

CHAPTER XIV

The Lost Rifle

The Confederate army under General Longstreet had three days before passed Lenoir's where I was temporarily residing with a near relative. Hourly intelligence reached us of the progress of the siege of Knoxville and of the position of Bragg's command at Chattanooga. I had a few days before bidden adieu to my father and four brothers who were now in the besieging camp. The issue I knew was doubtful. No one who has not experienced it can conceive the anxiety and apprehension I felt when a courier announced that Bragg had been defeated and that the siege of Knoxville was raised. I believed as a necessary consequence that East Tennessee must be the second time evacuated and we, the ladies of our household, would be again left within the Federal lines. It was a cold and bleak December evening and everything outside the house comported well with the cheerless and gloomy condition of our public affairs. The sad news just communicated confirmed our worst apprehensions. The house was in great confusion, all full of excitement, blasted hope and withered expectation. I was standing in the front door. It gave some relief to my sad heart to look from that point upon the scattered artillery and the abandoned camp left by the Federal troops upon the advance of our own

Indulging a moment in this reverie I saw several Confederate soldiers approaching the house, through the wintry storm that was then falling, at a very slow pace. One of them seemed to be helpless and exhausted and was supported by his comrades. At once I supposed him to be one of our soldiers wounded in the fight. One of his comrades asked me if they could get a room for his friend who was very sick and almost at the point of death. His last chill seemed already on him and he could evidently go no further. Though the house was then full and crowded with the wounded yet my sister (whose it was) said, "Yes. He must stay." We did everything possible under existing circumstances for his comfort, hoping that he might be able in a short time to join his brigade before the Yankees should occupy the place and take him prisoner. When morning came he was no

better, had high fever and severe headache. He united with his comrades in the request that he should be allowed to remain with us while they for fear of being captured should hasten to the Confederate camp. To this my sister and I replied affirmatively, assuring them that the poor soldier should be cared for and that we would ourselves wait upon him. The comrades hastily withdrew and we entered the sick man's room that his comrades had left. I imagined that I saw a tear of sorrow glistening in his eye [but comforted] ¹ him with the assurance that the Yankees should not know that he was there. He told [me what] matter troubled him. It was his rifle which had his name engraved on it and had been presented to him by his commanding general and that he would rather lose anything else than that. He had carried it through so many battles that he was miserable when he thought the Yankees would get it. I promised to hide it from them. The next night after all had retired and no servants being around to watch or report I took the gun out of the house and fortunately finding a brick loose near the basement window slipped the favorite gun through the opening, believing that it would take one sharper even than one of Burnside's bummers to find it, went into his room and told him the place of its concealment, with which he seemed to be much pleased and considered his rifle safe. The soldier, sick as he was, we put into an unoccupied room of an outbuilding on the premises and stealthily and in private administered to his wants. He remained weak and helpless for many days but at length began to improve, was in better spirits, and was able at length to come into our parlor after dark and take tea with us. During the day he was not allowed to leave his hiding place. In some way, we never knew how, on one occasion a prying Yankee found his way into our little rebel's room. He told me afterwards that he got quick into his bed, groaned as if he were almost dying, and the Yankee believing him to be very sick stayed but a few minutes in the room and said nothing about arresting him. We expected him to have reported the discovery to headquarters and that it was full time now to make further arrangements for the escape of our prisoner beyond the Federal lines.

The plan was this. . . . We . . . had to get a neighbor four miles up the river to bring his canoe and take the recovered soldier over to the south side. The neighbor came. We appointed the night, the hour, and the place

¹ In several places on this and the succeeding pages the manuscript is mutilated. Bracketed words are the editor's guesses. In other instances the extent of mutilation defies any attempt at reconstruction.

of meeting. Previous to his departure we contrived to disguise him so that if he should be seen by Union men or Federal soldiers his Confederate grey should not betray him. For this purpose I went to the attic of the house, found some clothes that had not been worn for a quarter of a century and selected a coat of the olden style commonly called "claw hammer." It had been worn by a gentleman six feet high. Our Confederate was scarcely five feet—we called him the Little Rebel Palmetto and really he was so for when the coat was put upon him it nearly reached the floor. *His own* papers were sewed into some part of the coat least likely to be seen if he should be searched. He was furnished with money both Confederate and Federal and the necessary provision for his long and exceedingly hazardous journey. All these arrangements being perfected the night for his departure came. There was no moon but the stars shone brightly and he could see to travel very well. The hour of twelve at which he was to be at the river bank was near at hand. He bade us a sorrowful and affectionate farewell, promising that when he reached Dixie he would write to our friends there of his escape and of our welfare.

Some time after he left my sister and I went out to lock up his room, etc. What was our surprise to see our rebel at his door and asked what could have brought him back? He seemed embarrassed, but stammered out that he had come back for the picture of his sister which he had left. We thought it was for the picture of another and perhaps as dear person. After taking a second leave we wished him a pleasant journey. Another Confederate accompanied him from the neighborhood. He was better acquainted with the road. Here for the present I will leave our soldier and resume his story again.

The day after Guffin left three Yankee soldiers again came into the house searching for a Rebel soldier! Oh how we all rejoiced that he had escaped! As usual they stole a great many articles they had no use for. Amongst them was a beautiful Confederate overcoat left there by some of our officers. One of them put it on, marched all through the house, singing, talking and abusing the Rebels, and said he was delighted to hear of Rebel property being taken and burned. I remarked that our house had been burned. He said, "Oh, that was glorious! glorious!" I told him I too was glad. That I had rather it was burned than [that] him and all the other [enemies] of the country to be [in it]. While I am now writing I feel just as I [did] then—so very angry that had it been [possible] I would have killed him. Seeing [him so de]termined to keep the articles he had

[I] said little to him. In a few days Lenoir's [was occupied] again by the enemy. Several briga[des] encamped there for the winter. The headquarters [of General] Hazen were near the dwelling house. . . . One day I saw from my window several soldiers standing in the yard and seeming to be much interested looking at and examining something. I ascertained it to be the rifle of poor Guffin which I thought I had successfully hidden under the house. I believe a Yankee can see through a brick wall if there was anything to steal. How else could he have known it was there I could never imagine. I at once went to General Hazen who, by the way, I must say was a gentleman. I told him the gun was mine and desired him to give it to me. He replied as the soldier had not taken it out of the house, it was not stolen and he could not make him give it up, but that if I could buy it or get it from him in any way I could have it as long as he commanded there. There was an old Federal musket in the house and this I exchanged for Guffin's rifle which I kept as long as I remained in the Federal lines. . . .

Months had elapsed. The scene is changed from abandoned and desolated East Tennessee to the Sunny South; from bleak and cheerless winter, blue coats and Federal rule to the bright summer, the Confederate grey and the ardent patriotism of the Old North State. I had been banished from my native home, had said farewell to a never-to-be-forgotten sister then confined to a sickbed from which she never arose till she awoke in a better world—in Heaven. A girl yet in my teens, I had been sent out of the Federal lines for *disloyal acts* and under flag of truce was brought out to Dixie. Seated in the veranda of Colonel Anderson's house in C. one pleasant May morning whom should I see enter the gate but the proud Palmetto soldier, Guffin whom I had last seen at Lenoir, Tennessee, on the night of his fortunate escape from captivity and possibly death. I received him almost like a brother risen from the grave. I was electrified by the narrative he gave me in full detail of his [journey] through the mountains, the dangers he encountered, his fortunate deliverances, and of his eventual arrival at his home in Abbeville, South Carolina. I was much interested when he told me that through all the storms and rains and the mountain streams which he had encountered on his wanderings the picture which he had so nearly [forgotten] came through safe and intact. On the other hand he seemed to be no less interested in the recital I

gave him [of my release] from Yankee thralldom in my beloved [Tennessee] and [my] expatriation to Bristol first and then to Liberty. . . .

He inquired [with] affection and solicitude for my mother and sisters whose kindness had assisted and whose sympathy had [cheered] him during his sickness and confinement at Lenoir's. He shed a tear of sorrow when he heard that my sister Henrietta, his hostess and benefactress, had never recovered her health and spirits after the sudden death of two promising boys but that though she bore the spoliations of the enemy and the privations of property without concern and without a murmur and with heroic fortitude, yet the wound of the heart was deep and incurable and she had pined away and died from its infliction. I told him, too, of the exile of my mother and another sister whose sudden departure from Lenoir's had been hastened by the sad letter of a brother in prison at Camp Morton that he had been captured at the disastrous battle of Piedmont, and that he left on the field our youngest brother—a noble boy of eighteen—dangerously wounded by a cannon ball. My aged mother after remitting money to Camp Morton hurried from Lenoir accompanied by her eldest daughter and came by flag of truce to Bristol, hoping to reach Piedmont in time to nurse her wounded son. They had scarcely reached the Confederate lines when some officers whom we had known in Tennessee disclosed to her the painful and unwelcome information that after the amputation of his leg poor Arthur had died of lockjaw. Guffin heard it all with interest but with deep sorrow. After a suitable pause he inquired, anxiously for his rifle left with us at Lenoir's. I gave him the history of its discovery and of its re-purchase and that when I was sent out of the Federal lines I had entrusted the valued treasure to the care of a true woman and it was safe. Hearing this the eyes of the brave Palmetto regained their usual luster and fire, his countenance brightened, the car-whistle sounded, the soldier told me farewell, and left for the army of Virginia, and I saw him no more.