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JENKINS & SON

CORNER CROCKERS.

Ray's Recruit

.....BY

CAPTAIN CHARLES KING, U. S. A.

AUTHOR OF "THE COLONEL'S DAUGHTER," "FROM THE RANKS," ETC.

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(Continued.)

"Thought you had a whole troop of rough riders, Ray," said he, after again glowering at the newcomer until he grew tired of the calm indifference which rewarded his gaze. "This ain't one of your lot, is it? I've seen him before."

"Yes, the day you persuaded him not to enlist," laughed Ray good naturedly. "I roped him in afterward." Then, lowering his voice, "He's got a hand on a horse's mouth as light as a child's."

The tall recruit had dismounted from his own troop horse, and, having thrown the reins over a picket of the fence, was now quietly approaching Stella, with a light English saddle in

his hand. Hogan, dismounted, was petting her glossy neck and speaking soothingly, but the pretty creature, with ears erect, was switching about, apparently hunting for something at which to shy, and the ladies' furs gave her ready excuse. The moment Mrs. Ray stepped forward to pat her, Stella backed vigorously, dragging Hogan with her, and, despite Ray's practiced hand extended to aid, back she persisted in going until she bumped into the hurdle post. This furnished excuse for a kick and a plunge. Ray sprang from his saddle, and, telling Hogan to look after Dandy, himself took Stella's bit and began Blue Grass expostulation, which seemed more intelligible than Irish. At all events, the mettlesome creature quieted down long enough to admit of Hunter's approach, and that tall, silent young soldier quickly set and girthed the saddle, and then, nod from his captain, vaulted on her back, Ray letting go the moment the reins were gathered.

And then did Stella dance nimbly, daintily about, playful and spirited, but not in the least vicious, Hunter giving her head abundant room to turn and maintaining only light and easy pressure on the bit. Mainwaring sniffed disdainfully at the uncavalrylike pose, the long, flat seat, the knees far to the front, the feet set home in the stirrups, and away forward. He sniffed still more when Stella began to bound and curvet, and Hunter rose slightly in his stirrups, riding lightly, springingly and never thinking of sitting fast. Ray called to Merriweather to bring one or two men and come over to the hurdles, and, without an audible word, the order was obeyed, though it was remarked at the time that the sergeant hesitated a bit, possibly because of his disfigured face.

"Try her over the bar first, Ray," said Mainwaring. And, with a man stationed at each post and the bar set easily nearly three feet from the ground, Hunter guided his pretty mount to the spot, let her sniff at and examine the strange affair, then as quietly rode her a dozen yards away, turned her head to the bar, and relaxing the reins gave her the hint to go, his long snowy legs close pressed to the saddle. Stella came at it delightedly, but changed her mind with the second stride and would have flown the track but for the firm hand and closed leg. Finding she couldn't dodge and had to do it, she rose high, and, half affrighted, cleared the bar and came bounding lightly to the turf, then bolted away with blood in her eye and a bit in her teeth. Only a few rods, however, Hunter, sitting her like wax now, reined her round in broad circle, headed her back for the group, gradually checking her speed as he neared the party.

"Try it from that side," said Ray, and over she popped, light as a bird. A third and a fourth time was the leap repeated, Stella enjoying being the center of attraction and improving on her party.

"Well, dismount and put on that McClellan saddle," said Mainwaring curtly. Atherton heard the order, saw the quick glance of the soldier toward his captain and the half vexed expression in Ray's face, and, glancing at Mrs. Ray, hesitated no longer.

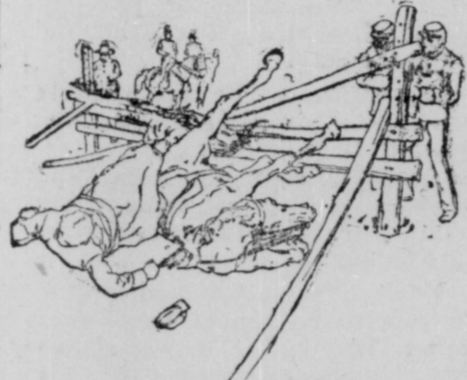
"No, no, major, don't change the saddle. Let us see how she'll take the bar again. Set it loosely, you men, so that it will slide off the pegs if she strikes."

Sergeant Merriweather was busily setting the peg at three feet again, when, glancing up to see that the opposite end was at the same notch, he caught sight of the slender figure of his wife standing well back of the group at the fence, her eyes fixed, not on him or on the ladies, but with deep, intense interest in her gaze, upon the tall, erect young soldier on the spirited mare. Un-

to this moment Merriweather had been silently carrying out his instructions, all his attention given to them or to Stella. Of the man in saddle he took apparently no notice whatever. Now, forgetting everything else in hand, he stood there, half bent over, gazing, with heaven only knows what thoughts surging through his brain, straight and steadfast at his unconscious wife.

"Sergeant, don't you hear?" At last the impatient words seemed to reach him, and the flushed face of his comrade at the opposite post recalled him to himself. "The captain says set it at 3 feet 6. Quick! She's coming."

Coming she was, with a rush, Hunter's hands held low on her withers, his legs dangling on the near side as she bounded over the springy turf. Merriweather jerked out the iron peg and thrust it into the three-six hole, lifting the bar as he did so, but turning the hook of the pin upward instead of down. It was no leap at all. There was no



Hurling Hunter, blanket and herself in a confused and rolling heap.

reason why she should strike, no reason why, if she did strike, any harm would occur. But it was all done in a second of time. Sitting sideways, instead astride, Hunter was at a disadvantage. He could not "lift her" as he was accustomed. The excited creature dashed at the bar as though reckless of its added height; the off fore foot struck the tough, unyielding wood, tripped her, threw her headlong on the turf, hurling Hunter, blanket and herself in a confused and rolling heap. A woman's shriek went up at the instant, but it came not from the lips of the women on the field.

(To be Continued.)

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