

CHAPTER 8

Jim Conklin's Red Badge of Courage

Henry hid behind some trees and waited until the tattered soldier had gone on ahead. Then he returned to the road and joined the throng. But the tattered man's question kept echoing in his ears: "*Where yeh hit, young feller?*"

Now, as he looked around at the wounded soldiers, he envied them. "They've earned their red badge of courage. Every bloody wound they got is a red badge for them."

When any of the men looked back at him, Henry immediately turned away. "They know

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what I've done and they're ashamed of me. If only I could earn my own red badge of courage!" he wished silently.

When he finally noticed the soldier beside him, his first reaction was: "The man looks like a walkin' ghost!" His eyes were staring into some unknown space straight ahead and never once turned to the side. And his grim, tightly pressed lips seemed to be holding back great pain.

As the man walked stiffly along, his eyes began to move from side to side, as if they were searching for something in the grass. "It's almost as if he's searchin' for a place t' die!" Henry whispered to himself.

As if he heard the whispered words, the man slowly turned his head toward Henry.

The shock of seeing the pale, waxlike face made Henry gasp! "My Gawd! It's you, Jim! Jim Conklin!" he screamed.

The soldier smiled weakly and whispered, "Hello, Henry." And he held out his blood-

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covered hand. "Where yeh been? I was worryin' mebbe yeh got kilt. There's sure been thunder t' pay t'day. Where yeh been?"

Henry's legs weakened, and he moaned over and over, "Oh, Jim—oh, Jim—oh, Jim—"

"Yeh know, Henry, I got shot," Jim mumbled in a confused way. "Don't 'xactly know how it happen'd, but by jiminey, I got shot."

Henry reached out his arms to help his old friend, but Jim insisted on walking alone.

They walked beside each other for a while. Then Jim suddenly stopped and looked around in terror. He clutched Henry's arm, leaned close, and whispered, "I'm 'fraid, Henry. I'm 'fraid I'll fall down an' them cannons an' artillery wagons'll run over me."

Henry cried out hysterically, "I won't let that happen, Jim. I'll take care of you!"

"Are yeh sure, Henry? Really sure?" Jim's eyes rolled in terror as he clung to Henry's arm like a child clings to his mother. "I was a good friend t' yeh. An' it ain't much

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t' ask, is it? Jest pull me out a' th' road if'n I fall."

Henry's sobs made it impossible for him to answer. All he could do was nod and grip his friend's arm a little tighter.

But Jim pulled away to walk ahead. It was as if he had forgotten his fear of falling. "Leave me be," he said, and Henry did as his friend asked.

After a while, Henry felt a hand gently tap him on the shoulder. It was the tattered soldier he had run away from earlier.

The man began talking softly. "Yeh'd best take yer friend out a' th' road, young feller. There's a load a' cannons comin' along right fast, and yer friend'll git runned over. He ain't got more 'n five minutes t' live anyhow, yeh kin see that. Don't know where he's gittin' his strength from."

Henry ran forward and grasped his friend's arm. "Jim! Jim!" he pleaded. "Come with me."

Jim stared blankly as if he had no idea

what Henry was saying. But he let himself be led off the road and onto the grass.

Moments later, the noisy clanging of large cannons coming toward them frightened Jim. He pulled away from Henry and began to run, stumbling, toward a clump of bushes.

Henry hurried after his friend. "No, Jim, wait! Where you goin'? Please wait, you'll hurt yourself!"

Jim stopped. "Leave me be, can't yeh?" he pleaded.

"Why, Jim, why? W-what's th' m-matter with you?" Henry gasped between sobs.

But Jim didn't answer. He just turned away and continued on. He seemed to be searching the ground for something... searching with an odd, blank stare in his eyes.

Finally, he stopped and stood motionless. He had reached the place he was searching for. His chest began to rise and fall with such violence, it was as if something was strangling him. Then his eyes rolled back into his

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head until only white showed.

“Jim! Jim!” wailed Henry, falling to his knees at his friend’s side.

“Leave me be! No! Don’t tech me!” Jim whispered hoarsely. Then his body started convulsing. After several moments, it stiffened and fell forward, slow and straight, like a falling tree.

As he watched his friend’s death movements, Henry’s face twisted in agony. He sprang to his feet and gazed down.

Jim’s unbuttoned jacket had fallen away from his body, and for the first time Henry saw his friend’s wound. *His entire side had been shot away!*

“My Gawd!” Henry cried. “It looks like he’s been chewed on by wolves!”

A fierce rage came over him, and he turned toward the battlefield, shaking his fist in frustration at the war that took the life of his childhood friend... the war that gave Jim Conklin his red badge of courage!

CHAPTER 9

Too Tired To Fight

Henry threw himself on the ground, grief-stricken and exhausted. When he finally looked up, he saw the tattered soldier staring down at Jim Conklin's corpse.

"He's gone now," the soldier said, "though I can't imagine where he got his strength from. An' I must say I ain't enjoyin' any great strength . . . m'self . . . these . . . days."

Hearing the soldier's voice weakening as he spoke, Henry looked up quickly. The man's feet were shaking and his face had turned blue. "Good Lord!" he cried. "You ain't goin' t'

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die too, are you?"

"Well, I'm feelin' pretty bad," said the tattered man, "but mebbe some pea soup an' a good bed'll fix me up. Besides, I can't die yet. I got me a wife an' a crowd a' young 'uns at home dependin' on me. . . . Say, did I tell yeh I got shot in m' head? An' when I put m' hand up t' m' head, them rebs shot me in th' arm. . . . Say, yeh look pretty peaked yerself. I bet yeh got a worser wound than yeh think yeh got, 'specially if'n it's inside mostly. Where's it at?"

Henry had been squirming uncomfortably as the tattered man spoke. Now he jumped up and glared at the man. He made a threatening motion with his hand as if to push him away. "Don't bother me!" he growled.

"Lord knows I don't want t' bother anybody," apologized the man.

Henry's couldn't stand any more talk and any more questions. He snarled, "Good-bye!" then turned to go.

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"Where yeh goin', ol' buddy? Where yeh goin'?" cried the man. "See here, Ben Jamison, it ain't right fer an ol' friend like yeh t' go off with a bad hurt."

"I'm not Ben Jamison!" cried Henry. "You must be losin' your senses, man. I'm gettin' away from you!" He began running toward a fence at the end of the field.

"Come back, Ben. Yer my friend, Ben Jamison," pleaded the tattered man as he started wandering aimlessly in the field. "Come stay with me, please, Ben. I'm dyin', Ben."

Although the voice of the dying man was ringing in his ears, Henry continued running. "*He* knew... he knew my secret... he knew I ran away! I wish I were dead!" he sobbed. "I know I'll never be able t' keep the rest of the world from findin' out I'm a deserter. Soon, everyone'll know! Oh, I wish I was dead!"

Henry finally stopped running and sat down to rest at the top of a hill. He knew the

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battles were still raging from the roar of the artillery and the clouds of smoke in the distance. From where he was sitting, he saw a road filling up with retreating troops coming out of the woods and fields. Horses were pulling white-topped wagons, taking supplies to other battle locations.

Henry let out a sigh of relief. "Maybe I'm not alone after all," he reassured himself. "They're retreatin' from the battle too."

Soon, a fresh column of soldiers appeared on the road from the opposite direction. They were advancing into the battle.

As the two groups of soldiers came face to face, the officers leading the advancing column shouted to the retreating troops, "Make way! Let us pass!"

When their orders weren't immediately obeyed, the officers forced open a path by swinging the wooden handles of their rifles at the troops that blocked their way.

Seeing the straight, proud backs and eager

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faces of the troops going to meet the enemy, Henry once again felt his spirits sink. "If only I could be like them," he whispered. "Maybe if I went back into battle and fought bravely and got killed, everyone would stand over my body and call me a hero! Then I'd have a red badge of courage."

Then, just as quickly, Henry's spirits lifted. "But then again, I could go back and *not* get killed. First, though, I'll have t' figure out a good story t' tell when I get back. Those fellers in my regiment'll be sure to ask where I've been and what I've been doin'. If I don't have answers or if I hesitate, they'll get suspicious. They'll sneer at me or make jokes. And they'd be sure t' watch me every second durin' the next battle t' see if I'm really a coward, t' see if I try t' run away. . . . No, I can't do it! I can't go back! I'm so hungry and so thirsty and so tired, I can't fight now."

CHAPTER 10

A Red Badge?

Henry watched the advancing column until it was out of sight. Then he gaped at the mobs of men sweeping out of the woods and fields, joining their fleeing comrades on the road. "The battle must be gettin' pretty heavy if our boys are runnin' so fast to get away from it," he decided.

Behind the fleeing mob, smoke from the battle rose in clouds over the treetops. It was so thick, it nearly blocked out the stars that were just beginning to come out.

Cannons were booming, louder and loud-

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er, more and more often . . . but now the firing wasn't coming from the Union side at all. It was coming *only* from the Confederate side. When the mob realized this, they panicked!

"The fight is lost!" cried one soldier, horror-stricken. "Our army's defeated!"

"Keep runnin', man!" cried another. "Keep runnin' till yeh git away from this war!"

The news spread quickly through the mob, and the stampede was on. Big, burly men were leaping and scampering, their faces white with fear.

Henry hurried to join the fleeing troops. He had to know what was happening in the battle. He ran from one man to another, asking, "Where you comin' from? Why—"

But the fleeing soldiers seemed not to hear him or see him as they ran every which way. Artillery fire was now coming from all directions, and men were running toward it and away from it in total confusion, as they

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shouted wildly to each other.

After rushing about and screaming at the retreating infantrymen, Henry finally seized one man by the arm. "What's happenin'? Why are you runnin'? W-where—"

The soldier tried to pull away from Henry. "Let go a' me! Let go!" he screamed in fear and rage. His eyes were rolling in his head, and he was heaving and panting as he tried to catch his breath. The heavy rifle in his hand was slowing him down, but he seemed not to notice its weight.

Henry pulled frantically at the man's arm. "Wait! Please!" he pleaded.

"Let go a' me!"

"Please tell me why you're runnin'—*why?*"

"Here's why!" the man screamed furiously. He swung his rifle with all his force, and brought it crashing down on Henry's head.

A deafening thunder exploded inside him, and Henry released his hold on the man's arm. All the strength left his legs, and he

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sank to the ground, writhing in pain.

Once free of Henry's grip, the soldier fled down the road without a glance back.

Henry lay with his face in the dirt for several minutes before he opened his eyes. He tried to stand, but managed only to get to his knees. He took a few deep breaths to try to clear his head, but fell back on the grass again, groaning.

His body seemed to be fighting a battle with his mind. His body wanted him to lie and rest where he had fallen. But his mind feared that he would be trampled by men and horses and cannons if he were to lose consciousness on the grass. He fought the pain and stumbled to his feet.

Standing in the middle of the road, he reached his hand to the top of his head and nervously touched his wound. Gasping in pain, he took his hand away and found spots of blood on his fingers.

He was staring at the blood so intently he

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didn't hear the bouncing cannon rolling toward him until the horses pulling it were almost on top of him. As he jumped out of the way and watched it pass, he saw masses of infantrymen, cavalrymen, and horse-drawn artillery following behind, heading for an opening in a long fence.

Moments later, the guns began to roar, and the orange lights of artillery fire lit up the evening sky all around him. Another battle had begun!

Henry stumbled along the narrow roadway littered with the remains of an earlier battle—guns, exploded parts of cannons, overturned wagons, and bodies of horses and men. Neither he nor any of the other fleeing soldiers paid any attention to these remains except to avoid stumbling and falling over them in the darkness.

The pain in his head seemed to be easing, but Henry was afraid to move too quickly for fear of opening up the wound again. He

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dragged his weary body along for hours, with his head hung forward and his shoulders drooping.

Some time around midnight, when the gunfire had quieted down a little, a cheerful voice beside him interrupted the silence. "Yeh seem t' be in a pretty bad way, m' boy. Are yeh?"

Henry didn't look up, but grunted.

The cheerful soldier ignored Henry's gruff reply and took him firmly under the arm. "I'm goin' yer way, m' boy," he said. "So's this whole gang. An' I guess I kin give yeh a lift. Yeh look like yeh sure kin use one."

As they walked along, the cheerful soldier asked question after question and ignored Henry's grunts and hesitant answers. "So yer with the 304th reg'ment? . . . Well, that means yer from N' York. . . . They in a fight t'day? . . . Guess that's where yeh got yer red badge, huh? . . . Say, I thought the 304th was way over in the center of the battle. . . . Oh, they

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was, huh? . . . It'll be a miracle if we find our reg'ments t'night. These woods is a reg'lar mess. It's so dark, yeh can't tell if yer fightin' with the Union or with the rebs."

He led Henry through a maze of woods filled with soldiers everywhere and managed to get them quickly past guards and patrols.

After several hours, he pulled Henry to a stop and pointed to a clearing. "There yeh are, m' boy! See that fire? That's where yer reg'ment is."

He took Henry's limp fingers in his warm strong hands, shaking the young man's hand, and then patted him on the shoulder. "Good-bye, m' boy and good luck t' yeh," he said. Then he turned and strode away, whistling happily.

Henry lifted his head for the first time. He suddenly realized in amazement, "Why, I never even saw what he looked like!"

CHAPTER 11

Returning to the 304th

Henry stumbled toward the campfire, fearful of what his regiment would say when they saw him. "They're sure to ridicule me," he decided. "But I've got no strength to make up a story. I'm just too tired and too hungry. And I hurt too much!"

Suddenly, a voice called out, "Halt! Halt! Who's there?" And the barrel of a rifle was pushed into his chest.

Henry recognized the voice. "That you, Tom Wilson?"

The rifle was lowered and a surprised voice

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called out, "Henry? Henry Fleming? . . . By ginger, I'm glad t' see yeh! I thought yeh was dead for sure."

Weakness was overcoming him quickly, and Henry knew he had to offer his story before any of his comrades started questioning him. "Yes, Tom," he began. "I've had an awful time. I got separated from the regiment an' I been way over on the right. Such terrible fightin' over there. Never seen any fightin' like it! I got shot, Tom. Shot in the head!"

Tom jumped to Henry's side. "What? Yeh got shot? Why didn't yeh say so first? Hold on a minute, Henry, and I'll get help. Corporal," he called, "over here!"

Within moments, Corporal Simpson joined them. "What yeh howlin' 'bout there, Wilson? . . . Oh, Henry, hello. Why, I thought yeh was dead hours ago! We figgered we lost forty-two men, but they keep turnin' up ev'ry ten minutes or so. If it keeps up, reckon we'll git th' whole company back by mornin'. So, tell me,

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where was yeh, Henry?"

"Over on the right. I got separated," began Henry, feeling more comfortable now with his story.

But Tom interrupted quickly. "An' he got shot in th' head. We'd better see t' him right away." And putting his arm around Henry's shoulder, he added, "Gee, it must hurt like thunder!"

Henry leaned heavily on his friend. "Yes, it hurts," he said weakly, "hurts a heap!"

"I'll take care a' yeh," said Corporal Simpson, supporting Henry under the arms.

"Put Henry t' sleep in my blanket," said Tom, "an' here, take my canteen. It's full a' coffee. An' check his head over by th' fire. I get relieved in a couple a' minutes, and I'll be over t' take care a' him."

With his knees wobbling, Henry let the corporal lead him toward the fire. He sat down obediently and turned his head so the corporal could see the wound in the light.

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Simpson whistled through his teeth when his fingers touched the dried blood. "Ah, here we are! Jest as I thought. Yeh've been grazed by a ball. It's raised a queer lump, jest as if some feller had slammed yeh on th' head with a club. It stopped bleedin', but yeh'll have one real big, hurtin' head in the mornin'."

Simpson handed Henry the canteen of coffee and went to arrange for Tom's relief. Henry seemed to forget that the canteen was in his hand as he stared into the crackling fire. Then he turned his gaze to the exhausted troops sleeping around it, some propped up against trees, others huddled in their blankets on the ground.

A few minutes later, Tom came running up, swinging a canteen of water on his arm. "Well now, Henry, we'll have yeh fixed up in jest a minute," he told his friend.

Tom bustled around, stirring up the fire so Henry would be warm and lifting the canteen

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to his friend's lips to make sure he drank all the coffee.

When Henry finished, he smiled at Tom. "That was sure good!" he said.

Tom took a large handkerchief from his pocket and folded it into a bandage. He soaked it with water from the canteen, then tied it around Henry's head, knotting it at the back of his neck.

After he stepped back to look over his work, he smiled and said, "There! Yeh look like th' devil, but I bet yeh feel better."

"Tom, my friend, this here cool cloth on my head feels as good as if it were my own mama's hand," Henry said gratefully.

"Why, thank yeh, Henry. Yer a brave un, though. Most men would a' been in th' hospital long ago with this kind a' red badge. A shot in th' head ain't no business t' fool with."

"Don't know how I can thank you, Tom."

"No need, Henry. Now let's put yeh t' bed

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and get yeh a good night's rest."

Tom helped Henry stand, then led him over to where the other soldiers were sleeping in groups. He picked up his own blankets and unrolled them. He spread the rubber blanket on the ground, then wrapped the woolen one around his friend's shoulders. "There now, lie down an' get some sleep."

Henry obeyed. "Thanks, Tom. This sure feels good. Why, this ground feels like the softest couch anyone could sleep on. . . . But wait! Where are you goin' to sleep?"

"Right down there next t' yeh, so I can watch over yeh."

"But I've got your—"

"Shet up an' go on t' sleep, Henry Fleming! Yer makin' a fool a' yerself!"

Henry stopped protesting. A pleasant drowsiness was spreading through him. He wrapped the warm blanket tighter around himself and let his head fall forward on his arm. In moments, his lids slowly closed over his eyes.