

DAVID

Drawings by Walter Biggs

BY HAPSBURG LIEBE

BROADWATER had wondered many times concerning the enlarged photograph that adorned one of the walls of his room, the best room of the cabin's three. It was that of a young man, with a face that was wholly good, with firmness on its lips, battle in its jaws, intelligence on its forehead, and loyalty in its deep, sincere eyes. It bore a resemblance to the old couple,—it must be a likeness of their son. About it were draped branches of laurel, that chaplet of the everlasting hills, and a few faded marigolds. Perhaps he was dead. Broadwater wondered.

And he had grown to look upon the picture with a certain awe. There was some reason for Grandpap Moreland's not having spoken of his boy. But it could be nothing, surely, of which the father and the mother were ashamed: the picture itself was a strong, however mute, denial of that.

The old mountaineer, appearing at his guest's door to announce the evening meal, saw Broadwater standing before the portrait. He did not interrupt the man from the city; but waited until he had turned of his own accord.

"I'll tell you about him after supper," he said; and his voice was a little different, Broadwater thought. And Broadwater noted that in the difference there was nothing of either sorrow or regret.

Half an hour later, when they were seated before the wide fireplace, Grandpap Moreland told the story of his son:

ME and my wife never had but two children. One of 'em was a gyrl, who is now married and got children of her own; t'other was a boy, who is now a man, and whose picture you was a lookin' at. He was big and strappin'—and the same size inside that he was outside, I be durned if he wasn't! He had eyes that was as blue as the sky one minute, and the color of a new rifle barrel the next. He never was whipped by no man, and he never bent his knees to nothin' but a groundhog's hole. My Lord a mercy, what a man he was! And yit he was as tenderhearted as a gyrl. I never seen sech a feller in all o' my borned days. I tell you, we're that proud of him that we can't hardly bear to talk about him, which is the reason we hain't never told you about him afore this.

He's now in the West, David is. He left here on account o' the law. The law was right; but David too was right. David always believed in the law; he lived by it too, until he felt that thar was a higher law than that made by man, no matter how good man might be in his lawmakin'.

IT was in May, and the trees was jest leafed out good, with the woods full o' wild bloom and the birds and squirrels a rantin' and a fussin' everywhar. I'd been to the Valley, to take some eggs to the store and to git a bag o' cornmeal from the mill; and as I come a drivin' my oxen along up the Stiffknee Spur road, a thinkin' to myself how good it was to be alive in sech a pretty world, thar stepped out o' the laurels a tall, lean man dressed in boots, blue shirt, and a broad-brimmed gray hat, with a wide blue handkerchief over his face up to his eyes, and a repeater rifle in his hands. He threwed the gun to his shoulder, with the barrel a p'intin' straight towards me.

"Put 'em up, and be quick about it!" he says, but a little weak and holler like in his voice. Then he adds, "I don't do much talkin' with my mouth."

It come so suddent that I didn't know hardly what to do. I come to, though, and jerked at my oxen and stopped 'em; then I turned and faced the highwayman. I seen his eyes glitter over the edge o' the handkerchief, and they looked keen and determined, even if they was sunk back and like them of a very sick man. So I put up my hands.

He got up in my wagon, and commenced a feelin' around in my pockets until he'd found my old, wore-out purse. He opened it and shook the little change I'd got for the eggs out in his hand and counted it. Then he put the money back in the purse, and the purse back in my pocket.

"I may be as crooked as a barrel o' snakes," he says, a tryin' to talk gruff and only a bein' pitiful, "but I'll never take the last cent from a old man like you!"

"Put 'er thar!" I says, a lowerin' my right hand and a holdin' it out to him, which he took and shook as hard as he could—which wasn't very hard. "I don't know you from Adam's off ox," I goes on; "but thar's somethin' mighty white in you. I'll tell the world that. And you take the money if you want it."

He started to say somethin'; but he didn't. He let loose o' my hand, turned, and jumped out o' the wagon, and split off up through the laurels, leavin' me a wishin' he hadn't gone.

WELL, my oxen was slow, and it was a uphill road, and I was a long time a makin' the next mile. But when I made it I found a hoss loose and a pickin' at the bushes along aside o' the road; and jest beyont



it laid a man tied hand and foot and gagged in the mouth with his own necktie and handkerchief. I knowed him,—it was a man who done buyin' for a timber concern, and he always went well dressed. Of course I cut the pieces o' rope that held him, and helped him to his feet.

At first he seemed too downright mad to talk; but he fin'ly cut loose in a sort o' one-man cuss fight, and you ought 'o heard the volley o' bad-word perfection he sent up through the trees in the direction the outlaw had took a leavin'! I don't jest remember it all, and I reckon I'm glad I don't. But he quieted down after a bit, and told me about it in sort o' respectable language.

"Some scoundrel in a blue shirt and boots and a gray hat," he says, "throwed a repeatin' rifle into my face and made me git down offen my hoss and stand still while he went through my clothes and got a hundred dollars o' the company's money; then he tied me up and left."

"Got any idee who he is?" I axes, not a lettin' on that I'd had a little brush with the unknown myself.

"He's the same feller, I guess," says the timber buyer, "who robbed two hunters over in Hemlock Cove yesterday. The Sheriff, I understand, is already on the look-out for him. Oh, he'll be got, all right. The gov'ment will have the woods full o' detectives afore long, and they'll shore separate him from his scalp. I can tell you, it don't pay to play off bad, it don't!"

So this here timber man he goes on down into the Valley and talks about it everywhar he sees anybody, and pretty soon lots o' people was afeard to go out o' their doors at night.

This here highwayman didn't seem to mind the Sheriff and the deputies: everywhar he give 'em the slip. And he was that bold that he'd steal up clost to whar the officers was a campin' at night, and shoot the coffepot offen the fire, and then laugh and say somethin' teasin' in his weak, holler voice, and be gone into the dark. Sometimes he'd tell 'em to quit tryin' to be officers, and go huntin' rabbits—and to watch out and not let the rabbits bite 'em.

THE summer passed, and so did a big part o' the fall o' the year, and still our bad man wasn't captured. For several months he'd quit holdin' people up; but that didn't stop the hand o' the law. About the middle of October the gov'ment offered a reward of three hundred dollars for him. I knowed that would git him, because the acorn crop hadn't been enough to feed the mountain folks's hogs, the drouth had killed the corn, the men who owned the mountain land had shet down on peelin' tanbark, and the people was all hard run.

Well, my son David he took a notion that he'd catch the bad man for the reward. We needed money to live on, and asides David had set his heart on goin' to school down thar in the Valley that comin' winter. David did want to know things more'n anybody I ever seen! He told me about his notion one evenin' at the supper table.

"Now you jest let that thar feller alone," I says. "He hain't never bothered you none. The gov'ment has got men hired, and is a payin' 'em big money, to arrest road agents."

"Pap," says David, with them thar big, earnest eyes o' hisn a shootin' straight into mine, "Pap, somebody'll git him. He'll shore be caught; and we might as well have the money as anybody else. And I can take him without killin' him, which is a thing most o' people can't do. And asides," he goes on, "hain't I always heerd you say that every citizen o' the United States ought to uphold the law—or move to some country whar they hain't got none?"

And, Sir, by gyar! I be durned if that thar boy, jest turned twenty-one,

didn't convince me that it was his duty to catch the bad man! He shore did have me a believin' that the very salvation of his soul depended on his takin' the highwayman, and I let him go. But I knowed he could watch out for hisself: thar was never a finer shot in this here section, nor a stronger man never walked these mountains, than my son David. He was as quick as a wil'cat too, and his nerves was fine.

So David took his repeater rifle, and some grub, and set out, bound for the wildest parts he knowed of. You see, the officers and mountain folks had been a scourin' the woods all around in here, and David reasoned that the outlaw had drifted further back to hide for awhile. And my son almost run in his anxiousness to git thar afore somebody else did and bagged the prize.

The place he headed for is named Picketts Dome. It's a big, p'inted peak that rears up a heap higher'n the highest o' t'other mountains, and is covered at the top only with rocks and a little scrub; but down lower thar is plenty o' thick woods, which is jest alive with game. In the west side o' this here peak, a beginnin' jest beyont whar the timber ends and the scrub sets in, thar is a little, slantin' cove, a lookin' for all the world like a big gash, in which thar is a tiny brook a runnin' from a spring knowed as the Cold Spring. Into this cove went my son David, a meannin' to hide thar and keep out a watch for the road agent.

WELL, as he made his way along up among the rocks aside o' the brook, which was a dashin' and a sparklin' in the light o' the goin'-down sun, thar come a voice:

"Hands up—quick!" it says, right sharp and hard.

David wasn't no coward; but he wasn't a fool neither. He held his hands up, with his gun in 'em. And then he seen a rifle barrel a stickin' out o' the laurels right ahead of him, and across the sights thar was the keenest, widest awake eye, he said, ever he seen.

"Walk on up here!" the cold voice orders.

And David walked. When he got in ten feet o' the rifle barrel's muzzle that covered him, the owner o' the voice steps out afore him, still with all due attentions to his gun, and flashes a little shield of a thing in his eyes.

"So you're caught at last!" says this here stranger to my son. "So you're caught at last! You'll never shoot any more holes through my coffepot, and never advise me to go to huntin' rabbits instead o' men, any more. I wonder if you realize, you young davedevil, how big a fool you was to buck ag'inst the gov'ment?"

David stood thar silent, plumb shocked at bein' accused as the road agent, and stared at the feller that had arrested him. This feller was dressed in officer blue, with a soft black hat on his head. He was big and



"The Almighty Never Made Anything Sweeter than That Woman."