

ALONE IN THE WILDERNESS,
MARY HAD TO TRUST A MAN
ACCUSED OF TWO MURDERS

SERGEANT RUTLEDGE

STORY BEGINS ON NEXT PAGE >

JEFFREY HUNTER (Lt. Cantrell) • CONSTANCE TOWERS (Mary)

• Young Lieutenant Tom Cantrell had never seen Fort Linton so grim as on trial morning. Big, dark-skinned First Sergeant Braxton Rutledge—C Troop, Ninth United States Cavalry—stood accused of raping and then strangling popular Lucy Dabney and of shooting her father, who had been Fort Linton's commanding officer. A shocked public muttered for a hanging.

Angry women hissed the prisoner so bitterly that Cantrell, as defense counsel, instantly requested that the room be cleared of spectators. When the Military Court's President, Colonel Otis Fosgate, complied, Cantrell then declared the defense ready to proceed. Captain Shattuck, the Judge Advocate General's representative, presented himself almost superciliously for the prosecution. Grimly, Colonel Fosgate directed Shattuck to swear in his first witness.

"I call Miss Mary Beecher to the stand," the dapper Captain said.

Cantrell sprang to his feet. "I appeal to the Court! Captain Shattuck knows very well that Miss Beecher is here as a witness for the defense!"

"I know of no rule which says the prosecution cannot call a defense witness," Shattuck intervened smoothly,

"so long as it does not later impeach her testimony. Miss Beecher, please." And Mary was sworn in.

"Now, in your own words," the Captain said pleasantly, "will you acquaint the Court with your first meeting with the accused?"

Cantrell saw Mary take a deep breath. But she spoke steadily enough.

"Well," she began, "I was returning to Arizona after twelve years in the East. Passenger trains no longer run through to Spindle Station and Fort Linton, but a conductor I'd known as a child let me ride his freight's caboose...."

It had been an odd homecoming for Mary Beecher. The freight train took eleven hours in reaching Spindle; yet, she'd scarcely noticed the time. She'd been talking so eagerly to that good-looking Lieutenant Cantrell, who'd swung aboard the caboose on his way to Fort Linton.

The train had slid into Spindle Station at midnight. Conductor Owens had telegraphed ahead to notify Mary's father, but he hadn't arrived by the time Mary had settled her bags on the platform. Seeing a light gleam from the station office, Mary had figured that old Nate Hedges, the telegrapher, would

keep her company until her father could meet her and take her to the ranch.

As the train had dwindled into the night, taking that special Lieutenant with it, Mary had gone inside to greet Nate. She'd found him slumped over his telegraph key, his throat slit from ear to ear.

Lurching from the station, she'd plummeted into the arms of a huge, faceless giant, who'd grabbed her in an iron grip.

Captain Shattuck cut in on Mary's testimony deftly. "And this man who sprang at you like a nightmare. Is that brutal stranger here in the courtroom?"

"Why, he's right there," she answered, and pointed to the accused. "But he didn't-"

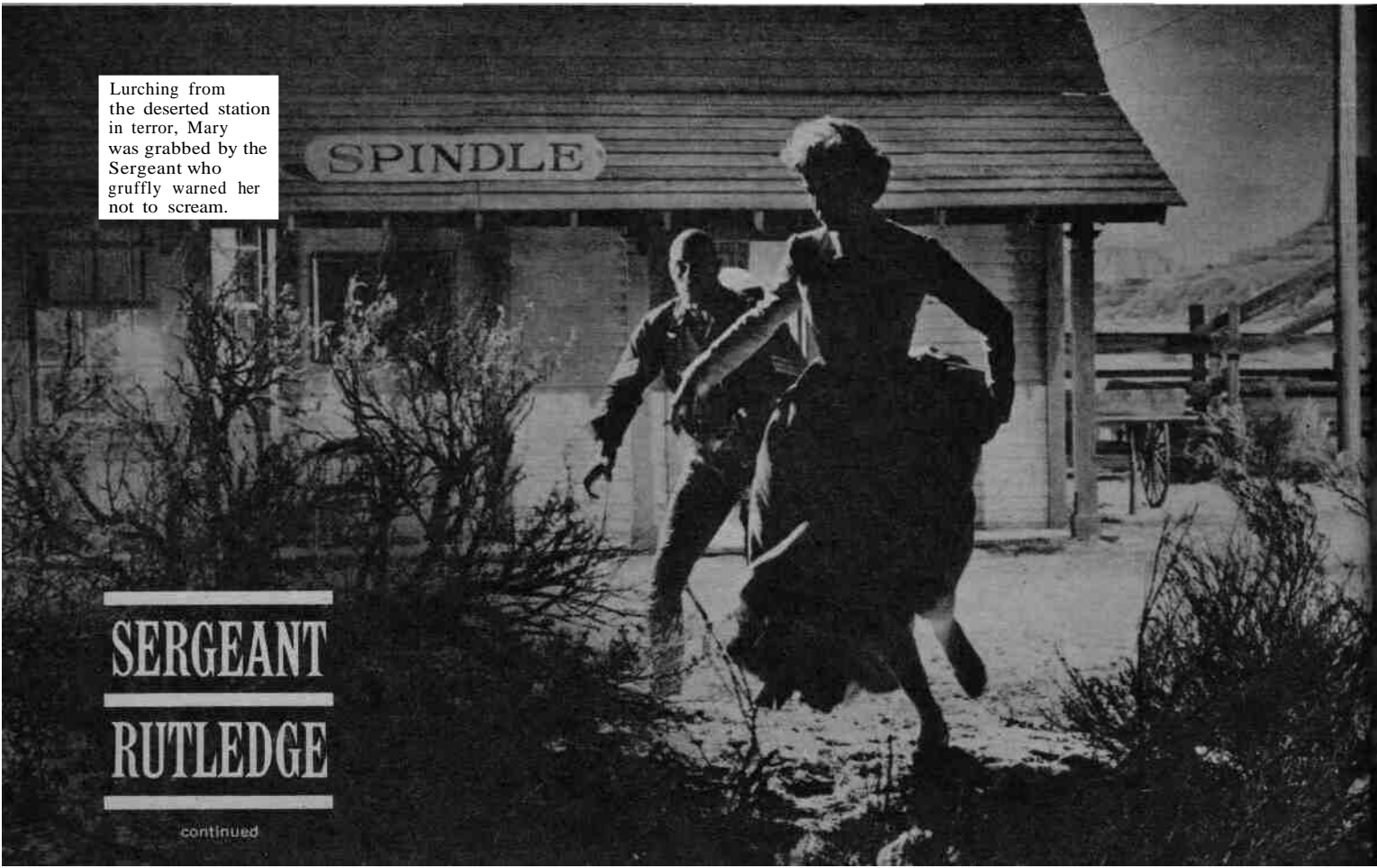
"That *colored* soldier?" Shattuck went on. "He was the man who seized you so brutally?" Shattuck did not even wait for her nod before he said, "Your witness. Lieutenant."

• Cantrell was tight with anger. Like all the white officers of the Ninth and Tenth Cavalry, he was dedicated to the theory that his men, hand-picked Negro troops chosen just after the close of the Civil War, were among the finest soldiers serving anywhere.

Lurching from the deserted station in terror, Mary was grabbed by the Sergeant who gruffly warned her not to scream.

SERGEANT
RUTLEDGE

continued



• BILLIE BURKE (Mrs. Fosgate) • WOODY STRODE (Rutledge)

"A man's life is at stake here," Cantrell angrily told the Court, "yet prosecution steals a key defense witness! I ask the Court not to accept these half-truths, but to insist on the whole truth, by letting the witness go on with her story!"

Colonel Fosgate nodded. "Sergeant Rutledge was holding you. What then?" he asked Mary.

"He warned me not to scream again," Mary murmured, shaken.

Rutledge had scooped her up and run with her across the tracks to the cover of a slight grade. Only then had his harsh whisper cut through her paralyzing fear.

"Listen to me, Miss! I been blood-trailed here to Spindle by three Apaches. They jumped me a mile back and got my horse. I killed one. But the other two are right out yonder."

Grimly, the giant had thrust his carbine into her hands. "You're a Western woman. You can use a gun. They'd have no mercy on you, ma'am."

After that, there'd been an agony of waiting until a sudden silent shadow had hurled down on them, knife flashing. The big soldier had ducked and grabbed, and the two men had rolled violently. Then, the second Apache had swooped

down. The carbine had roared as she'd fired, and the Indian had gone down. By then, the Sergeant had driven a knife into the other Indian's heart.

Rutledge had guided her back to the station shack and left her safe inside while he'd scouted the area. He'd removed Nate's body to a shed at the rear. Returning, he'd fixed hot coffee for them.

He'd found signs of thirty to forty ponies outside, and figured there'd been a big-scale break out from the San Rosario Reservation.

"Our ranch is on the San Rosario Road," she'd moaned.

"May be a good thing, then, if your father didn't get your message," the tall soldier had said. "No time to be caught out on the roads, ma'am."

Only later, when she'd glimpsed him trying to bandage up a wound in the back room, had Mary realized he'd been hurt. But it hadn't been a knife cut. This man had taken two bullets in his coppery side! He'd refused to talk about it, even when she'd insisted on swabbing the wounds with whisky.

"You've got to rest," she'd said. "But suppose the Apaches come back?"

"If they do, after killin' and runnin', it won't be till daylight," he'd told her.

"Just can't think no more. Wait till mornin'."

He'd fallen asleep and Mary had covered him with a blanket. Then she'd taken the carbine and settled herself by the window to guard him.

In the courtroom, Cantrell leaned toward her eagerly. "At any time that night did Sergeant Rutledge threaten or molest you in any way?"


"Of course not!" she snapped. "Sergeant Rutledge saved my life!"

• The prosecution's first intent was to establish the facts and nature of the crimes. The Colonel stiffened as his own wife, Cordelia Fosgate, was recalled and sworn in. She was first asked to identify a miniature of poor Lucy Dabney; it showed her wearing the tiny gold cross she had never been seen without. Shattuck then wanted to know about the last time Mrs. Fosgate had seen the motherless Lucy alive—at the sutler's store, on the day of the murders.

"I'd asked Chan Hubble, the sutler, to order me wool for socks for Otis," Mrs. Fosgate began. "I was going into the store when poor, dear Lucy rode up. . . ."

Mrs. Fosgate had primly chided the

continued >



At the Fort, Lieutenant Cantrell found the Major's daughter strangled and the Major shot; Sergeant Rutledge had just disappeared.

RUTLEDGE HAD SAVED ALL THEIR LIVES; CANTRELL COULDN'T

SERGEANT RUTLEDGE

continued

glowing girl for riding astride when she was a young lady of sixteen. They'd entered the adobe store together. Sergeant Rutledge had been there, buying tobacco. While Mrs. Fosgate had been examining her wool, young Chris, the sutler's handsome son, had packed up an order for Major Dabney's house. Mr. Hubble had offered to deliver it when he went to see her father later, but Lucy had said she needed it at once. She'd also said that her father wouldn't be home until after Retreat.

The last Mrs. Fosgate had seen of Lucy, Sergeant Rutledge had paused in the street outside to help her with her purchases.

"And that was the last time I saw Lucy Dabney alive," Mrs. Fosgate said. "But I saw Sergeant Rutledge again that same evening."

- She'd been writing a letter when she'd heard the sudden shots. Two fast shots, sounding like a small caliber gun, then one heavy one, as her china clock had chimed eight.

As Mrs. Fosgate reached her window, a tall shadow had burst from the door of Major Dabney's house. The figure had been holstering a service revolver as he'd sprung atop a waiting cavalry mount.

The lone rider had sped past, directly under Mrs. Fosgate's window. She'd seen the face clearly. It had been distorted by pain and panic, yet, unquestionably, it had been the face of Sergeant Brax Rutledge.

Shattuck smirked triumphantly. "Your witness, Lieutenant."

Tom Cantrell arose. "The defense does not challenge Mrs. Fosgate," he said.

Next witness to be sworn in was the Post Surgeon, Dr. Eckner.

"As there was no senior officer on the post," Dr. Eckner testified, "I ordered the bodies left where they were and met Lieutenant Cantrell at the station. We returned to Major Dabney's. . . ."

When they'd gotten back to the commanding officer's quarters, a growing crowd had gathered outside. Striding

past the Sergeant of the Guard, Cantrell had clipped orders for all those not officially present to disperse. Inside, he'd found everything just as Eckner had last seen them: Lucy, strangled and nude, lay under a serape on the sofa; her dead father sprawled face down near the door, still grasping a .31 Colt revolver.

The Major had been shot through the heart; he'd fired his own gun twice. The girl had been beaten, violated, *then* strangled.

Cantrell had figured that the Major had surprised whomever it was and had wounded him. Then he'd killed the Major.

"The little gold cross Lucy always wore—it's been torn off her," Cantrell had observed.

"You never can tell about such a degenerate," Eckner had said. "He takes the cross, perhaps—a symbol of purity he has destroyed."

Only when he'd sent a messenger seeking Sergeant Rutledge had Cantrell discovered that his trusted officer was missing. He had been seen just before eight o'clock, looking for Major Dabney. Incredibly, this suggested that the trusted soldier had been in Dabney's house just at the fatal hour—to report that Apaches were on the loose and three ranches had been raided. But what man with news like this could have been diverted to murder—and worse?

While Eckner had the bodies removed to the post hospital for autopsies, Cantrell had sent a galloper to the outlying survey camp after Colonel Fosgate. Then, he'd started a forced march for Spindle Station where Mary Beecher had been left unguarded.

As Eckner finished his testimony, Captain Shattuck was all but purring; "By now, I'm sure, this Court is aware of Lieutenant Cantrell's peculiar involvement in the case. I call as my next witness defense counsel himself—Lieutenant Cantrell!"

- "We arrived at Spindle Station shortly after dawn," Lieutenant Cantrell began; and he saw again in his mind's eye the dust-caked line of soldiers at full gallop as they bore down upon the station. . . .

With two men covering the rear, Cantrell had kicked open the front door, tensely shouting Mary's name. He'd found himself facing Rutledge, who'd held his carbine ready.

"Don't touch your gun, Lieutenant," the tall Negro had said grimly.

"I won't have to. You're going to hand me that carbine."

"No, sir," Rutledge had answered. "Take me back, they'd hang me sure."

The two men coming in at the back had jumped him, then.

"Iron him. Sergeant Skidmore!" Cantrell had barked. "And search him. Bring me everything you find on him!" He'd been thinking, in that moment, of Lucy's tiny gold cross. Incredible as it seemed, Rutledge's actions had seemed a confession.

- Cantrell turned to Mary Beecher. "Mary—are you all right? He didn't hurt you, did he?"

"Of course not! He saved my life! You're treating him like an animal!"

"He's under arrest for the murder of his commanding officer," Cantrell had said. "Now what about your father? What happened to him?"

Mary'd told him Sam Beecher had never arrived at Spindle Station. "But I wasn't alone here," she'd added. "Sergeant Rutledge was here. No officer could have been more gallant."

Then, Cantrell had been told of the telegrapher's murder and of the two Apaches who'd attacked them. By then, they had searched Rutledge and had emptied his pockets. He'd had no gold cross on him. Cantrell had ordered Mary out of the room and had questioned Rutledge about the Apaches.

"There were thirty to forty unshod ponies here last night before the train came in," Rutledge had replied. "You can see the sign out back."

Thirty or forty meant a big breakout! But Cantrell had been examining the manacled Sergeant's wounds. "This wasn't Apaches. Two small caliber bullet wounds. Did you do it, Rutledge?" he'd asked.

"I refuse to answer, sir—respectfully."

With the quietly defiant Rutledge rebandaged, Cantrell had ordered in his non-coms to explain what lay ahead. "A strong band of hostiles attacked here yesterday and murdered the telegrapher. We're going to track 'em down and drive 'em back to the reservation. Three ranches are reported burned out. They seem to be moving west. So I'm going to swing north and west fast, to cut them off before they can reach the young lady's home at Spanish Wells. She goes with us. You, too, Rutledge. With that many hostiles loose, I can't detach anyone to take you back to Fort Linton. You ride with us."

Rutledge had lifted his handcuffs. "One hand free? Like the book says?"

"You know what the book says. One hand free *if* and *when* we make contact

LET HIM HANG NOW...

with enemy. Now we'll see to burying Nate before we leave."

But even as he'd supervised the burial detail outside, Cantrell heard the voices of the non-coms in the station, loyal to Rutledge yet.

"How 'bout that, Top Soldier?" they'd said. "He ain't sendin' you back! Top Soldier still Top Soldier! We're all your friends. Top Soldier."

"Not any more, you ain't!" Rutledge had snapped back with determination. "I'm a prisoner now, in bad trouble. You're Ninth Cavalrymen. The record of the Ninth is goin' to speak for us all some day—and it's goin' to speak clean. You ain't goin' to risk it for one man's good!"

"That thing at Fort Linton, we don't believe it. But why did you run away?" they asked.

"'Cause I walked into the one thing none of us can fight—white woman business. Now don't call me Top Soldier no more. That's an order."

• Cantrell had found Mary outside the station and had told her he was taking her home. Then, he'd talked again with Rutledge in the telegraph office.

"Last night," he'd said. "It's against everything I know about you! But you ran out. You deserted. And now you refuse to make any statement. Rutledge, you and I have served together for nine years. I know there's no better soldier. Tell me you didn't do it. I'll believe you."

"Maybe you, sir—but not any court-martial. *You* know that."

Cantrell had sent him outside with the men. Presently, from the corral, came a sound of singing—a chantey in praise of Captain Buffalo. Dressed for the trail, Mary had rejoined him. "Who is this Captain Buffalo?"

"He's a legendary character the colored troops invented when the Indians started calling them Buffalo Soldiers. The ideal soldier, giant size. Right now they're putting it on thick—to cheer up Rutledge."

"What a wonderful way to do it!" Mary had said.

After breakfast, the detail had begun to move again, on toward Spanish Wells. They'd ridden fast. Before noon, Cantrell had offered to unlock the irons, if Rutledge promised not to escape. But the promise had been refused.

"If you make one move to get away, I'll have to kill you," Cantrell had said at last.

Well ahead, they had come upon a white man staked out by the Indians and badly mutilated. What was left of this Apache (*continued on page 69*)



^ Questioned by the prosecution, Mary admitted the Sergeant had seized her at the station.

V As defense counsel, Cantrell knew the whole case depended on identifying the gold cross.



Sergeant Rutledge

continued from page 27

THE CAST

Lieutenant Cantrell.....**Jeffrey Hunter**
Mary Beecher.....**Constance Towers**
Mrs. Fosgate.....**Billie Burke**
Braxton Rutledge.....**Woody Strode**
Skidmore.....**Juano Hernandez**
Colonel Fosgate.....**Willis Bouchey**
Captain Shattuck.....**Carleton Young**
Lieutenant Mulqueen.....**Judson Pratt**
Captain Dwyer.....**Bill Henry**
Captain MacAfee.....**Walter Reed**
Captain Dickinson.....**Chuck Hayward**
Nellie.....**Mae Marsh**

victim trussed to trailside stakes had made Cantrell's stomach churn. But Rutledge had claimed to recognize the tattered shirt.

"He's Chris Hubble, the sutler's son. He was sparkin' the Jorgenson girl, sir. Maybe he got news of the raid on her pa's ranch."

The killers had left nothing much behind but a tobacco pouch. Cantrell had examined it thoroughly. No gold cross!

"If you'd tell me what you keep huntin', sir—" Rutledge had breathed.

"I didn't find what I was looking for this time either, Sergeant."

• Captain Shattuck made no attempt to discredit Cantrell's testimony. What he wanted to do was remove him as defense counsel, on the grounds of his being an obviously interested party. The brief legal skirmish between the two young officers was settled when Fosgate overruled the prosecution.

Shattuck summoned Sergeant Skidmore as his next witness.

"All right, Sergeant," Shattuck said. "The patrol report states you pressed on after seeing smoke signals. I'd like to hear *your* version of what happened then."

"Like you say, sir," Skidmore testified, "Lieutenant Cantrell forced the march, fixin' to get the young lady home and make sure the Apaches were headed back to the reservation...."

A few miles on, the Lieutenant had suddenly ordered the line to quit the trail and circle onto higher ground, while the flank guard of three moved in below. At the same time, Rutledge had ridden up to Cantrell.

With only brief hesitation, Cantrell had clawed out his key and unlocked the irons. But he still hadn't given his prisoner a gun. The line had forged on.

Suddenly, the flank guard had been attacked by six fanatic braves, determined to be bloodied in their ancestral tradition though peace had been upon the district for years.

At Cantrell's orders, every man had fired as the braves had moved into range. Four of the Indians had gone down, and two of the hard-pressed troopers had made it safely back to the line. But the third man, Moffat, had been wounded and had lost control of his horse. It had started veering away with the two remaining hostiles in pursuit. Then Rutledge had spurred out—unarmed—to cut in alongside the wounded soldier.

Rutledge had stopped the runaway horse, and he'd shot one of the braves with Moffat's gun; but the other had sped past and into the rocky ravines ahead. By then, Moffat had fallen from his mount; Rutledge had swung down beside him when he'd died.

Sergeant Skidmore would swear that it was then that Rutledge's own predicament had first come back into the prisoner's mind. With Moffat's horse all provisioned and outfitted, and with only open range ahead, Rutledge had climbed into the saddle and had slowly wheeled away, as if he'd been inviting Cantrell's bullet.

And after a shouted command had been ignored, Cantrell had indeed fired. But his first shot had been ruined by Mary, who'd swung her horse into his mount. After that, two revolver shots had missed because the

distance had been too vast. Top Soldier had vanished into an arroyo.

After the troopers had buried Moffat, they'd followed the Apache trail on toward Crazy Woman River, which they had to cross to reach Spanish Wells. They hadn't tried to follow Rutledge; the hostiles had to be dealt with first. In Skidmore's opinion, there was no question that the Lieutenant had tried his best to shoot the escaping prisoner. Only Mary had stopped that.

• After Skidmore left the witness stand, Shattuck addressed the judges.

"It must be clear to the Court that no one can tell the rest of this story but the accused himself. But I cannot call him. And I doubt Lieutenant Cantrell dares to," he said.

"The accused welcomes the opportunity to testify," Cantrell clipped.

And so, at long last, Braxton Rutledge himself was sworn in. Shattuck coldly requested him to pick up the story after he'd evaded Cantrell's shots.

"I rode full gallop for Crazy Woman River," the prisoner said, "figuring to cross over and head north to the railroad. . . ."

Alert for Apaches, he'd pressed Moffat's mount on through the hilly terrain until he'd reached the river. There, he'd found the lone brave who'd escaped already swimming his pony across. In the distance, rising smoke had told him Spanish Wells was burning.

A shouting band of some twenty-five young Apaches had suddenly broken from cover on the far bank and had met the returning warrior. A prisoner bound to his saddle had been with them—a white man. Rutledge had recognized Sam Beecher.

Too far away to intervene, he'd watched them brutally murder the old rancher and dump his body into the current. Then the war party had wheeled and galloped around the bend—in the direction of Middle Ford.

It had been no trouble to figure out what they'd do there. Along about sundown, the patrol would have to cross the river without knowing the Apaches had circled back. Either they'd be jumped in midstream, or as they emerged on the far bank with only open water behind them. They'd be mowed down, massacred.

But the cavalry was no longer any concern of Braxton Rutledge. He had a sound horse under him and the rations to get him to the railroad. He was Top Soldier no longer. Those doomed soldiers were no business of his.

Cantrell had led his detail down to the water at Middle Ford in the last hour of daylight. He'd halted the main body while he and three others had waded out to midstream. Finding no sign of enemy action, he'd motioned the others to follow. And all the while, in the brush on the bank toward which they headed, the Apaches had lain waiting like panthers.

• The moment the troopers began to struggle up the bank was the moment the Apaches would attack. A split second before that moment, Braxton Rutledge had broken from cover—spurring his horse dead into the midst of the ambush and scattering the startled Indians.

The patrol's discipline had been apparent, even in the instant of surprise; the troopers had quickly fallen back toward the bank. Rutledge had seen two of them hauling Mary Beecher to safety, while he'd been desperately trying to beat off the Apaches who had come after him. But as he'd fought, he'd seen the Lieutenant administer a death blow to one huge hostile clad in a fringed buckskin jacket that obviously had been pilfered from some white man.

The Apache that Cantrell had killed must have been their leader; for when they saw

him fall, the others had streaked for cover. "And that's how it was, sir," Rutledge finished. "We dug in to wait out the night."

Captain Shattuck favored the courtroom with a sneer of ridicule.

"So, with freedom before you, you deliberately turned your back on it and with noble disregard for your own life saved the patrol?" he demanded.

Rutledge stiffened. "No, sir. Nothin' noble about it. I just—"

"It was a brave act. Admit it! And just why *did* you come back?"

"I don't rightly know, sir," the prisoner muttered. "But the more I kept ridin' away, the more somethin' told me to go back, sir."

"I'll tell you why. Bravery is your stock in trade. Your whole record shows it. So you were hoping to trade your murderer's bravery for the mercy of this Court. Admit it, Rutledge! Don't lie!"

"That wasn't it at all!" the big man wailed. "It was because the Ninth Cavalry was my home—my *real* freedom, my self-respect! Desertin' it like I was, I weren't no better than a swamp-runnin' nigger. And I ain't that, you hear? No, I ain't! 'Cause I'm a *man*!"

In the stunned silence following that wild vehemence, Cantrell jumped to his feet, shouting, "I protest! This goading is an outrage! In common decency—"

"Your witness, Cantrell," Captain Shattuck cut in contemptuously.

Cantrell stood before the prisoner defiantly. "I can only say this. If Rutledge had *not* been my prisoner, I would have cited him for gallantry above and beyond the call of duty during the action at Crazy Woman River. No questions, Sergeant. Step down."

• The Court took a brief recess before the defense opened its case. Waiting with his client, Cantrell tried to persuade him that Shattuck's attack had been meaningless words. But one word—*GUILTY!*—was all it took to hang.

The spectators' benches were jammed again when the judges filed back. As his first witness, Cantrell called Mary Beecher back to the stand. He asked her to tell the Court what had happened after that ambush at the river.

"We did what we could for the wounded men," Mary said. "And Lieutenant Cantrell took me aside and told me that Rutledge had—had seen my father die. . . ."

The night had been cold and the moon ghostly. Trooper Otway had died of his wounds before morning and the men had buried him. Mary had asked Cantrell if he planned to take Rutledge back to Fort Linton after all that had happened.

"For the first time," he'd answered slowly, "I don't know what to do."

"You know they'll hang him if you do!" she'd said. "He never touched that girl!"

Cantrell had seemed deep in thought, that night. Toward dawn, he'd led a scouting party across the river. Riding back just after daybreak, he'd brought the news that the war party had retreated clear back to the reservation. Down by the river's edge, Cantrell had halted by the body of the dead Apache in the stolen buckskin, studying it moodily. Abruptly, he'd called Mary.

When she'd reached the spot where the fallen Indian lay, he'd said quietly, "I'm sorry, Mary, but I must have a witness."

He'd knelt by the corpse and she'd watched him detach a tiny gold cross on a broken chain from the dead brave's headband. He'd held it out for her to look at. "Just remember you saw me take it from this hostile's headband. Thank you, Mary."

And then he'd ridden up the bank to his men; he'd picked up the hated handcuffs and snapped them back on Rutledge's unresisting wrists. A rumble of anger had arisen among the troopers, but Rutledge had spoken out sharply: "*No! Leave it be!*"

"Corporal," Cantrell had ordered, "we move out for Fort Linton in twenty minutes!"

On the stand, Mary Beecher turned to glare at the defense counsel. "Sergeant Rutledge had saved all our lives," she said. "In common decency, Lieutenant Cantrell at least owed him *his*."

But Cantrell ignored Mary and picked up the cross. "Miss Beecher has identified this, gentlemen, as taken from the Apache's headband. Here are twenty-seven affidavits from personnel at Fort Linton identifying the cross as one habitually worn by Lucy Dabney. Miss Beecher also identifies this blood-stained coat as one taken off the Apache. I call the Court's attention to initials sewn inside this coat. A 'C' and an 'H.'"

A murmur arose in the room; he pressed on. "The initials of the sutler's son, Chris Hubble, whose body we found on the trail. The only person from whom the Apaches could have taken that cross!"

As the implication grew clear, cries of protest spurted from the onlookers. The sutler himself groaned heavily.

Shattuck had no cross-examination. Mary left the witness stand and resumed her seat. Rutledge caught Cantrell's sleeve, protesting troubledly that Chris Hubble had been too nice a boy to suspect what the Lieutenant was hinting. But Cantrell spoke tightly.

"If it wasn't you, Rutledge, it was Chris. It's got to be!"

• With no other witnesses to be called, Colonel Fosgate directed the defense to proceed with its summation. Cantrell faced the Court firmly.

"Neither side has been able to produce a witness who actually *saw* the crimes," he began. "Sergeant Rutledge admits under oath that he entered Major Dabney's quarters to inform him of the Apache raids, found the girl naked and strangled, was covering the body with a serape when Major Dabney entered and in blind fury at what he saw opened fire, wounding him twice. Only then, in self-defense of his own life, did Rutledge return fire and kill the Major. The defense contends this story is simple truth."

They were listening to him intently. Old Chan Hubble looked sick.

"Defense has introduced as evidence this small gold cross, and this coat," he went on. "I must remind you of Mrs. Fosgate's testimony that at the store, in Chris Hubble's hearing, Lucy said her father would not be home until after Retreat; that she would be there alone. The boy's whereabouts during that hour are unknown. Whereas all but ten minutes of Sergeant Rutledge's time is accounted for by the duty roster. I submit there is only one possible conclusion. Young Chris Hubble violated and murdered Lucy Dabney, and Sergeant Rutledge is innocent of these crimes!"

Shattuck was on his feet at once, deploring this accusation of a dead boy unable now to defend his name. Lucy Dabney had worn a cross, he agreed, but why *this* cross? He spread a dozen small gold crosses, all on broken chains, onto the table. He defied anyone present to mix in the cross in evidence and then identify it.

Angrily, Cantrell had to admit that even he would not know the cross he had taken from the dead hostile from the other crosses. But Shattuck was not through. The coat with initials, he said, could have been taken from any of several raided ranches; it could have belonged to Charlie Haight, say, or to Crim Hagathorn. So much for the defense's evidence!

Shattuck had two further points to make. If the accused were not guilty, he asked, why had he run? Certainly, he added, it hadn't been the prosecution who had tried to write *Murderer* on the gravestone of an innocent white lad to shield the life of a Negro!

Cantrell cried out angrily, "I object! If the color of a man's skin—"

But Colonel Fosgate gestured him to silence. "In my opinion," the Colonel said, "the case hangs upon this cross. Is it or is it not Lucy Dabney's?"

"If it is permitted, sir"—big Chan Hubble had arisen in his place—"I could pick out that cross, even mixed with the others. I sold it to the Major for Lucy's twelfth birthday. There's a tiny nick under the bar."

Fosgate investigated. "By the Lord Harry, there is! Right here! Take the stand, Mr. Hubble. Sergeant, swear in the sutler."

Obviously, Chris's father was bowed with grief as he shambled to the stand. Watching him closely, Cantrell felt excitement begin to rise in him. Shattuck disdainfully shrugged off his right to question. And now it was the defense's turn. Moving forward, Cantrell spoke with deceptive gentleness.

"Mr. Hubble, why did you tell me earlier you could *not* identify the cross? Take a moment, if you want to. Collect yourself."

"Chris was my only son. It's hard for a man to admit—I *wanted* to believe it was the Sergeant, but I can't stand by and see him hung."

"Tell us just how you think it happened, Mr. Hubble."

"Chris is dead. The truth can't hurt him now. Well, after he did the thing, he must have torn the cross off Lucy. I was home, upstairs, when he ran into the house that night, shoutin' somethin' about Apache raids. When I come down, he was gone. Coat was gone, too."

"What is your first name?" Cantrell went on. "Chan—for Chandler. Chandler Hubble. C.H. Chris wasn't a big man. *This* coat fits—you!"

"Never said it wasn't mine. Chris just grabbed up the first thing."

"Right! The first coat handy! And that cross was in the pocket—*because you'd put it there!* You had the same opportunity as Chris to know Lucy was alone. You went there, attacked her, killed her. And now, to save your own neck, you're trying to pin the blame on your own dead son!"

"Lies!" the sutler screamed. "Lies!" But then he crumpled. "I *had* to do it! The way she walked, the way her body moved, young and warm—she drove me crazy. I *had* to have her! Oh, God help me, God help me!"

The courtroom erupted into an uproar that almost drowned Fosgate's sharp command for his men to hold the sutler for the United States Marshal. As Hubble was dragged out a side door, Cantrell turned wearily to his veteran First Sergeant. No words passed between them. But the trial of Sergeant Rutledge was over.

• Outside in the street, a little later, everyone was assuring everyone else that the Sergeant's innocence had been evident all along and that young Lieutenant Cantrell certainly had done the service proud. Cantrell emerged from the building to find Mary Beecher waiting, flushed and fair.

"Well, Tom—" She hesitated. "Go ahead. Say it."

"All right." But what he said wasn't what she had expected. "I still think you're the most beautiful girl I've ever seen."

While they stood gazing at each other, smiling at each other, the tall figure of First Sergeant Braxton Rutledge paused beside them. He had trouble steadying his voice. "Ain't nothin' I can say, Lieutenant."

Cantrell held out his hand. "Don't try, Rutledge. You're home again."

THE END

Adapted from the JOHN FORD Production—Releaded through WARNER BROTHERS—Directed by JOHN FORD—Produced by WILLIS GOLDBECK and PATRICK FORD—Screenplay by JAMES WARNER BELLAH and WILLIS GOLDBECK—Color by TECHNICOLOR—Adapted for SCREEN STORIES by JEAN FRANCIS WEBB
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