

TOM STROTHER, MY BODY SERVANT

. . . As under feudal institutions the arms of heiresses were quartered with those of the families into which they married, in the South their slaves adopted the surname of the mistress; my paternal grandmother was Miss Sarah Strother of Virginia and from her estate came these Strother negroes. Tom, three years my senior, was my foster brother and early playmate. Tall, powerful, black as ebony, he was a mirror of honesty and truth. Always cheerful, I never heard him laugh or knew of his speaking unless spoken to. He could light a fire in a minute under the most unfavorable circumstances and with the most unpromising material, made the best coffee to be tasted outside of a creole kitchen, was a "dab" at camp stews and roasts, groomed my horses, one of which he rode near me, washed my linen and was never behind time. Occasionally, when camped near a house, he would obtain starch and flat-irons and get up my extra shirt in a way to excite the envy of a professional clear-starcher; but such red-letter days were few.

I used to fancy that there was a mute sympathy between General Jackson and Tom, as they sat silent by a camp fire, the latter respectfully withdrawn; and an incident here at Strasburg cemented this friendship. When my command was called into action I left Tom on a hill where all was quiet. Thereafter, from a change in the enemy's dispositions, the place became rather hot, and Jackson passing by, advised Tom to move; but he replied, if the General pleased, his master told him to stay there and would know where to find him,

RICHARD TAYLOR

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and he did not believe shells would trouble him. Two or three nights later Jackson was at my fire when Tom came to give me some coffee; whereupon Jackson rose and gravely shook him by the hand, and then told me the above.