



T H E D E A D L Y Q U A R R E L

COLONEL GRANGERFORD WAS A GENTLEMAN, A COMPLETE GENTLEMAN. He and his family were members of the upper class of the South. In our town, the Widow Douglas was thought to be a member of the upper class, while Pap was from the very lowest class. But the Grangerfords were members of a much higher class than the Widow.

Colonel Grangerford was very tall and very thin and kept himself neat and clean. He dressed in a clean white shirt and wore a complete suit with a jacket every day of his life. His suit was made of white material—the white was so bright and clean that my eyes hurt just to look at it. He never spoke in a loud voice and was the kindest man that I have ever met. He never had to remind his family about good manners; everyone was always good-mannered when he was near.

When Colonel Grangerford and his wife arrived at the breakfast table in the morning, the other family members stood up from their chairs and said, “Good morning.” Bob was the oldest son, and Tom next—tall, beautiful men with very broad shoulders, black hair, and black eyes. They dressed in pure white suits, like their father’s, and wore expensive hats.

One sister's name was Charlotte. She was twenty-five, and was tall and proud and beautiful. Her sister, Sophia, was twenty, and kind and gentle and sweet.

Each member of the family had a black slave to work for him. I was given a black slave, too, but he didn't have much work to do since I wasn't accustomed to having a slave.

These were all the people who remained in the family then, but the family had once been larger. Three sons had been killed and a daughter, Emmeline, had died.

The Colonel owned many farms and more than one hundred black slaves. The Grangerfords had many cousins living on nearby farms. The cousins would visit for five or six days, during which the Grangerfords would give parties for them and picnics and dances. The men who came to visit always brought their guns with them.

There was another upper-class group of families named Shepherdson living in the same area. The Shepherdsons were as rich and as grand as the Grangerfords, and their houses were equally splendid.

One day, as Buck and I were hunting with our guns, we heard the sounds of a horse approaching. "Quick! Hide!" whispered Buck.

We hid behind some bushes and watched a handsome young man ride by on his horse. He was carrying a gun. *I recognized* Harney Shepherdson!

I heard Buck's gun shoot, and Harney's hat fell to the ground. Harney aimed his gun straight at the place where we were hiding, but we were already running back to the Grangerford house.

Colonel Grangerford looked happy when we told him the story, although he said that he did not like for Buck to shoot from behind a bush. "You should have stepped out into the road when you shot at him."

As soon as I was alone with Buck, I asked him, "Did you want to shoot Harney?"

"I certainly did."

"Has Harney ever attempted to harm you?"

"No. He's never hurt me."

"Then why did you want to kill him?"

“Because of the feud.”

“What’s a feud?”

“I’ll tell you what the word feud means. A man has a quarrel with another man and kills him. The dead man’s brother then kills the murderer. Then other brothers in both families have been killed. That’s what’s called a feud.”

“When did your family’s feud with the Shepherdsons begin?”

“More than thirty years ago. There was trouble about something, and the problem was taken to a court of law. One man wasn’t happy with how the problem was settled and he shot and killed the other man.”

“What was the trouble about, Buck?”

“I have no idea.”

“Well, which family began the shooting?”

“That was so long ago that I don’t know.”

“Have any men been killed this year, Buck?”

“Yes, we killed one and the Shepherdsons killed one. About three months ago, my fourteen-year-old cousin, Bud, was riding his horse on the other side of the river. He didn’t have his gun with him. Old Baldy Shepherdson met him and chased him for five miles before he shot him dead. By the end of the week, one of the Grangerford cousins had killed old Baldy.”

The following Sunday, we attended a church service three miles away. The men, including Buck, took their guns with them and sat in church with guns in their arms. The Shepherdsons attended the same church, and their men, also, sat holding guns. The minister talked about brotherly love and faith and doing good works. I thought that this was one of the worst Sundays that I had ever lived through, but the Grangerfords enjoyed what the minister had to say and talked about brotherly love on the way home.

After we had eaten Sunday dinner, the men sat sleeping in their chairs, while Buck and his dog lay stretched out in the sun asleep. I always considered Sunday the dullest day of the week. I decided to go to my room to sleep, when Miss Sophia motioned for me to come into her room. She closed her door softly and asked me if I would do some-

thing for her and not tell anyone. I said that I would. She then told me that she had left her Bible in church that morning and wanted me to get it for her.

I walked to the church without being seen and soon found Sophia's Bible. I knew that something was wrong because it wasn't normal for a girl to be so eager to have her Bible. I shook the book and a piece of paper fell out. On the paper were written the words, "Half-past-two." Nothing else. Half-past-two must mean a time of day, 30 minutes after the hour of two o'clock. I could figure nothing more from the note, so I returned it to the Bible and hurried to Miss Sophia.

Miss Sophia was waiting for me in her room. She took the Bible and shook it until the paper fell out. As soon as she read it, she looked happy. Again she asked me not to tell anyone. Her face turned red for a few minutes and her eyes seemed to shine. I asked her what the message on the paper meant, and she said that it was nothing, only a book mark to keep her place in the Bible. She then told me to go away and play.

I walked to the river, thinking about that message, and soon noticed that my black slave was following me. When we were out of sight of the house, he came to me and said, "If you come up the river with me a short distance, I'll show you a nest of dangerous snakes."

There's something strange about this, I thought to myself. He told me about that nest of dangerous snakes yesterday, too. He should know that I don't have a love for dangerous snakes and I don't go hunting for them. I wondered about his real purpose and said, "Show me the way."

I followed him for a half mile along the river. Then we walked over another half mile of land that was partly covered by water. We came to a small flat piece of land that was dry and covered with trees and bushes, and he said, "Walk in there a few steps. That's where the snakes are. I've seen them before and don't want to see them again." Then he left.

I pushed aside some of the bushes and saw an open area that looked almost like a room in a house. A man was lying there asleep. It was my old friend Jim!

I awakened him and expected him to be very surprised to see me.

He was very happy, but not surprised—he said that he knew all about what I'd been doing. The Grangerford slaves had found him and showed him this place to hide. They brought him food every day and told him what I was doing.

“You should have sent for me sooner. I thought that you had drowned. Why did you wait to let me know you were safe?”

“I wanted to repair the raft first.”

“What raft?”

“Our old raft.”

“I thought our raft was destroyed when we were hit by that large boat.”

“Parts of it were damaged, but I was able to repair the damage. We lost most of our supplies, but I've been buying new pots and pans and other supplies.”

“How did you find the raft?”

“The slaves found it and told me about it. I bought it from them. They were happy to get the money.”

I don't want to talk much about the next day. I awakened very early and noticed that the house was very quiet. Buck was not in bed beside me. I ran outside and asked my black slave where the Grangerfords had gone.

“Don't you know?”

“No, I don't know anything.”

“Miss Sophia ran off in the night to get married to Harney Shepherdson. When the family learned about it a short while ago, they all rode off on their horses carrying guns. They say that they'll shoot Harney Shepherdson before he can cross the river with Miss Sophia.”

I started running along the river road as fast as I could. I could hear guns at a distance. When I got near the store, I could see four or five men on horses screaming to some boys who were hiding behind a woodpile. I climbed up into a tree to be able to see better. The boys behind the woodpile shot one of the men on horseback. The other men jumped off their horses to help the wounded man. That gave the boys time to run, but the men were soon after them. I suddenly realized

that the boys were Buck and his cousin Joe. They ran behind a woodpile that was beneath my tree. I called to Buck, and he was surprised to see me. He said that he and his cousin would kill some Shepherdsons before the day was ended. His father and his two brothers were already killed.

I asked him what had become of Harney and Miss Sophia, and he said that they had gotten safely across the river. Suddenly, I heard *Bang! Bang! Bang!* from three or four guns. The Shepherdson men had come quietly from behind without their horses. The boys ran for the river; both of them were injured.

“Kill them! Kill them!” the men shouted. I became so sick that I almost fell out of the tree. I won’t tell all that happened next. It makes me so sick just to think about it. I wish that I had never met the Grangerfords.

I stayed in the tree until nighttime. Sometimes I heard guns far in the distance and twice I saw groups of men ride by on their horses.

I felt very guilty and as though the fault were mine. I knew now that the piece of paper in the Bible meant that Miss Sophia was to meet Harney at half-past-two in the morning and run off with him. If I had told her father about that message, all of this would not have happened.

When I climbed down from the tree, I walked quietly along the shore of the river and found two bodies lying in the water. I dragged them out of the water and covered their faces. I cried as I covered Buck’s face because he had been a very good friend to me.

It was dark now. I never returned to the Grangerford house. I went directly to the place where Jim was hiding. We got on the raft and started down the river. I didn’t feel comfortable until we were two miles below there and out in the middle of the Mississippi. I was very glad to get away from the feud, and Jim was glad to get out of hiding. We said that there was no home as wonderful as a raft. Other places seem so tight and breathing is difficult. You feel very free and easy and comfortable on a raft.