

A Messenger

By Mary Raymond Shipman Andrews

[Footnote: From "The Militants," by Mary R. S. Andrews. Copyright, 1907, by Charles Scribner's Sons.]

How oft do they their silver bowers leave, To come to succour us that
succour want! How oft do they with golden pineons cleave The
flitting skyes, like flying Pursuivant, Against fowle feendes to ayd us
militant! They for us fight, they watch and dewly ward, And their
bright Squadrons round about us plant; And all for love, and nothing
for reward. O! Why should heavenly God to men have such regard?

--Spenser's "Faerie Queene."

That the other world of our hope rests on no distant, shining star, but
lies about us as an atmosphere, unseen yet near, is the belief of many.
The veil of material life shades earthly eyes, they say, from the glories
in which we ever are. But sometimes when the veil wears thin in
mortal stress, or is caught away by a rushing, mighty wind of
inspiration, the trembling human soul, so bared, so purified, may look
down unimagined heavenly vistas, and messengers may steal across
the shifting boundary, breathing hope and the air of a brighter world.
And of him who speaks his vision, men say "He is mad," or "He has
dreamed."

The group of officers in the tent was silent for a long half minute after
Colonel Wilson's voice had stopped. Then the General spoke.

"There is but one thing to do," he said. "We must get word to Captain
Thornton at once."

The Colonel thought deeply a moment, and glanced at the orderly
outside the tent. "Flannigan!" The man, wheeling swiftly, saluted.

"Present my compliments to Lieutenant Morgan and say that I should like to see him here at once," and the soldier went off, with the quick military precision in which there is no haste and no delay.

"You have some fine, powerful young officers, Colonel," said the General casually. "I suppose we shall see in Lieutenant Morgan one of the best. It will take strength and brains both, perhaps, for this message."

A shadow of a smile touched the Colonel's lips. "I think I have chosen a capable man, General," was all he said.

Against the doorway of the tent the breeze blew the flap lazily back and forth. A light rain fell with muffled gentle insistence on the canvas over their heads, and out through the opening the landscape was blurred--the wide stretch of monotonous, billowy prairie, the sluggish, shining river, bending in the distance about the base of Black Wind Mountain--Black Wind Mountain, whose high top lifted, though it was almost June, a white point of snow above dark pine ridges of the hills below. The five officers talked a little as they waited, but spasmodically, absent-mindedly. A shadow blocked the light of the entrance, and in the doorway stood a young man, undersized, slight, blond. He looked inquiringly at the Colonel.

"You sent for me, sir?" and the General and his aide, and the grizzled old Captain, and the big, fresh-faced young one, all watched him.

In direct, quiet words--words whose bareness made them dramatic for the weight of possibility they carried--the Colonel explained. Black Wolf and his band were out on the war-path. A soldier coming in wounded, escaped from the massacre of the post at Devil's Hoof Gap, had reported it. With the large command known to be here camped on Sweetstream Fork, they would not come this way; they would swerve up the Gunpowder River twenty miles away, destroying the settlement and Little Fort Slade, and would sweep on, probably for a general

massacre, up the Great Horn as far as Fort Doncaster. He himself, with the regiment, would try to save Fort Slade, but in the meantime Captain Thornton's troop, coming to join him, ignorant that Black Wolf had taken the war-path, would be directly in their track. Some one must be sent to warn them, and of course the fewer the quicker. Lieutenant Morgan would take a sergeant, the Colonel ordered quietly, and start at once.

In the misty light inside the tent, the young officer looked hardly more than seventeen years old as he stood listening. His small figure was light, fragile; his hair was blond to an extreme, a thick thatch of pale gold; and there was about him, among these tanned, stalwart men in uniform, a presence, an effect of something unusual, a simplicity out of place yet harmonious, which might have come with a little child into a scene like this. His large blue eyes were fixed on the Colonel as he talked, and in them was just such a look of innocent, pleased wonder, as might be in a child's eyes, who had been told to leave studying and go pick violets. But as the Colonel ended he spoke, and the few words he said, the few questions he asked, were full of poise, of crisp directness. As the General volunteered a word or two, he turned to him and answered with a very charming deference, a respect that was yet full of gracious ease, the unconscious air of a man to whom generals are first as men, and then as generals. The slight figure in its dark uniform was already beyond the tent doorway when the Colonel spoke again, with a shade of hesitation in his manner.

"Mr. Morgan!" and the young officer turned quickly. "I think it may be right to warn you that there is likely to be more than usual danger in your ride."

"Yes, sir." The fresh, young voice had a note of inquiry.

"You will--you will"--what was it the Colonel wanted to say? He finished abruptly. "Choose the man carefully who goes with you."

"Thank you, Colonel," Morgan responded heartily, but with a hint of bewilderment. "I shall take Sergeant O'Hara," and he was gone.

There was a touch of color in the Colonel's face, and he sighed as if glad to have it over. The General watched him, and slowly, after a pause, he demanded:

"May I ask, Colonel, why you chose that blond baby to send on a mission of uncommon danger and importance?"

The Colonel answered quietly: "There were several reasons, General--good ones. The blond baby"--that ghost of a smile touched the Colonel's lips again--"the blond baby has some remarkable qualities. He never loses his head; he has uncommon invention and facility of getting out of bad holes; he rides light and so can make a horse last longer than most, and"--the Colonel considered a moment--"I may say he has no fear of death. Even among my officers he is known for the quality of his courage. There is one more reason: he is the most popular man I have, both with officers and men; if anything happened to Morgan the whole command would race into hell after the devils that did it before they would miss their revenge."

The General reflected, pulling at his moustache. "It seems a bit like taking advantage of his popularity," he said.

"It is," the Colonel threw back quickly. "It's just that. But that's what one must do--a commanding officer--isn't it so, General? In this war music we play on human instruments, and if a big chord comes out stronger for the silence of a note, the note must be silenced--that's all. It's cruel, but it's fighting; it's the game."

The General, as if impressed with the tense words, did not respond, and the other officers stared at the Colonel's face, as carved, as stern as if done in marble--a face from which the warm, strong heart seldom shone, held back always by the stronger will.

The big, fresh-colored young Captain broke the silence. "Has the General ever heard of the trick Morgan played on Sun Boy, sir?" he asked.

"Tell the General, Captain Booth," the Colonel said briefly, and the Captain turned toward the higher officer.

"It was apropos of what the Colonel said of his incentive faculties, General," he began. "A year ago the youngster with a squad of ten men walked into Sun Boy's camp of seventy-five warriors. Morgan had made quite a pet of a young Sioux, who was our prisoner for five months, and the boy had taught him a lot of the language, and assured him that he would have the friendship of the band in return for his kindness to Blue Arrow--that was the chap's name. So he thought he was safe; but it turned out that Blue Arrow's father, a chief, had got into a row with Sun Boy, and the latter would not think of ratifying the boy's promise. So there was Morgan with his dozen men, in a nasty enough fix. He knew plenty of Indian talk to understand that they were discussing what they would do with him, and it wasn't pleasant.

"All of a sudden he had an inspiration. He tells the story himself, sir, and I assure you he'd make you laugh--Morgan is a wonderful mimic. Well, he remembered suddenly, as I said, that he was a mighty good ventriloquist, and he saw his chance. He gave a great jump like a startled fawn, and threw up his arms and stared like one demented into the tree over their heads. There was a mangy-looking crow sitting up there on a branch, and Morgan pointed at him as if at something marvellous, supernatural, and all those fool Indians stopped pow-wowing and stared up after him, as curious as monkeys. Then to all appearances, the crow began to talk. Morgan said they must have thought that spirits didn't speak very choice Sioux, but he did his best. The bird cawed out:

"Oh, Sun Boy, great chief, beware what you do!"

"And then the real bird flapped its wings and Morgan thought it was going to fly, and he was lost. But it settled back again on the branch, and Morgan proceeded to caw on:

"Hurt not the white man, or the curses of the gods will come upon Sun Boy and his people."

"And he proceeded to give a list of what would happen if the Indians touched a hair of their heads. By this time the red devils were all down on their stomachs, moaning softly whenever Morgan stopped cawing. He said he quite got into the spirit of it, and would have liked to go on some time, but he was beginning to get hoarse, and besides he was; in deadly terror for fear the crow would fly before he got to the point. So he had the spirit order them to give the white men their horses and turn them loose instanter; and just as he got all through, off went the thing with a big flap and a parting caw on its own account. I wish I could tell it as Morgan does--you'd think he was a bird and an Indian rolled together. He's a great actor spoiled, that lad."

"You leave out a fine point, to my mind, Captain Booth," the Colonel said quickly. "About his going back."

"Oh! certainly that ought to be told," said the Captain, and the General's eyes turned to him again. "Morgan forgot to see young Blue Arrow, his friend, before he got away, and nothing would do but that he should go back and speak to him. He said the boy would be disappointed. The men were visibly uneasy at his going, but that didn't affect him. He ordered them to wait, and back he went, pell-mell, all alone into that horde of fiends. They hadn't got over their funk, luckily, and he saw Blue Arrow and made his party call and got out again all right. He didn't tell that himself, but Sergeant O'Hara made the camp ring with it. He adores Morgan, and claims that he doesn't know what fear is. I believe it's about so. I've seen him in a fight three

times now. His cap always goes off --he loses a cap every blessed scrimmage--and with that yellow mop of hair, and a sort of rapt expression he gets, he looks like a child saying its prayers all the time he is slashing and shooting like a berserker." Captain Booth faced abruptly toward the Colonel. "I beg your pardon for talking so long, sir," he said. "You know we're all rather keen about little Miles Morgan."

The General lifted his head suddenly. "Miles Morgan?" he demanded. "Is his name Miles Morgan?"

The Colonel nodded. "Yes. The grandson of the old Bishop--named for him."

"Lord!" ejaculated the General. "Miles Morgan was my earliest friend, my friend until he died! This must be Jim's son--Miles's only child. And Jim is dead these ten years," he went on rapidly. "I've lost track of him since the Bishop died, but I knew Jim left children. Why, he married "--he searched rapidly in his memory-- "he married a daughter of General Fitzbrian's. This boy's got the church and the army both in him. I knew his mother," he went on, talking to the Colonel, garrulous with interest. "Irish and fascinating she was--believed in fairies and ghosts and all that, as her father did before her. A clever woman, but with the superstitious, wild Irish blood strong in her. Good Lord! I wish I'd known that was Miles Morgan's grandson."

The Colonel's voice sounded quiet and rather cold after the General's impulsive enthusiasm. "You have summed him up by his antecedents, General," he said. "The church and the army--both strains are strong. He is deeply religious."

The General looked thoughtful. "Religious, eh? And popular? They don't always go together."

Captain Booth spoke quickly. "It's not that kind, General," he said. "There's no cant in the boy. He's more popular for it-- that's often so with the genuine thing, isn't it! I sometimes think"--the young Captain hesitated and smiled a trifle deprecatingly--"that Morgan is much of the same stuff as Gordon-- Chinese Gordon; the martyr stuff, you know. But it seems a bit rash to compare an every-day American youngster to an inspired hero."

"There's nothing in Americanism to prevent either inspiration or heroism that I know of," the General affirmed stoutly, his fine old head up, his eyes gleaming with pride of his profession.

Out through the open doorway, beyond the slapping tent-flap, the keen, gray eyes of the Colonel were fixed musingly on two black points which crawled along the edge of the dulled silver of the distant river--Miles Morgan and Sergeant O'Hara had started.

"Sergeant!" They were eight miles out now, and the camp had disappeared behind the elbow of Black Wind Mountain. "There's something wrong with your horse. Listen! He's not loping evenly." The soft cadence of eight hoofs on earth had somewhere a lighter and then a heavier note; the ear of a good horseman tells in a minute, as a musician's ear at a false note, when an animal saves one foot ever so slightly, to come down harder on another.

"Yessirr. The Lieutenant'll remimber 'tis the horrse that had a bit of a spavin. Sure I thot 'twas cured, and 'tis the kindest baste in the rigiment f'r a pleasure ride, sorr--that willin' 'tis. So I tuk it. I think 'tis only the stiffness at furrst aff. 'Twill wurruk aff later. Plaze God, I'll wallop him." And the Sergeant walloped with a will.

But the kindest beast in the regiment failed to respond except with a plunge and increased lameness. Soon there was no more question of his incapacity.

Lieutenant Morgan halted his mount, and, looking at the woe-begone O'Hara, laughed. "A nice trick this is, Sergeant," he said, "to start out on a trip to dodge Indians with a spavined horse. Why didn't you get a broomstick? Now go back to camp as fast as you can go; and that horse ought to be blistered when you get there. See if you can't really cure him. He's too good to be shot." He patted the gray's nervous head, and the beast rubbed it gently against his sleeve, quiet under his hand.

"Yessirr. The Lieutenant'll ride slow, sorr, f'r me to catch up on ye, sorr?"

Miles Morgan smiled and shook his head. "Sorry, Sergeant, but there'll be no slow riding in this. I'll have to press right on without you; I must be at Massacre Mountain to-night to catch Captain Thornton to-morrow."

Sergeant O'Hara's chin dropped. "Sure the Lieutenant'll niver be thinkin' to g'wan alone--widout me?" and with all the Sergeant's respect for his superiors, it took the Lieutenant ten valuable minutes to get the man started back, shaking his head and muttering forebodings, to the camp.

It was quiet riding on alone. There were a few miles to go before there was any chance of Indians, and no particular lookout to be kept, so he put the horse ahead rapidly while he might, and suddenly he found himself singing softly as he galloped. How the words had come to him he did not know, for no conscious train of thought had brought them; but they surely fitted to the situation, and a pleasant sense of companionship, of safety, warmed him as the swing of an old hymn carried his voice along with it.

"God shall charge His angel legions
Watch and ward o'er thee to keep;
Though thou walk through hostile regions,
Though in desert wilds
thou sleep."

Surely a man riding toward--perhaps through--skulking Indian hordes, as he must, could have no better message reach him than that. The bent of his mind was toward mysticism, and while he did not think the train of reasoning out, could not have said that he believed it so, yet the familiar lines flashing suddenly, clearly, on the curtain of his mind, seemed to him, very simply, to be sent from a larger thought than his own. As a child might take a strong hand held out as it walked over rough country, so he accepted this quite readily and happily, as from that Power who was never far from him, and in whose service, beyond most people, he lived and moved. Low but clear and deep his voice went on, following one stanza with its mate:

"Since with pure and firm affection Thou on God hast set thy love,
With the wings of His protection He will shield thee from above." The simplicity of his being sheltered itself in the broad promise of the words.

Light-heartedly he rode on and on, though now more carefully; lying flat and peering over the crests of hills a long time before he crossed their tops; going miles perhaps through ravines; taking advantage of every bit of cover where a man and a horse might be hidden; travelling as he had learned to travel in three years of experience in this dangerous Indian country, where a shrub taken for granted might mean a warrior, and that warrior a hundred others within signal. It was his plan to ride until about twelve-- to reach Massacre Mountain, and there rest his horse and himself till gray daylight. There was grass there and a spring--two good and innocent things that had been the cause of the bad, dark thing which had given the place its name. A troop under Captain James camping at this point, because of the water and grass, had been surprised and wiped out by five hundred Indian braves of the wicked and famous Red Crow. There were ghastly signs about the place yet; Morgan had seen them, but soldiers may not have nerves, and it was good camping ground.

On through the valleys and half-way up the slopes, which rolled here far away into a still wilder world, the young man rode. Behind the distant hills in the east a glow like fire flushed the horizon. A rim of pale gold lifted sharply over the ridge; a huge round ball of light pushed faster, higher, and lay, a bright world on the edge of the world, great against the sky--the moon had risen. The twilight trembled as the yellow rays struck into its depths, and deepened, dying into purple shadows. Across the plain zigzagged the pools of a level stream, as if a giant had spilled handfuls of quicksilver here and there.

Miles Morgan, riding, drank in all the mysterious, wild beauty, as a man at ease; as open to each fair impression as if he were not riding each moment into deeper danger, as if his every sense were not on guard. On through the shining moonlight and in the shadow of the hills he rode, and, where he might, through the trees, and stopped to listen often, to stare at the hilltops, to question a heap of stones or a bush.

At last, when his leg-weary horse was beginning to stumble a bit, he saw, as he came around a turn, Massacre Mountain's dark head rising in front of him, only half a mile away. The spring trickled its low song, as musical, as limpidly pure as if it had never run scarlet. The picketed horse fell to browsing and Miles sighed restfully as he laid his head on his saddle and fell instantly to sleep with the light of the moon on his damp, fair hair. But he did not sleep long. Suddenly with a start he awoke, and sat up sharply, and listened. He heard the horse still munching grass near him, and made out the shadow of its bulk against the sky; he heard the stream, softly falling and calling to the waters where it was going. That was all. Strain his hearing as: he might he could hear nothing else in the still night. Yet there was something. It might not be sound or sight, but there was a presence, a something--he could not explain. He was alert in every nerve. Suddenly the words of the hymn he had been singing in the afternoon flashed again into his mind, and, with his cocked revolver in his hand,

alone, on guard, in the midnight of the savage wilderness, the words came that were not even a whisper:

"God shall charge His angel legions
Watch and ward o'er thee to keep;
Though thou walk through hostile regions,
Though in desert wilds
thou sleep."

He gave a contented sigh and lay down. What was there to worry about? It was just his case for which the hymn was written." Desert wilds "--that surely meant Massacre Mountain, and why should he not sleep here quietly, and let the angels keep their watch and ward! He closed his eyes with a smile. But sleep did not come, and soon his eyes were open again, staring into blackness, thinking, thinking.

It was Sunday when he started out on this mission, and he fell to remembering the Sunday nights at home--long, long ago they seemed now. The family sang hymns after supper always; his mother played, and the children stood around her--five of them, Miles and his brothers and sisters. There was a little sister with brown hair about her shoulders, who always stood by Miles, leaned against him, held his hand, looked up at him with adoring eyes--he could see those uplifted eyes now, shining through the darkness of this lonely place. He remembered the big, home-like room; the crackling fire; the peaceful atmosphere of books and pictures; the dumb things about its walls that were yet eloquent to him of home and family; the sword that his great-grandfather had worn under Washington; the old ivories that another great-grandfather, the Admiral, had brought from China; the portraits of Morgans of half a dozen generations which hung there; the magazine table, the books and books and books. A pang of desperate homesickness suddenly shook him. He wanted them--his own. Why should he, their best-beloved, throw away his life--a life filled to the brim with hope and energy and high ideals--on this futile quest? He knew quite as well as the General or the Colonel that his ride was but a forlorn hope. As he lay there, longing so, in the dangerous dark, he went about the library at home in his thought and placed each familiar

belonging where he had known it all his life. And as he finished, his mother's head shone darkly golden by the piano; her fingers swept over the keys; he heard all their voices, the dear never-forgotten voices. Hark! They were singing his hymn-- little Alice's reedy note lifted above the others--"God shall charge His angel legions--"

Now! He was on his feet with a spring, and his revolver pointed steadily. This time there was no mistaking--something had rustled in the bushes. There was but one thing for it to be--Indians. Without realizing what he did, he spoke sharply.

"Who goes there?" he demanded, and out of the darkness a voice answered quietly:

"A friend."

"A friend?" With a shock of relief the pistol dropped by his side, and he stood tense, waiting. How might a friend be here, at midnight in this desert! As the thought framed itself swiftly the leaves parted, and his straining eyes saw the figure of a young man standing before him.

"How came you here?" demanded Miles sternly. "Who are you!"

Even in the dimness he could see the radiant smile that answered him. The calm voice spoke again: "You will understand that later. I am here to help you."

As if a door had suddenly opened into that lighted room of which he dreamed, Miles felt a sense of tranquillity, of happiness stirring through him. Never in his life had he known such a sudden utter confidence in any one, such a glow of eager friendliness as this half-seen, mysterious stranger inspired. "It is because I was lonelier than I knew," he said mentally. "It is because human companionship gives courage to the most self-reliant of us;" and somewhere in the words he was aware of a false note, but he did not stop to place it.

The low, even voice of the stranger spoke again. "There are Indians on your trail," he said. "A small band of Black Wolf's scouts. But don't be troubled. They will not hurt you."

"You escaped from them?" demanded Miles eagerly, and again the light of a swift smile shone into the night. "You came to save me -- how was it? Tell me, so that we can plan. It is very dark yet, but hadn't we better ride? Where is your horse?"

He threw the earnest questions rapidly across the black night, and the unhurried voice answered him. "No," it said, and the verdict was not to be disputed. "You must stay here."

Who this man might be or how he came Miles could not tell, but this much he knew, without reason for knowing it; it was some one stronger than he, in whom he could trust. As the new-comer had said, it would be time enough later to understand the rest. Wondering a little at his own swift acceptance of an unknown authority, wondering more at the peace which wrapped him as an atmosphere at the sound of the stranger's voice, Miles made a place for him by his side, and the two talked softly to the plashing undertone of the stream.

Easily, naturally, Miles found himself telling how he had been homesick, longing for his people. He told him of the big familiar room, and of the old things that were in it, that he loved; of his mother; of little Alice, and her baby adoration for the big brother; of how they had always sung hymns together Sunday night; he never for a moment doubted the stranger's interest and sympathy--he knew that he cared to hear.

"There is a hymn," Miles said, "that we used to sing a lot--it was my favorite; 'Miles's hymn,' the family called it. Before you came to-night, while I lay there getting lonelier every minute, I almost thought I heard them singing it. You may not have heard it, but it has a grand

swing. I always think"--he hesitated--"it always seems to me as if the God of battles and the beauty of holiness must both have filled the man's mind who wrote it." He stopped, surprised at his own lack of reserve, at the freedom with which, to this friend of an hour, he spoke his inmost heart.

"I know," the stranger said gently. There was silence for a moment, and then the wonderful low tones, beautiful, clear, beyond any voice Miles had ever heard, began again, and it was as if the great sweet notes of an organ whispered the words:

"God shall charge His angel legions
Watch and ward o'er thee to keep;
Though thou walk through hostile regions,
Though in desert wilds
thou sleep."

"Great Heavens!" gasped Miles. "How could you know I meant that? Why, this is marvellous--why, this"--he stared, speechless, at the dim outlines of the face which he had never seen before to-night, but which seemed to him already familiar and dear beyond all reason. As he gazed the tall figure rose, lightly towering above him. "Look!" he said, and Miles was on his feet. In the east, beyond the long sweep of the prairie, was a faint blush against the blackness; already threads of broken light, of pale darkness, stirred through the pall of the air; the dawn was at hand.

"We must saddle," Miles said, "and be off. Where is your horse picketed?" he demanded again.

But the strange young man stood still; and now his arm was stretched pointing. "Look," he said again, and Miles followed the direction with his eyes.

From the way he had come, in that fast-growing glow at the edge of the sky, sharp against the mist of the little river, crept slowly half a dozen pin points, and Miles, watching their tiny movement, knew that

they were ponies bearing Indian braves. He turned hotly to his companion.

"It's your fault," he said. "If I'd had my way we'd have ridden from here an hour ago. Now here we are caught like rats in a trap; and who's to do my work and save Thornton's troop--who's to save them--God!" The name was a prayer, not an oath.

"Yes," said the quiet voice at his side, "God,"--and for a second there was a silence that was like an Amen.

Quickly, without a word, Miles turned and began to saddle. Then suddenly, as he pulled at the girth, he stopped. "It's no use," he said. "We can't get away except over the rise, and they'll see us there;" he nodded at the hill which rose beyond the camping ground three hundred yards away, and stretched in a long, level sweep into other hills and the west. "Our chance is that they're not on my trail after all--it's quite possible." There was a tranquil unconcern about the figure near him; his own bright courage caught the meaning of its relaxed lines with a bound of pleasure. "As you say, it's best to stay here," he said, and as if thinking aloud-- "I believe you must always be right." Then he added, as if his very soul would speak itself to this wonderful new friend: "We can't be killed, unless the Lord wills it, and if he does it's right. Death is only the step into life; I suppose when we know that life, we will wonder how we could have cared for this one."

Through the gray light the stranger turned his face swiftly, bent toward Miles, and smiled once again, and the boy thought suddenly of the martyrdom of St. Stephen, and how those who were looking "saw his face as it had been the face of an angel."

Across the plain, out of the mist-wreaths, came rushing, scurrying, the handful of Indian braves. Pale light streamed now from the east, filtering over a hushed world. Miles faced across the plain, stood close to the tall stranger whose shape, as the dawn touched it, seemed to rise

beyond the boy's slight figure wonderfully large and high. There was a sense of unending power, of alertness, of great, easy movement about him; one might have looked at him, and looking away again, have said that wings were folded about him. But Miles did not see him. His eyes were on the fast nearing, galloping ponies, each with its load of filthy, cruel savagery. This was his death coming; there was disgust, but not dread in the thought for the boy. In a few minutes he should be fighting hopelessly, fiercely against this froth of a lower world; in a few minutes after that he should be lying here still-- for he meant to be killed; he had that planned. They should not take him--a wave of sick repulsion at that thought shook him. Nearer, nearer, right on his track came the riders pell-mell. He could hear their weird, horrible cries; now he could see gleaming through the dimness the huge head-dress of the foremost, the white coronet of feathers, almost the stripes of paint on the fierce face.

Suddenly a feeling that he knew well caught him, and he laughed. It was the possession that had held in him in every action which he had so far been in. It lifted his high-strung spirit into an atmosphere where there was no dread and no disgust, only a keen rapture in throwing every atom of soul and body into physical intensity; it was as if he himself were a bright blade, dashing, cutting, killing, a living sword rejoicing to destroy. With the coolness that may go with such a frenzy he felt that his pistols were loose; saw with satisfaction that he and his new ally were placed on the slope to the best advantage, then turned swiftly, eager now for the fight to come, toward the Indian band. As he looked, suddenly in mid-career, pulling in their plunging ponies with a jerk that threw them, snorting, on their haunches, the warriors halted. Miles watched in amazement. The bunch of Indians, not more than a hundred yards away, were staring, arrested, startled, back of him to his right, where the lower ridge of Massacre Mountain stretched far and level over the valley that wound westward beneath it on the road to Fort Rain-and-Thunder. As he gazed, the ponies had swept about and were galloping back as they had come, across the plain.

Before he knew if it might be true, if he were not dreaming this curious thing, the clear voice of his companion spoke in one word again, like the single note of a deep bell. "Look!" he said, and Miles swung about toward the ridge behind, following the pointing finger.

In the gray dawn the hill-top was clad with the still strength of an army. Regiment after regiment, silent, motionless, it stretched back into silver mist, and the mist rolled beyond, above, about it; and through it he saw, as through rifts in broken gauze, lines interminable of soldiers, glitter of steel. Miles, looking, knew.

He never remembered how long he stood gazing, earth and time and self forgotten, at a sight not meant for mortal eyes; but suddenly, with a stab it came to him, that if the hosts of heaven fought his battle it was that he might do his duty, might save Captain Thornton and his men; he turned to speak to the young man who had been with him. There was no one there. Over the bushes the mountain breeze blew damp and cold; they rustled softly under its touch; his horse stared at him mildly; away off at the foot-hills he could see the diminishing dots of the fleeing Indian ponies; as he wheeled again and looked, the hills that had been covered with the glory of heavenly armies, lay hushed and empty. And his friend was gone.

Clatter of steel, jingle of harness, an order ringing out far but clear-- Miles threw up his head sharply and listened. In a second he was pulling at his horse's girth, slipping the bit swiftly into its mouth--in a moment more he was off: and away to meet them, as a body of cavalry swung out of the valley where the ridge had hidden them.

"Captain Thornton's troop?" the officer repeated carelessly. "Why, yes; they are here with us. We picked them up yesterday, headed straight for Black Wolf's war-path. Mighty lucky we found them. How about you--seen any Indians, have you?"

Miles answered slowly: "A party of eight were on my trail; they were riding for Massacre Mountain, where I camped, about an hour-- about half an hour--awhile ago." He spoke vaguely, rather oddly, the officer thought. "Something--stopped them about a hundred yards from the mountain. They turned, and rode away."

"Ah," said the officer. "They saw us down the valley."

"I couldn't see you," said Miles.

The officer smiled. "You're not an Indian, Lieutenant. Besides, they were out on the plain and had a farther view behind the ridge." And Miles answered not a word.

General Miles Morgan, full of years and of honors, has never but twice told the story of that night of forty years ago. But he believes that when his time comes, and he goes to join the majority, he will know again the presence which guarded him through the blackness of it, and among the angel legions he looks to find an angel, a messenger, who was his friend.