

A man on a horse slowly trotted up to a large white farmhouse. The man was surveying his surroundings with pleasure, but also with wariness. He reined in his horse about 10 yards from the house, and dismounted.

The air was fresh, and the dark pines on the hills about the house wafted their scent through the slight breeze. The grass was still green, but the changing temperature of the breeze signified the coming of fall.

The man, tall and lithe, climbed the steps to the large porch with ease, and rapped firmly upon the front door, removing his hat, and running his fingers through his hair. After a moment, footsteps were heard within, and the door opened a little. A woman appeared, and looked out. Seeing who it was, she opened the door a little further, but still seemed cautious.

“What does thee want?”

The woman was wearing a dark gown, with a high neck and long sleeves. A plain white collar was the only ornament. She seemed about fifty. Her hair was greying, back in a tight knot on the back of her head. The woman was rather handsome, in a severe sort of way.

The man bowed, still holding his hat. “Ma’am, could you spare a little food? I do not even need to come inside, but could wait outside if you wish. I’ve been traveling all day, and my horse needs rest, and I need victuals.” He grinned. “I’m still a growing boy.”

The woman scrutinized him. The man standing in front of her was tall, and dark, and very young. Not even thirty, if she had to guess. His hair was almost black, but not quite. He stood straight, and his manner was very polite. When he smiled, he was quite winning. The woman smiled a little, and opened the door wider.

“Wait here, Friend. I’ll get thee some edibles, but I must know thy name first.”

“Jesse Duvall, ma’am.”

She nodded, and gently closed the door.

Jesse walked around on the porch, investigating the porch railing very closely, trying to keep his mind off the gnawing hunger pains in his stomach. It was getting to a point where he was about to be sick. Conveniently, the woman arrived again just then, however, and he concentrated on the food she had brought. At her invitation, Jesse sat in one of the large chairs on the porch.

“I am Perseverance Cassidy,” she said, sitting primly in the chair a few feet away from him, “one of the Friends in this area. Young man, I presume that thee is a soldier?”

Jesse nodded, his mouth full. After he had swallowed, he spoke. “Yes ma’am. I was on furlough, and now I’m on my way back to camp.”

She nodded. “Confederate?”

“Yes ma’am. And proud of it, if you’ll excuse me saying so.”

The woman smiled slightly, again, but before she could say anything, hoof-beats in the distance interrupted. The two on the porch stood. As the horse and rider came into slight view, Perseverance suddenly put a hand on Jesse’s arm.

“Mr. Duvall, if thee will please follow me.”

Looking slightly puzzled, he followed her, as she quickly stepped to the door, opened it, and went inside. Once inside with the door shut, she explained.

“That is my neighbor from about a mile down the road. His sympathy lies with the Union army, though he is coward, and has not enlisted. He would be a disgrace to either side. Young man, thee must hide upstairs, for he will not hesitate to capture and take thee as a prisoner of war to the nearest Union camp.”

Jesse understood, and asked where he should hide.

“In the spare bedroom upstairs. Under the bed. Go! It’s to thy left up the stairs.”

The young man did not hesitate, until halfway up the stairs. Suddenly he remembered his horse. He ran down the stairs, bolted out the door, and led his horse around back of the house, into the pines. He tied his horse to a tree, and then ran back to the house, and through the back door. There he turned, and directed a question at the woman.

“Will he bother or molest you?”

Her reply in the negative was too quick to soothe Jesse, but he continued upstairs, resolved to come back down at the slightest sign of alarm. He accidentally turned to the right, instead of the left where the woman had pointed.

“Stop!” Perseverance’s voice was urgent. She composed herself in a second, and reminded him that the room was to the left.

He ducked under the low entryway to the room, and clambered under the bed. It was not dusty, thanks to the diligence of Perseverance Cassidy. However, it was tight. Jesse was over six feet tall, and the space under the bed was hardly enough for his long, lanky body. He made the best of it he could.

There was silence downstairs for a few minutes, before a loud, obnoxious knock on the door. Jesse could hear Perseverance answering it.

“Yes, Mr. Barrows?”

There was the sound of someone shoving his way inside. A deep, gravelly voice began, at first too low for Jesse to hear properly. In a moment, however, it became louder. Barrows’ words alarmed Jesse.

“...Saw a man riding down this way. Knew he might stop for water or something like it here, wanted to check on you, Perseverance. Is he still here?”

“I thank thee for thy trouble, Mr. Barrows, but I am quite capable of taking care of myself. I am not unarmed, thee knows. As a matter of fact, as thee could see, his horse is not outside. Nor is the man here with me.”

Jesse almost choked with suppressed laughter. It was amusing the way you could word things, so as to not tell lies. The gravelly voice downstairs continued.

“As he is not here then, how about telling me the answer to that question I asked a week ago? I would sincerely advise your agreeing to my proposition.”

Perseverance interrupted, in an icy voice.

“No, thank thee, Mr. Barrows. We gave thee my final answer a week ago. I have told thee why. Now, as there is nothing further to say, will thee please do me the honor of leaving my establishment?”

Mr. Barrows' voice became ugly.

“Why should I leave? I can stop you from reaching your rifle. I'll make a bargain with you, Perseverance. It's no use lying to me; I saw the hoof-prints outside your house. And there aren't any prints going towards the road. He's upstairs, isn't he? If you'll consent to my little offer, I'll turn the man in, and spare you. If you continue to spurn my advances, I'll turn the man in- and you. How would that be, for you and yours, Perseverance?”

Jesse could have kicked himself for not remembering the hoof prints.

“I-we will not consent, nor will thee turn me in. If there is a man upstairs, kindly show me *where*.”

“It would be an honor,” sneered Barrows.

Jesse heard them climbing the stairs, and prepared himself to quickly roll out from under the bed and spring out his revolver if need be.

Footsteps drew near, and then entered the room. Sure enough, Barrows started rummaging around in the closet, and then he started towards the bed.

Jesse, like a flash of lightning rolled out from under the bed, and drew his revolver. Aiming it at Barrows, he recovered his breath, for the fast movement had taken it for a moment.

Perseverance shuddered at the sight of the weapon. “Mr. D-Doyle,” she exclaimed, remembering at the last moment to change his name, “please put away the revolver. There will be no violence in my house. “

Mr. Barrows was both excited and angry. “I knew he was here,” he shouted, “Perseverance, you've been harboring a dang Confederate spy. But- I can help you, you know. It doesn't have to end with your punishment for aiding and abetting this man.” His voice became crafty. “You know what you have to do, Perseverance. Woman, my proposition can't be as bad as all that!”

Perseverance's voice sounded as though she had clenched her teeth. "Do not call me "woman". I take that as a personal insult. And for the last time, we would not agree to thy proposition, if it was the last chance on earth!"

Suddenly she burst into tears, and buried her face in her hands. Barrows was laughing, maniacally. "They always say, that, don't they, Doyle! Unoriginal creatures."

That was the last straw, for Duvall. He noticed the window behind Barrows. All in one fluid motion, he sheathed his revolver, sprang towards Barrows, and smashed him through the window, sending Barrows and Duvall sliding down the eave of the roof, and plummeting to the ground. The drop to the ground was not too steep; simply stunning both men for a moment, before they both jumped up, and faced each other. At first there was silence, while the two men glared menacingly at each other. The silence was broken, by Perseverance running out of the house, apparently having run down the stairs and out the door immediately after Jesse's move.

Now it was Barrows' turn to react. He leaped towards Perseverance Cassidy, and in one move had a knife out, and at her throat. He was clearly frightened now, being the coward that he was. Trembling, he held the knife where it was, and turned to face Duvall.

"Doyle!" he shouted, "Make one move with that revolver, and she's dead."

Jesse laughed, contemptuously. "Dead, is she? Whatever proposition you were suggesting, sure doesn't have much of a chance now. Cut her with that knife, and then what? She's dead, then I shoot you, assuming I miss my shot and ride away, you've murdered a woman, and have no proof that I was here. The Union camp would here the shot and be here in a minute to string you up the nearest tree."

His logic made an impression on Barrows. The man turned red, and shoved Perseverance away from him. He still held the knife. Duvall raised his revolver, and coolly shot Barrows in the right arm. Barrows fell to the ground, cursing.

"I'd advise you to stay where you are, Barrows."

Duvall turned to Perseverance. "Ma'am? After I leave, take his horse and ride to the Union camp. Tell them about this man molesting you, and-" here Jesse paused for a second- "tell them about me. Tell them whatever you wish; I think you'll get off fine. You're a Quaker, after all. Barrows won't get far with that arm, and the army can catch him. There are good men in the Union army, ma'am, they'll help you."

For a minute, he stood there, looking quizzically at her. Then he spoke again. "I am sincerely sorry for the trouble I've caused you. I just hope, ma'am, that I did the right thing. Do I have your word that I was defending the right person? Not to be rude, ma'am, but- I don't know what he was blackmailing you about."

Perseverance nodded. "Mr. D-Doyle," she said, remembering again that Barrows was still there, "thee did not put me into trouble, thou hast gotten me out of it-gotten *us* out of it." She turned, and beckoned him with her to the house again. Once inside, she called upstairs, "Serena!"

After a moment, a young woman came down the stairs, looking questioningly at Perseverance. Mrs. Cassidy smiled, and turned towards Duvall once more.

"Now does thee understand, Mr. Duvall? Mr. Barrows has been after my daughter for a long time. He hoped to force her into it, after a while. When-when thy horse stopped at our house, I ordered her upstairs, not knowing what thy intentions were. Thou have saved both of us today, Mr. Duvall."

Jesse did indeed understand now. Serena was a beautiful young lady, sure to catch the eye of a brute like Barrows. Jesse bowed to Serena.

"Pleased to make your acquaintance, ma'am."

She nodded, and thanked him. Jesse and Perseverance now went outside, and Jesse fetched his horse from behind the house.

Perseverance now remembered Barrows again, and grabbed the knife off Barrows, before heading towards his horse. Jesse checked to make sure that Barrows was out of action for a while, and then turned towards *his* horse.

"Thank you for everything, ma'am. I sure do appreciate it."

Jesse mounted his horse, tipped his hat to Perseverance Cassidy, and rode off down the dirt road.

Perseverance and Serena watched him go. They knew that they would probably never know if Jesse Duvall was a spy or not. Or whether Jesse Duvall was even his real name. But one thing they did know: Jesse Duvall was a true hero, though not one which history would record.

“God bless thee,” Perseverance said, though he was already too far away to hear. Then she and Serena mounted Barrow’s horse, and kicking the horse gently, took off in the opposite direction, and headed for the Union camp, about to bring justice to Mr. Barrows.