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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.)

"Possibly Captain Ray will explain it," was the answer, and the serenity of the applicant remained unruined.

"Oh, very well," said Dana, nettled in spite of his better nature. "Go see Captain Ray if you wish."

But even as he spoke the hall door opened and in burst Major Mainwaring. There is no other way of describing the major's method of entering a room. It has been said that he was blunt both in speech and in action. A soldier for years of his life, no amount of domestic polish had ever succeeded in smoothing off the rough edges of the camp. Mainwaring prided himself on being direct in everything he said and did. Men and women who knew him well knew there was a mine of genuine kindness and goodness under the rugged surface. Men and women who heard him speak for the first time declared him a brute.

"What you got here?" blurted Mainwaring, glaring at the sergeant and his silent companion.

"Man wants to enlist, sir," was the reply.

Now, Mainwaring was not the recruiting officer of the regiment. He was in nowise responsible for their selection. He had been but a few months a member of the regiment himself, having, as has been explained, been promoted to it from another when Major Barry became lieutenant colonel, but it was a peculiarity of Mainwaring's that he considered it his inalienable right to have a say in everything going on, and it wasn't so much what he said as how he said it that made it obnoxious. He scowled at the very presentable newcomer as though words were inadequate to express his disapprobation, then gruffly demanded:

"Where you from?"
A flush went up to the forehead of the young man, and there was an instant's hesitation, then in a very quiet tone he replied, "The east."

Major Mainwaring was studying him sharply, a suspicious light in his black eyes. "Haven't I seen you before?" he presently asked, the words tumbling all over one another's heels.

"Not out here, certainly," was the tempered reply, though the blue eyes were firing up and looking square into the kindling black.

"Do you mean to tell me you haven't been in service before?" The major's precipitate style of questioning left barely time for answer.

But the civilian took his time and chose his words. "I do not mean to tell you--anything, sir."

For a moment Mainwaring simply glared as though he could not realize the full significance of the words.

"What in thunder do you mean by that?" he finally growled.

"Just what I have said, sir," was the reply. "Five minutes ago I wished to enlist in this regiment; now I don't. Good day to you, gentlemen." And, to the speechless amaze of the sergeant major, the suppressed delight of Dana and the profane astonishment of Mainwaring, he calmly walked past the two officers, replacing his hat as he did so, and stalked deliberately into the hallway and out of the front door.

"Well, of all the chip on the shoulder specimens I ever saw," loudly laughed Mainwaring, "that fellow beats the lot. What do you s'pose fired him off so? I hadn't begun to say anything to him. The man's a dash dashed double dashed liar, and I know it. I've seen him somewhere before, and he knows it, and he's afraid to show up again and took the first excuse to get off. That man's a dash dashed deserter or a horse thief or something. He knows me and didn't know of my promotion to this

regiment or my being here. You are well rid of him, Dana. He'll never show up at Ransom again."

But he did, for just two days later Captain Ray came cheerily into the office with enlistment papers in his hand. "Dana, old boy, I've got a tiptop man to be sworn in. This way, please, Hunter." And there at the doorway stood the applicant of two days before.

Dana glanced over the papers. "Arthur Hunter, born New York, by occupation a clerk, do hereby acknowledge to have voluntarily enlisted this sixth day of November, 188-, as a soldier in the Army of the United States, etc., and do solemnly swear that I am 25 years and 7 months of age, etc., and I, Arthur Hunter, do solemnly swear that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the United States of America, etc."

Then Dana looked up at the dark eyes and curling black mustache and animated face of one of the crack captains in the regiment and from him to the silent, blue eyed and, as before, thoroughly presentable stranger, and there was embarrassment in the adjutant's face. For a moment he hesitated, then turned to the would be recruit.

"Will you step outside a moment? I have to speak with Captain Ray."

He was instantly obeyed.

"I beg your pardon, captain," said Dana, "but I have to ask a question or two. Major Mainwaring is sure he has seen this man before and that he is a deserter or something disreputable despite his good looks. He refused to answer for himself two days ago."

"Yes, I know," answered Ray smilingly. "We all know how suave and encouraging the major is apt to be to strangers. It's a wonder some wild westerner hasn't put a bullet through him. I've heard all about that interview."

"And--you're willing to take chances? You're satisfied this man's all right?"

"All right as men go, Dana. We can't expect all the virtues and timperance besides for \$13 a month," as Mulligan said in the Mexican war. But this applicant satisfies me that he means to serve, that he loves a horse and can ride like a Kentuckian. I'll bet he can fight, and it's none of our business who he is, where he hails from or why he enlisted so long as he does his duty. Now I'm willing to take him."

And that settled it. Recruit Arthur Hunter was formally accepted as a member of the sorrel troop, took his first lesson with the currycomb and brush without a word, and, "without turning a hair," his initiation on Buckler, the meanest brute in the stable, and rode him barebacked to water despite furious plunges and wild howls of de-



Recruit Arthur Hunter was formally accepted.

light from threescore trooper throats. Furthermore, Hunter accepted barrack fare without remonstrance, and when 48 hours elapsed and his captain asked him how he liked it the new trooper clicked his heels together and said, "Better than I hoped to, sir," and then surprised that officer by a request to be allowed to be absent until next day. Etiquette required that such favors should be asked through the first sergeant in writing. The colonel's consent had also to be given, but Hunter produced in explanation a telegram received but half an hour before stables. That dispatch was addressed properly to Trooper A. Hunter, Fort Ransom, and said: "Must move tonight. Will bring your things on No. 3," and it came from Pawnee.

Captain Ray looked it over in some uncertainty. "What things are these?" he asked.

"A trunk, sir, and some other property, principally clothing."

Colonel Atherton did not look over-pleased at the application of Captain Ray for permission for a new recruit to be absent overnight, but Ray was a favorite. Sergeant Merriweather was going to Butte on pass after supper. Recruit Hunter could go with him in the post trader's wagon. Ray felt sure of his man, and the colonel consented.

And so it happened that Merriweather's pretty wife, the invalid of a fortnight ago, was surprised by the sight of a tall, very fine looking young man, in a new fatigue suit not yet altered to fit him, who appeared at the doorway

of her little abode shortly after gun fire and asked for the sergeant.

"He'll be here directly. Surely this must be Mr. Hunter," said she, dusting a chair and looking up at him from under her long lashes. "You'll come in and wait, won't you?" she added invitingly. But Hunter thanked her briefly and said he'd go to the store, which he did, with her bright eyes following him in lively curiosity.

It was midnight when Sergeant Merriweather, driving in, reported his return at the guardhouse and found the officer of the day and half the guard searching busily about the premises in hopes of discovering by what means two general prisoners had sawed their way out of their iron barred room. The rest of the guard were in pursuit. It was a night of excitement and disgust for most of them, and they were all wide awake and eager for news when, at the break of day, there came galloping out from Butte the local agent of the Transcontinental, with a startling story. Train No. 3, "The Owl," the Pacific express, had been held up by robbers about an hour earlier, just east of Ska bridge. Jimmy Long, engineer of 783, was badly shot. His fireman was killed. The robbers, nearly a dozen in number, had terrorized the train hands, got everything there was in the safe, in the mail car and among the passengers in the day coach and sleeper and had then ridden off northwestward across the Ska. They were heading for the Dry Fork. The sheriff was trying to raise a posse in town, but it was slow work. For God's sake, couldn't the cavalry go in pursuit?

CHAPTER VI.

A territorial governor is not an awe inspiring official ordinarily, but the governor of Wyoming, relieved of his valuables at the point of the pistol, was not slow in seeking redress. From Butte he wired full particulars of the robbery to the department commander, who was at Pawnee just back from an inspection of the Sioux agencies, 50 miles to the north. The general was waiting for the east bound train at the depot hotel, was aroused in an instant, and lost no time in wiring authority to Colonel Atherton to use any means in his power to head off and capture the robbers without waiting for civil process. The news of the hold up with its attendant casualties went buzzing over the post at reveille, and barely had the story reached Atherton as he stood under the flagstaff receiving the reports of the troop commanders when out came the telegraph operator, racing, and the colonel read the hurriedly penned lines and turned to Ray. Somehow or other whenever any swift, hard riding had to be done,

Ray and Ray's troop were the first fellows thought of.

"Let your men finish breakfast," said the colonel, "then--do your best." And he handed the dark eyed Kentuckian the dispatch.

In an hour from that time Mrs. Ray, holding her baby boy in her arms, was gazing from the north window of her army home at some black specks on the far horizon, and little Sandy, tugging at the skirts of her pretty morning wrapper, was coaxing for mother to hold him up too. The sorrel troop were up and away, heading for Wheelan Springs, on the Laramie trail, and bets were even between Stannard and Mainwaring that "Ray would nab the outfit before sundown."

(To be Continued.)

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