was about thirty feet square, and the upper thirty-three, so that it projected over the lower, giving those within an opportunity of defending the door and windows, in case a determined attack was made. A well had been sunk in one corner, so that if besieged they could not be brought to terms by thirst. The roof was so steeply-shelving as to prevent any burning missiles from remaining upon it, and the planks themselves were so smooth-shaven that the most agile savage could not maintain a position upon it for an instant. The sides were built of solid green logs of some eighteen or twenty inches in diameter, dove-tailed at the ends in the usual manner, and the interstices filled in with mortar. The doors and windows and shutters were bars of ponderous puncheons, secured by massive bars of wood on the inside. The upper part of the house was pierced with numerous loop-holes, through which a large force could keep up a constant fire upon their assailants.

The block-house was surrounded by a substantial wall of palisades. These were made by cutting trees of a foot in diameter into pieces fifteen feet in length. These pieces were then quartered, hewed off sharply at one end, and driven four feet into the solid ground, leaving eleven feet above. The palisades were kept firmly in their places by means of stout braces and wall-pieces upon the inside; and, as they were set with their smooth side outward, and close together, no force could scale them without the aid of ladders.

A flagstaff stood a few feet from the block-house, and the stars and stripes ever waved from the summit. At the second story was a projection, facing the forest, upon which the sentinel passed most of his time while on duty, and which supported a swivel, so hung that it could be brought to bear upon almost any point from which danger was to be apprehended.

This fort was quite a celebrated one, and being manned by the governor with an active force, was much resorted to by the scouts and rangers along the frontiers. Dick Dingle was enrolled as a member of this company, although the governor and the commander of the fort knew there was no use of undertaking to bring any such character under discipline. He was allowed to go and come when he pleased, and it may be said, in fact, that the whole class of frontier rangers were a set of *Border Zouaves*. They were ever in the most perilous situations, did the most dangerous service, and acknowledged no leader other than their own free will. The commander, with several of his leading men, had served in the capacity of rangers, and were all adepts in Indian warfare.

It was the duty of Dingle to range through the adjoining country, to keep a constant watch upon the movements of the Indians, and to return as often as possible with his report to the commander. At this time there were other scouts performing similar duties in other situations, who have since become celebrated in history. McArthur, White, McClelland, and Davis, and the Whetzel brothers are the ones to whom we refer. They occasionally visited the fort singly, but never in company, and sometimes remained several days in conversation and feasting with their friends.

Peterson, upon his return with Dingle, had had his name enrolled as a member of the company at the block-house; and they had already made several excursions in company. When Abbot and his friends arrived at the settlement, these two scouts had just returned from a journey up the Sciota valley to one of the Shawnee towns. The genial settlers, having known of the coming of their new friends, showed their good-will by erecting several cabins and presenting them to the newcomers immediately upon their arrival. By dusk, Abbot, with his wife and Mansfield, were snugly

domiciled in theirs, and ready to join their neighbors, on the morrow, in clearing the forest, breaking the ground, or whatever their duty might chance to be.

Although Abbot had not seen Peterson, he had heard that he was in the settlement, and sent for him in the evening. The good-hearted fellow had purposely kept out of the way, for fear that his presence would be painful to them, but upon hearing the wish of Abbot, he immediately went to his house.

The meeting could not be but painful upon both sides. There was a manifest restraint about the ranger, for he well knew the feelings that must be awakened by his presence. The conversation turned upon ordinary subjects, and each carefully refrained from any allusion that might bring up the matter that was in the mind of every one.

In the course of a half hour or so, the quick eye of Mrs. Abbot saw her presence was a restraint upon something her husband wished to say; and she made an excuse for withdrawing and retiring for the night.

After she had gone, the conversation continued a short time as usual, and then, as it sometimes will, it suddenly came to a dead pause. Utter silence fell upon all.

"Jim," said Abbot, glancing furtively around to assure himself that his wife was not within hearing, "Jim, I must once more speak about *that*."

"Wal?" queried the ranger, uneasily.

"I must ask you once more to narrate, as particularly as is in your power, the account of the attack upon the flat-boat, and the death of Marian. I will not ask you to give anything else but that alone."

"I dunno as I can tell anything more, but, howsumever, I can tell that over again if you want it," and thereupon he proceeded to give with fearful vividness, the dying-words and actions of Marian Abbot. The father heard him all through, without a syllable of interruption, keeping his lips compressed, his brow knit, and his eye fixed upon the smoldering fire before him.

"You think, Jim, then, that she is – she must be dead?" he inquired.

"Why, Abbot, 'sposen I had fifty bullets right smack through this h'yer noddle of mine, and you should ax me if I had any s'pishions I'd survive, and I should tell you I was as dead as a door nail, wouldn't you believe me?"

"Of course."

"Wal, then, though I'm sorry to say it, there ain't a bit more hope for her. She never seed the devils that climbed over the boat. She died afore I got twenty feet from the boat."

"You are *certain of it*?"

"Yes, sir; I'm certain."

"You must wonder at my talking thus, Jim; but I have no hopes either; I have given her up long since. I have still one wish – to know what fate attended her body."

"I can tell you that."

"What was it?"

"She was thrown overboard with the others."

"You did not see that done, Jim, and cannot be sure of it."

The ranger was about to contradict him, and tell that he had followed the murderers and seen that they bore no body with them; but he did not, and Abbot continued.

"It is this doubt – this uncertainty that still troubles me. When that has been cleared up I shall never speak of the subject again. Russel has told me that you and Dingle are going to seek revenge upon McGable?"

"We are not going to seek it; we are going to *get* it."

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