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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.)

Only two men in all Fort Ransom, however, were found to have anything to explain as to their whereabouts that night. First, Sergeant Merriweather, whom the sergeant of the guard had inquired for just after visiting sentries, and solely because a light was burning so late in his window. The second was the new trooper, Hunter, found nearly 300 yards away from his proper post, blinded, senseless, bleeding and half drowned. The Kid had told the plausible tale that "him and three other fellows was sneaking off to town for a lark" when detected. Merriweather declared that he had heard horses stamping and snorting in the stables and had considered it his duty, though no longer stable sergeant, to go and investigate, and that he saw no sentry on No. 6, but hunted up and down for him, wondering where he could be, and was so occupied when the explosion occurred. But Hunter had not yet been approached. There were reasons why it was deemed best to let him suppose no suspicion attached to him.

For, no sooner was it light enough to see, the morning after the explosion, than Atherton had some of his best officers scouring the prairie for traces. They found bricks, bullets and unexploded boxes of cartridges all over the neighborhood, but not one of the 40 revolvers and only 20 of the 80 boxes of carbine, rifle and revolver cartridges that should have been there. Of the barrel of rifle powder and half barrel of cannon cartridges not a vestige, of course, remained. All this was brought out by the board, and the board's findings having been sent to department headquarters, Atherton, as has been said, had gone off on leave; so had Stannard, and this left Mainwaring in command.

"Not a word, not a hint to that fellow until I tell you," said Mainwaring to the post surgeon, who, an older man and a major senior in rank by several years, was nevertheless his inferior in the eyes of military law and regulation, he being debarred from assuming command. And so, as Hunter grew stronger every day and watched with eagerness for the coming each morning of the young devotee, there dawned upon him no ray of suspicion of the toils that were surrounding him, for Miss Leroy, who used to talk at home of her pupil patients, had become silent as to one at least and uncommunicative as to all, for Mrs. Mainwaring of late had expressed her disapprobation in no measured terms, and there was no longer that sweet accord which should obtain between aunt and niece.

One bright morning the doctor bade Hunter lay aside the shrouding bandages entirely and wear only a green shade over the eyes. Orders were orders, but when Miss Leroy entered and, as usual, spoke to him a dainty handkerchief was pressed to his face. The light, he said, was still too dazzling.

"But you are much better," said she in her clear tones. "The doctor says you can soon return to light duty, probably before Christmas."

Then as she took her seat to read, her side face toward him, he slipped the kerchief a little to one side that he might gaze unobscured.

The men had asked that she should give 15 minutes at least to the leading events of the day, and a Chicago paper was selected for their edification. From this she chose such items as she thought might prove of interest, and to these Hunter listened in spite of himself. First she read of the political news; then the doings of great dignitaries, foreign and domestic, and then came accidents by flood and field and another railway hold up on a small scale. To all

these he lent but languid ear. He was watching with eager eyes the movements of those soft, sensitive, curved red lips. He hardly paid even faint attention to what she was saying until something in the names struck him as familiar. All the foremost part of the paragraph had passed unheeded, unheeded, but now—now only by strong effort could he restrain himself from sitting bolt upright in bed and reaching out and seizing the paper and reading for himself, for what she read, when once again he became conscious of her words, was this:

"The overturned yacht now lies in 40 feet of water, her taper masts and upper rigging all that remain visible. Mr. Hunter is doing well, carefully attended by Dr. Lambert at the Hotel des Ambassadeurs. The bodies of Mrs. Hunter and her unfortunate friends will doubtless be recovered this morning. The ladies were caught in the cabin when the Amoritza was struck, and escape was impossible. She went to the bottom like a shot. English and American residents are in deep grief. The ballroom at the Casino last night was almost deserted. Many New York and Philadelphia families are at Nice for the winter, and the tragic fate of Mrs. Hunter has cast a gloom over the community. Mr. Hunter had greatly improved in health, but it is feared this bereavement may again prostrate him. They have no children."

The Amoritza? That yacht was owned by a wealthy English admirer of his uncle's wife. For more reasons than one Hunter Gray had never fancied him, and even his easy going uncle seemed to hold aloof. But Mrs. Hunter, so much her husband's junior in years, loved society, adored yachting, and what was more necessary for her beloved invalid's recovery than the soft sea breezes of the Riviera and the idyllic dolce far niente days and nights under those incomparable Mediterranean skies and on the Amoritza's dainty deck? There was a late supper going on one joyous night aboard, just as she was coming in from a day's dancing over the blue waters. There was misunderstanding between her skipper and that of a steamer over the right of way—signals or God knows what—for when the Amoritza rounded to the cruel black prow struck her amidships and ground her underneath the iron keel. Through the devotion of the crew Mr. Hunter and one or two friends with him were rescued. They were on deck. But nothing could save the hapless banqueters still below. Darcy Hunter had survived the wreck of his business, the wreck of the Amoritza—had survived even his young, light hearted wife, with whose remains, said the paper, he would return to America at once.

CHAPTER XII.

That evening when the surgeon was making his visit to the hospital the steward told him Trooper Hunter desired to speak with him, and, halting somewhat in his gait and looking very pallid still, but otherwise little the worse for wear, the tall soldier was ushered into the dispensary.

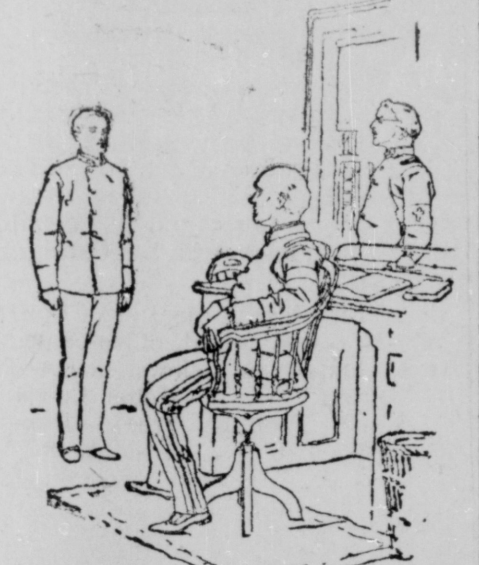
The junior medical officer, for reasons the senior could not quite fathom, had on several occasions recently asked the senior if he did not think Hunter fit to return to light duty and gave his opinion that he was getting soft and lazy there. The post surgeon, for reasons the junior could not fathom at all, replied that he thought it might be several days before he should permit Hunter to return to his troop. This in nowise added to Jayne's good will toward his gentlemanly and attractive patient. Hunter was fortunate in having won the sympathy of the senior. Tonight he won something more.

Standing bolt upright at the door, he said:

"May I speak one moment with the colonel in private?"

The surgeon almost blushed as he whirled toward the speaker. All through the war of the rebellion he had served, a gallant, skillful, devoted officer, ever seeking duty at the front, ever ready night or day to brave peril, hardship or fatigue to go with his regiment into action. Time and again he had dashed with them into battle. More than once he had cheered them in headlong charge until recalled to himself and duties that bade him sheathe the sword for the scalpel. Scorning to leave his wounded, he had fallen with them into the hands of the enemy and had starved with them at Andersonville. Once he had been seriously wounded as he knelt beside a stricken comrade on the battle line. Twice he had been offered hospital duty at Annapolis and Washington and declined. From one end of the war to the other he had been known among the men as the fighting doctor, and the fame had followed him to the far frontier, where in one long and fierce campaign against the Sioux he had spared himself no hardship that the humblest soldier had to endure, and the cavalry swore by him—aye, and the

liber, steady, hard marching, hard fighting doughboys, too—and loved him for the love he bore them. With all he was a student of his trade and gloried in it, but most he gloried that he was a soldier. He looked it, lived it, deserved it and everything the name implied, but he had one weakness, if weakness honest glory in one's profession could be called. "I've been a soldier 10 years of my life. I've won the bravest of major and lieutenant colonel on the



"May I speak one moment with the colonel in private?"

battlefield and colonel for the war, but never have I been called or can I look to be called anything but doctor. Here are your paymasters, commissaries, quartermasters—fellows that never heard a hostile bullet whistle or saw the smoke of battle—lots of 'em. You call them captain or major, as though they were soldiers, but you snub, by God, the one staff corps that never leaves the fighting line when the fighting begins."

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Thursday, 20th day of December

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