

Dave Mann--A Civil War-Time Story

By LeRoy Armstrong.
(Continued from last week)

No trace of Lett Evans had been found. The story of his murder was another legend of Little Wabash. Those men who were present at the fatal charivari were favored above ordinary mortals. They told of that last cry which came back to them from the margin where two lives mingled, and were beginning already to tread the uninviting paths where ghosts are seen. Had they not searched the woods and the swamps for his body? Had they not waited for the river to give up its dead?

The bride of an hour prosecuted that search most faithfully--though quite without tears. She abandoned it at last, with something like relief. The name of one man, the hearts of two, had been given her; and it seems she must have known some mysteries were better than light.

After that came the war.

We were so far from the great news centres, so little disturbed by the great convulsion that rocked an age in agony, that our small affairs were never quite dwarfed by the giant events of the nation. Dave Mann was still an outlaw, with a living price upon his head. He was still our greatest figure--good or bad. But as one year, two years, three years added themselves to the seven of my life when Dave Mann went away, the weekly record in my father's paper wore the awful story of battle and suffering and death down into my soul. Perhaps it was because I had more time to brood upon it, for sickness was always present with me; but I thought of those soldiers in the south, their glorious victories and their crushing defeats, as in some way related to the one great Book I had read. Talking of it little, for it was a thing the Friends could not approve, but reading and dreaming of it a great deal, I drew curious pictures of the strife.

"The walls of Richmond" were walls indeed to me. I fancied them masses of masonry, like those about Jerusalem when it fronted the East in power; or like Babylon that night when the finger of God wrote doom on the wall; or like Jericho, and wished some Joshua might come with trumpets and candles, more potent than guns, and shatter them down in ruin.

Her son had been gone two years when Mrs. Mann died. The neighbors were very kind to her when they heard she was ill; but they softened little to the outlaw. They found her heart quite full of him--quite unaccountably full, it seemed to them. She could not have been prouder or more anxious to speak of his steady love for his mother if he had been the most unoffending man in Little Wabash.

"You will all know him better some day," she said that final afternoon; and this was her leave taking.

"I ain't got no call to know him no better than I do now," muttered one of the comforters who had gone with mother. But the patient old woman never knew of the thrust, for Martha Hecker folded her arms about her, and said in a tone that almost won a seraph's blessing:

"They'll all be proud of him some day."

And then they closed her waiting eyes, and set her house in order. The silent wheel was placed against the wall, for the hands that had turned it were crossed on a bosom that could not rise and fall to the spindle's humming. The next day they followed her still corpse to the graveyard from a home scarcely less lonely.

The autumn of 1864 was so filled with thrilling hope and chilling dread. The warring in the south seemed so surely ended in one day, so endlessly prolonged the next. The Farmer told us about General Sheridan at Cedar Creek, painting the victory somewhat, it may be, but cheering us mightily with the promise of approaching peace. That was under the usual head of "News from the Front," which was always read before anything else--albeit with protestations. On an-

other page, under headings that filled half a column and discounted astonishment with frightful summary, was an account of the affair at St. Albans, Vermont. St. Albans seemed very near at hand. Cedar Creek was distant as Jerusalem. How it startled us with the rush and sweep of execution! How naked to our enemies it seemed to prove each unsuspecting home! And how, through it all went a touch of thought for the leader so lost to apprehension. We wondered, and we dreaded him.

Baze Pennington and Conrad Zehner came in that night, and talked it over with father. The event was long passed, but this was the first account that reached our neighborhood. Sheridan's victory paled to nothingness in the blaze of this achievement on the northern border. There had been victories before down yonder. This was the first blow in the quarter undefended.

"Rode twenty miles in the night, and swept the town!" exclaimed the miller.

They had canvassed it till the musing mood was on them. "I swear it reads like Dave Mann led it."

"I bet Dave Mann was there," cried Pennington. It was an inspiration both startling and welcome. Not a man who believed him guilty of Lett Evans's murder but felt the fitness of his graduation in such a class. For a moment they all sat silent, each looking at the others, and putting together mosaics of evidence that should pave his way to perjury. Then Martha Hecker surprised them.

"Dave Mann was not there," she said. There was a trembling undercurrent in her tone. She seemed striving against excitement. "More likely he was with Sheridan at Cedar Creek."

"Ho, ho!" laughed huge Zehner. "Dave Mann in blue! That's a pretty story." The unreasonableness of it, the scorn it evoked, were all compressed in his exclamation. Then he added: "Dave Mann wouldn't dare--"

"Don't talk of daring," cried the girl. She was aroused. The restraint was gone, consumed in the flame of that man's contemptuousness. "He was the bravest man that ever set foot in Little Wabash. You talk of daring! Why don't you fight? They need soldiers had enough, heaven knows. No able-bodied man that

hides at home has a right to say a word about Dave Mann."

"They did not answer her. It was the first time since his mother's death the fugitive had found an advocate.

"Well, I must be going, yawned Pennington presently. "You and your woman come over," he said as they strayed down the walk.

"We will," said Father without rising. It was scant ceremony. It was the only courtesy of Little Wabash. "Good night, fiail. Good night, Conrad. Come over again."

In an hour they came back. Father had just come in from the stables; for the prudent farmer kept close watch of his goods those times. The rest of the family was abed. I lay there broad awake, and thinking again of the raid at St. Albans, when I heard the gate swing open. Two pairs of heavy feet beat up the walk, and the tinorous knock more startling than a rougher summons could have been, called Father to the door. They talked in low, mysterious tones for a time; then Father stepped out and closed the door behind him. After a little he brought his hat and coat, and went away with them. I laid in a wonder the silence drifting into dreams, and wished to see Mother and Martha Hecker sitting by the empty fire--
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