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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.)

And, besides Trooper Hunter's incarceration on the charge of aiding and abetting in the robbery and destruction of the magazine, the senior major had the following matters now to tackle: Captain Blake, in arrest for using insubordinate language to the commanding officer ("Said that compared with my mental condition the magazine wasn't a circumstance in the way of a wreck, begad," explained Mainwaring to his senior, who strove to keep a straight face, but couldn't); Mrs. Merriweather, disappeared since the night of Hunter's transfer from hospital to guardhouse; Sergeant Merriweather, transferred from guardhouse to hospital with a bullet through one lung and a knife wound in the other; Corporal Croxford and Trooper Elzey, deserted—two hitherto shining lights of the garrison and admirers of Mrs. Merriweather ("Could Mrs. Merriweather have gone with either of them?" asked some one of the ladies, "Or with both?" asked certain brutes among the officers)—and, finally, Lieutenant Brady, back from a bacchanalian bout with his kindred spirit Rawson, and now laid by the heels in quarters with an Irish orderly in attendance, for doctors would have nothing to do with him.

The way Stannard sailed in was characteristic. Brady had not been drunk on duty. He had taken advantage of the absence of Albertson and Stannard to relax the reins of his self control, but had only got a good start when he sought and received a seven days' leave from Major Mainwaring, which enabled him to meet Rawson at Pawnee. This was about ten days after the explosion. He was to have staid his week away, but in two days suddenly reappeared in Butte, full of whisky and information. Mainwaring, who knew him but slightly, received a dispatch saying that he had news of a most important character resulting from discoveries he had made at Pawnee and urging the commanding officer to meet him at the railway station on his arrival, which Mainwaring did, and then the very next night ordered Hunter's arrest.

"I always said that when Brady drank he could be depended upon to make an ass of himself," said Blake, "and this proves it." But what Brady's revelations might have been Mainwaring refused to disclose. It was enough, he said, to hang Hunter high as the hayman, and the hay contractor, in Mainwaring's opinion, was the double dastardest scoundrel that ever lived. This statement so rejoiced Blake's heart that he repeated it broadcast and was in the merriest of moods until he heard that Mainwaring had forbidden Captain Ray's eaving an interview with his imprisoned recruit. Then Blake boiled over and made the odious comparison between Mainwaring's brain and the blown up building which resulted in his own summary confinement to quarters. Brady's leave had still two days to run when Stannard got back, but Stannard had heard enough of his doings in Butte to warrant the immediate action taken. An officer was sent with the post ambulance and orders to fetch him forthwith. Then and there Dana waited on him with the major's message to the effect that he would give him 24 hours in which to sober up and face the music, and Brady had sense enough to know he had no time to lose.

Then another snarl had to be disentangled in which Stannard could not help, since it was purely domestic. The veteran post surgeon had had a flare up with Mainwaring, all on account of Trooper Hunter. The doctor protested against his patient's being put in the

guardhouse, declaring that no matter what the charges were he was entitled to humane as well as medical treatment. Mainwaring said the man of his own volition had removed himself from hospital and therefore deserved no consideration. The doctor said if Hunter were kept in the prison room with the garrison malefactors overnight he would hold Mainwaring responsible for ill results that were certain to occur, which staggered Mainwaring for a minute. He finally compromised, ordered Hunter sent back to hospital, but put in a room by himself with a sentry at the door and another at the window, and orders prohibiting his being seen or spoken to by anybody except the doctors and the steward, unless it were himself or on his own written order.

Then Mainwaring had to go home and face the women folk, and there for the first time (Miss Leroy, shocked and stunned, having gone to her room) did Mrs. Mainwaring have him to herself and tell him of the identification of Hunter, as the polite and helpful stranger of the night on the train. Then, furthermore, did she add her plea to the doctor's and finally admit that, much to her own distress and consternation, she feared Pet was actually deeply if not indeed very painfully interested in this mysterious trooper. In justice to Pet, she must say that that young lady was probably unaware of the feeling that had been growing upon her until the denouement of that evening. She (Mrs. Mainwaring) had striven to wean her from the morning services, but without success, and now she knew not what had happened, for Pet had shut herself in her room and begged to be left undisturbed.

Which was more than Pet would permit the major to be next day, however, for she was up and on the lookout for him on his return from stables. He marveled and was shocked at the pallor of her face, the trouble in her eyes. Without preliminary remark, she went straight to her subject.

"Major Mainwaring, at what time and where may I see Trooper Hunter, as you call him, today?"

"Well—I, I'm sure I don't know, Kate," for the major, like many a lion among men, was a lamb among women. "I—don't think you—ought to wish to see him."

"But I do wish it, major. Moreover, I should be ashamed of myself if I did not." And the reply conveyed all the more weight because of the calm decision of her manner.

And so the first written order Mainwaring signed was one to permit the bearer to visit the prisoner Hunter, and at 10 o'clock that morning, when, pale, calm, but resolute as ever and smiling still despite her sleepless night, Miss Leroy entered the hospital for the customary reading, she sent the steward to tell Mr. Hunter that she hoped he would be able to see her soon after 11 and then indomitably went on with her self appointed task.

At 11:15 the post surgeon came, silently gave her his arm as they left the big sunshiny ward and led her to a doorway up the corridor in front of which a sentry was pacing—a sentry who halted and presented arms as the doctor opened the door and ushered her in.

It was that night that Merriweather was brought back from town to the guardhouse, shot and stabbed, as has been said. Mrs. Merriweather had fled during the previous night, and the sergeant had been missing since reveille. It was the next night that Stannard returned and had Brady hunted up. Then came new labors and honors for Sheriff Conway, and this time there were no troops to divide the honors of the capture with him, for his prisoners were deserters all—one from an overindulgent husband, the others from a not too

indulgent Uncle Sam. Pawnee was the Mecca of the fugitives. Thither had Mrs. Merriweather fled to a married sister. Thither had Croxford and Elzey followed, after having remained to cover her retreat and settle matters with the sergeant, which they had done only too effectually, for Merriweather's days were numbered.

Two days later Stannard had straightened out affairs at the post in marvelous fashion (all save matters domestic—wherein, said he, no wise man meddled), and the man to start him on the right scent was that scapegrace, the Kid, whom he had disciplined time and again in Arizona days and appreciated at his true value. The Kid's derisive and explosive laughter when told that Major Mainwaring had ordered Trooper Hunter confined as accessory to the magazine robbery, etc., had been promptly reported to Stannard on his return, and that versatile young reprobate was sent for, marched to the adjutant's office and collared by his old time troop commander, for one of his several enlistments the Kid had spent with Stannard, and knew him well.

And this was what the Kid divulged. Every one knew he could see a lame

like a cowboy, and Croxford had asked him, just for devilry, to join him and "some other fellers" in roping the swell, Hunter, on the midnight relief, and he was going to, but happened to hear that Merriweather was in it, and that set him to thinking. He'd heard the women talking about Mrs. Merriweather's boasting that she had made a conquest of the swell recruit, and he remembered Merriweather's black eye and the rumor that it was Hunter "laid him out," and the Kid scented mischief and backed out. Then Croxford came and told him it would be best for him to keep his promise, as he might get the credit of it anyhow, which prompted the Kid to tell them all to go to Ballyhack. But when Elzey and Hughes later came and "stumped him" to join them in a spree to town that night and displayed their money he forgot Croxford's threat in the prospect of whisky and, anything for a frolic, started with them, only to run foul of the patrol just across the creek.

But the moment he heard of Hunter's being hauled out of the stream after the explosion the whole plot dawned on him, and something more, for he remembered the stories of forage and cartridges being sold in town and saw that it was planned to fix the guilt on Hunter, and, if not, to fix the crime of the assault on the sacred person of a sentry upon himself, the innocent Kid. Then Stannard would have cross questioned the two deserters, for such they were, despite stalwart protestations that they were only out for 24 hours' fun, but detectives, ferreting their movements, warned him to make no attempt. Merriweather might make an antemortem statement, but not these men. Neither would Mrs. Merriweather "peach." She was in the county jail begging piteously to be taken to her Danny and declaring he and she were only going to Pawnee to see her sister for a day, and he must have been waylaid in town.

(To be Continued.)

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