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T. C. HARBAUGH



A TALE OF THE BLOODY FORT

THE NIGHT-HAWKS OF THE FIRE-LANDS



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A Tale of the Bloody Fort

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CHAPTER I. DOUBLY WARNED.

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A small apartment, walled with rough logs, and blackened by smoke.

A substantial fire burns in an uncouth but serviceable fireplace, and a man reclines on the puncheons in the ruddy blaze.

His sole companion is a huge yellow dog of the mastiff species; and his master's long black locks rest upon his shaggy coat.

It is nine o'clock at night, and the moon shines in an unclouded firmament.

Not a sound disturbs the stillness of the wood; but just at the edge of the meager clearing that lies before the cabin, a little river flows northward with a low noise, for it is almost bank full.

Man and dog are wide awake; the former gazes into the fire, the latter looks up into the hard, sunbrowned face.

The master is a great, strong man, whose looks, physique and voice, when he speaks, indicates a long frontier life. He is perhaps three and forty years of age. Some would say that he is fifty; but people must not judge age by certain crows-feet on the brow; troubles make young men old. His occupation is revealed by a quantity of animal traps lying in one corner of the room, and suspended from a rafter overhead hangs a bundle of skins, ready for the market at Fort Sandusky.

But he rises and looks at the dog, who bristles up and runs to the door, protected by a strong oaken plank.

“What is it, Yellow Dick?” asks the trapper, standing beside his companion, rifle in hand, and peering into the moonlight through a crevice between two logs. “I would hev sworn that I heard the voice of a man; but—”

He paused abruptly, for Yellow Dick had suddenly pricked his long ears anew, and the trapper began to unbarricade the door.

“’Tis old Johnny, Dick, as sure as death,” he said, glancing at the mastiff while he worked at his plank. “He hasn’t been this way for a three month. Mebbe he brings news from the seat of war.”

The dog seemed to understand the man, for his fierceness abated, and he stepped from the portal.

“There! I knew it was Johnny Appleseed,” the trapper said triumphantly, as he opened the cabin door, and let a flood of moonlight into the dingy room. “Here he comes, down the river. What’s that he’s saying, Dick?”

The speaker leaned forward and caught these words uttered in a melodious voice:

“The spirit of the Lord is upon me, and he hath anointed me to blow the trumpet in the wilderness and sound the alarm in the forest: for behold the tribes of the heathen are round about your door, and a devouring flame followeth after them.”

The herald of danger stood near the edge of the water, and looked like some wild being from spirit-land.

“Old Johnny means somethin’; somethin’s gone wrong somewhar,” cried the trapper, becoming excited, and then

in a louder tone he spoke the singular cognomen of the man of the wilderness—"Johnny Appleseed!"

The latter turned and after some hesitation came forward.

"Do not detain the Lord's anointed long," said the little wiry man, exhibiting his old restless activity, "for the Philistines are this night sweeping down upon the scattered tents of Israel, who will be found without the cities of refuge."

"But, Johnny, what has happened?" queried the settler, who could not repress a smile at the herald's quaint phraseology.

"The Philistines hold revel in the great walled city on the northern water."

"What! has Hull surrendered?"

"Even so, Israel is again in captivity, and the families on her borders must feel the fire now."

The trapper was silent for a while.

"Then the red-coated and red-skinned devils are coming to devastate the frontiers," he said, in a tone scarcely audible.

"Their forces no man can number," said the strange herald. "They are like the sands of the sea-shore. But I must go. I am appointed to deliver my message before every door in the forest, that the Lord's chosen may flee from the wrath to come."

"Then go, Johnny. I should not have detained you a minute. Yours is an errand of mercy. I have a duty to perform this night. Go, Johnny; tell them all of the swoop of the red

eagles; and tell them that Wolf Cap says, 'Fly to the block-houses without delay!'"

The pioneer hero started forward, but paused after taking a step, and drew the portion of an old volume from his bosom.

"Here news right fresh from heaven," he said, and he tore a leaf from the book and handed it to the trapper.

It was a leaf from Swedenborg's writings, for Johnny Appleseed—Jonathan Chapman—is no myth, and he was a true disciple of the Swedish seer.

Having accomplished his duty, the strange man, clad in nothing save a garment fashioned from a coffee sack, and bearing a long distaff, started off to spread dismay throughout the fire-lands.

"So Hull has surrendered," muttered Wolf-Cap through clenched lips, as he turned into the cabin again. "I know it was a cowardly affair, for Detroit was proof against ten thousand foes; but Hull was the wrong man in the right place. I know it; I told the soldiers so when I war there not long ago. These frontiers hev got to be desolated now, through the cowardice of one man," the lone trapper continued, busying himself with preparations for a night journey. "Our block-houses are poor excuses for bulwarks; but we must get the women and children in them as quickly as possible."

He donned his hunting accouterments and the wolf-skin cap which had given him the *sobriquet* that entitles our romance, and replenished the fire.

"I'll leave you to keep house, Dick," he said, addressing the dog. "I'll be back about daybreak. Now old fellow do

your duty, and don't let a sneakin' red-skin over this portal."

He patted the dog's shaggy back, barricaded the door, and made his exit from the cabin, by the roof.

"I'm pretty sure that Johnny missed 'em," he said, pausing for a moment beside the cabin and communing with himself. "He came down the river, and they are too far to his left. Yes, I guess he missed 'em."

The last word still quivered his lips when he started in a north-easterly direction, leaving the river to his left.

A well-defined trail stretched before him, and he walked rapidly through the moonlit forest, trailing his long-barreled rifle at his side.

It was a night in August, 1812, and, as not a breath of wind was stirring, the heat was oppressive. Once or twice the hunter started a deer from the weed-fringed margin of some forest stream, or frightened a coyote from his feast of freshly-slain bird.

Suddenly he paused and listened to a silver voice, soaring skyward far away.

"That's Huldah's voice," he said, audibly. "No woman can sing like her in these parts. I don't know, but some how or other I think an uncommon sight of that girl. She looks so much like Bessie did twenty years ago," and here the rough deer-skin sleeve dashed a tear from the speaker's eye.

"But I wonder what makes her so happy just now—when terror sits in many a white girl's heart. Ah! old Johnny did not warn *them!*"

He leaped the little rivulet by which he stood while speaking, and threaded the forest mazes again. Presently he came upon a neat clearing, in the center of which,

surrounded by a rail-fence, stood a cabin, somewhat larger than his bachelor abode. An air of industry pervaded the spot, and the honeysuckles that half concealed the little square windows, proclaimed the presence of the softer—the flower-loving sex.

The song that had startled the trapper by the little creek, was mute now, and a dead silence brooded over the settler's home, on which the moonlight softly fell.

Wolf-Cap leaned against a tree at the edge of the clearing, and thought of the coming whirlwind of destruction.

He thought till he gritted his teeth, and started forward, impulsively.

"Here's the toil of months," he cried. "Levi has labored like a giant to build a shelter for Huldah's head, and now to think that the flames must, in one brief hour, destroy it all. Oh, I wish I could wield the thunderbolts of heaven for a single minute!"

He approached the cabin boldly, his giant form bathed in moonshine, and a low growl saluted his ears as he stepped upon the little porch before the door.

"Who's there?" said a woman's voice, beyond the heavy door.

"Me—Wolf-Cap," answered the trapper, and he heard nimble fingers undoing the fastenings.

"Come in, neighbor Belt," said a voice as the door flew open, and a beautiful young girl, whose right hand gripped a rifle, appeared to the hunter.

He obeyed, and as he crossed the threshold the door was closed again and barred.

"Ye warn't lookin' for me to-night, I guess," he said, taking in the room at a glance.

"No, neighbor Belt; but you are none the less welcome. Father has just retired—"

"I'll be thar in a minute, Belt," interrupted a man's voice in the next room. "I thought it war you when I heard your step on the porch. What's up? Ye kin talk while I dress."

"A good deal what's bad is up," said Wolf-Cap, in a loud one. "Hull has surrendered, and a swarm of British and Indians are pouring down upon the frontier."

"Who told you, Belt?"

The speaker had appeared like a flash, and, scarcely more than half-dressed, stood before the trapper.

"Who told me?—Johnny Appleseed. He went down the last, Armstrong. We've enjoyed comparative quiet thus far during the war; but the cowardice—I know it was just that and nothin' else—of Hull, has unloosed the dogs of hell, an' they'll be here pretty soon. To the block-house is the cry now. If safety lies anywhere, it is there."

Levi Armstrong, the old settler, stood in the dim light of the tin fat lamp, and quivered with rage.

"Belt," he said, slowly and with emphasis, "I'm not goin' to give up the work of my hands without a struggle. You kin bet on that."

"But Huldah must go to the block-house. Strong's is the strongest, and best defended. We must act—"

"So long as father remains from the block-house I remain, too," interrupted Huldah Armstrong, as she touched Wolf-Cap's arm. "I share his love for our home. He shall not be separated from me."

“Huldah, you must go to Strong’s to-morrow,” said Levi. “I will go with you.”

“Truly, father?”

“Truly, girl.”

“Then I am content to go,” she said. “When do you look for the marauders, neighbor Belt?”

“They are liable to come at any hour,” was the reply. “But in truth I do not look for them for several days yet. No doubt Johnny heard of the disaster from some Indian, and is many hours in advance of the slayers.”

“And what are you going to do, Belt?” asked Levi Armstrong.

“I had settled upon no plan of action. I’ve got a cabin, and I hate to leave it to the torch. The Night-Hawks are with Proctor, you know. I wonder if they will come down upon the frontiers?”

“To be sure they will, neighbor Belt.”

“God help the frontiers, then.”

“Yes, yes.”

“But I must go back,” said the trapper; “nobody is at home but Yellow Dick. I guess we’ll not go to the block-house till to-morrow night. I think we’re safe in keeping aloof till then; ’tis best, you know, to seem in ignorance of the threatening danger.”

“I think so too, Belt. You’ll come over to-morrow evening, ready for the run?”

“I’ll be here, and then”—with a glance at Levi that told much—“we’ll shelter our heads beneath Strong’s roof.”

Several minutes later Wolf-Cap was returning to his cabin, and at length the grayish dawn of day revealed it to

him.

“Nobody has disturbed Dick,” he said, after inspecting the little structure’s surroundings. “He’s a good housekeeper—no woman in this land kin beat him, but—What’s that? By Huron! somebody hes nailed a piece of paper to my door.”

The trapper was walking forward while speaking, and it was a piece of paper on his cabin door that called the exclamation to his lips. With his eyes fastened upon the object, he quickened his steps, and presently paused on the flagstone stoop.

Before his eyes was a piece of dingy paper, bordered with blood, and held in its place by a knife, the point of which was buried deeply in the firm wood!

The uncouth letters had been traced on the dirty sheet with a stick dipped in gore, and were arranged in the following order:

“We hunt you. You know us. Fly or die!

“The Night-Hawks.”

The trapper looked at the warning a long time, and gradually a smile of contempt wreathed his lips.

“So, Royal Funk, you and your devils are in these parts again,” he said, “and I tell you, once for all, that I am not an illegal squatter. You can’t scare Card Belt.”

Then, without more words, he ascended to the roof and joined Yellow Dick, who received him with manifestations of delight in the room below. Fearlessly he threw wide the cabin door, and spread a map of the North-west, face downward, on the floor.