

A Midnight Duel

By Jeannette Holland Austin



"I remember it as though it was yesterday, the march of Hill's corps along the winding Shenandoah, up to the famous Luray gap.

Who could ever forget that march? The road winding with the beautiful river, and overhung with a majestic chain of Blue Ridge mountains, while across the crystal water the magnificent valley, with its charming cottages dotting the bounteous land with white-like balls of snow robed in flowers. But the most engaging and lovely objects paled into significance beside the peerless women of this blessed country, and you may well believe that when the camp was struck that the soldiers lost no time in making their way to the surrounding cottages.

Soon the music of the violin was heard, and the shuffling feet kept time to the music, while, for a time, the soldier's face was lit with old time joy.

At one of those cottages the belle of the valley reigned supreme, while several southern soldiers vied with each other in paying homage to the queen. Among others were two young soldiers, one from Georgia and the other from Mississippi; who were specially energetic in their attentions, and so marked had this become that those present watched the play with constantly increasing interest, fulling believing that both exhibited a case of

love at first sight. The surmise on the part of those present was only too true, as the tragic event which followed fully proved.

An altercation ensued, but both were cool, brave soldiers, two of the best shots in the army, who did not believe in a war of words. So it was ended by the Georgian dancing with the lady and the significant remark of the Mississippian that "I will see you after this set." When the dance was over the Georgian was seen to seek the Mississippian, and together they called each a friend from the crowd and departed. When outside, both claimed that an insult had been passed, which could only be wiped out in the blood of the other, and that a duel to the death should be arranged at once.

A full moon was just appearing above the tops of the surrounding forest, and I tell you this talk of blood in the silence of the night was anything but pleasant. No argument, however, would avail with these men, so it was arranged that the duel should take place at the top of the Blue Ridge near the center of the road that passes through the gap; that the weapons should be pistols at fifteen paces, and to fire at or between the words one, two, three, firing to continue until one or both were dead. The point was reached, the ground measured off and the men took their positions without a tremor.

The moon shed its pale light down on a scene never to be forgotten. A moment or two and the silence was broken by the signal: one, two three. At the word one the report of two pistols rang out on the midnight air, but the principals maintained their respective positions.

The left arm of the Georgian was seen to drop closer to the side, but the Mississippian was immovable, and still held his pistol to the front.

Again, a pistol shot was heard, coming from the Georgian, and the Mississippian still held his position, but he did not fire. The Georgian protested that he had not come there to murder him, but no answer was returned. The Mississippian's second approached his principal and found

him dead, shot through the eye on the first discharge of the weapons. Death it seems has been instantaneous so much so as not even to disturb his equilibrium. I may forget some things, but the midnight duel on the top of a spur of the Blue Ridge, with its attendant circumstances, is not one of them."

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