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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.)
Now, the surgeon had come but lately to Ransom. He had served but a few weeks with the —th, yet Truscott and Ray had discovered his sensitiveness and gladly hailed him as colonel. Blake promptly followed suit, but when Mainwaring heard it Mainwaring bristled. "What right's a d—d doctor to expect to be called anything but doctor?" he asked, explosively, and he no more meant to be offensive or thought he could be considered offensive in his language than did the doctor in claiming recognition as a soldier. And then, as Mainwaring prided himself on "never saying behind a fellow's back what he wouldn't say to his face," and the Lord only knew what he hadn't said to people's faces—what did the major do, only that very day, but, in attempted jocularly, pitch into the post surgeon at the morning gathering of the officers and try to chaff him about wanting to be called colonel! It stung the honest old soldier surgeon to the quick. It hurt him sore, and he left the room disgusted.

And so, when from the lips of this tall trooper came the title he valued, the post surgeon fairly blushed, for he had been thinking intently over the events of the morning, and, if the truth must be told, was wondering how he could get square with Major Mainwaring and here was a possible opportunity.

Obedient to his superior's nod, the hospital steward went out, closing the door behind him.

"What is it, Hunter?" asked the surgeon kindly.

"I have come to ask, sir, if it would be possible for me to return to my troop tonight, and if the colonel could aid me in any way to get a furlough of 20 or 30 days."

Colonel Connell looked up, perplexed, even troubled. Both requests were unusual from old soldiers and never heard of from recruits.

"I fear not, Hunter. You see, there are reasons why you ought not to attempt to return to duty yet, and what can you allege as reason for a furlough so soon after enlistment?"

"Urgent personal affairs, sir," was the answer, a half smile twitching at the corners of the handsome mouth. "Even a trooper may have them, you know."

"Hunter," said the surgeon after a moment's pause, "be advised by me. Don't think of going back to duty for two or three days yet and don't let any one know you wish to leave Ransom on any account just now."

For a moment there was silence. The soldier still remained respectfully at attention, standing close to the door. The surgeon had spoken impressively, earnestly, significantly, and Hunter could not but notice it, could not but realize that behind it there was some urgent meaning or reason, yet he persisted.

"I hope the colonel will pardon me," he said. "I will not refer to the furlough again until I can explain more fully, which will be possible after I have talked with Captain Ray, but, as to returning to the troop, I beg that I may not be detained here through—another morning."

The surgeon was seated in a wicker bottom office chair, which he twisted round, and so squarely faced his visitor, looking keenly yet not unkindly into the pale, handsome face. It was a moment before he spoke.

"I thought you greatly appreciated those morning readings," said he at last. "I'm sure the young lady has done very much to make hospital life bearable."

It was Hunter's turn to color, but

before he could speak he had to spring aside. Into the outer hall came banging a burly form enwrapped in cavalry circular. "Where's Dr. Connell?" brusquely demanded a loud, unmodulated voice. Then, slap bang, with all his characteristic impetuosity, Mainwaring burst into the room.

Direct as ever, never noting or caring who was present, he went straight to the point. "Hello, doc!" said he, loud, gruff, yet hearty. "Just the man I'm looking for. Say, Truscott tells me I hurt your feelings this morning, and I've come to apologize. I didn't mean a d—d thing. It's all right. If you want to be called colonel, why, colonel it shall be. I'll issue orders calling the attention of the whole command to it, if you like."

And then for the first time he became aware of the tall soldier, now trying to slip quietly behind him so as to leave the room. Mainwaring whirled on him in a trice. "Hello, you're up again, are you? Well, this man's able to answer for himself now, I see, doc—er—colonel!"

But the post surgeon had risen from his chair and held up a hand appealingly.

"He is still a patient under my charge, sir, and is not restored to health or duty as yet. I protest!"

"Oh, you needn't protest. I'm done for the present. I'm giving way to everybody this evening, all on your account." Here the surgeon signaled significantly to the soldier, and, silently, wonderingly, Hunter withdrew.

"Tisn't only Truscott. My wife's jumped on me with both feet; says I've insulted you—done nothing but make enemies ever since I came into the —th. Why, I've been catching it right and left, doc—colonel; haven't had a moment's peace. What d'you think that dash dashed long legged lath of a man Blake says to me not an hour ago, begad? I asked him if he thought you had any right to feel offended, and he said if you didn't it was only because everybody agreed that no notice was to be taken of anything I ever said. I never know whether he's in earnest or joking. If I thought he meant what he said, by God, he'd be in arrest this minute."

Again the post surgeon held up a warning hand. "Pray do not speak quite so loud, Mainwaring," said he. "Some of my patients are trying to sleep. I beg you will think no more of this morning's incident. What you have said is more than sufficient. I am possibly hypersensitive."

And then it was the doctor's turn to be abruptly silenced. For a second time the outer door was hurriedly opened, silvery voices and soft laughter were heard in the corridor, and then, marshaled by Blake, there at the entrance stood Mrs. Mainwaring, and behind her, silent and a trifle pale and anxious looking, Kate Leroy.

"I knew he'd be coming right over here," laughed Mrs. Mainwaring. "But really, Colonel Connell, my husband is even more impetuous in rushing to make amends than he is in treading on people's tender spots. No, don't go wandering off to the wards, Kate," she cried, for Miss Leroy looked anxiously up the corridor and showed a tendency to follow her eyes. "Come now, major, if you have finished what you were saying to the colonel, we want you to come home. Indeed," she persisted, as she saw how angrily his eyes were regarding Blake, "you've got to come and make your peace with us now, for you were simply unbearable all through dinner, and we had to ask Captain Blake to escort us in search of you." Then, as Mainwaring still held back as though striving to speak, she seized his arm. "Come, indeed," lowering her voice, "I must speak with you before you go any further in that case." And then did Connell feel sure she spoke of Hunter.

An instant later he was surer still, for in came an attendant, alarm on his face.

"Did the post surgeon give Hunter permission to leave hospital? He's picked up his coat and gone, sir."

Outside the moon was shining brightly on the glistening snow. Objects were plainly visible over 100 yards away. Mainwaring sprang to the door with excitement in his eyes and flew to the porch, the others following in every stage of astonishment. Outside the gate, as luck would have it, was marching a relief of the guard, the men swinging rapidly by in their heavy winter dress, the carbine butts grasped in their fur-gloved hands, the gleaming barrels tossed over the shoulder. Over toward the trader's store a tall, slender form in soldier's overcoat was rapidly striding. Mainwaring's voice rang out with the force and volume of a trombone. "Halt your relief, corporal! Catch that man over yonder, quick, and bring him here!"

Astonished, the corporal obeyed. "Relief, halt!" he ordered. "Come with me, two of you." Then away he

rushed. "Halt! Halt, you!" was the next shout, and all in a moment they had overhauled the offending soldier. There was brief parley, and then back they came, the unresisting prisoner between the two members of the guard.

"Oh," almost whimpered Mrs. Mainwaring, "do hear Captain Blake first! He's sure there's some mistake!"—Then broke off short with exclamation of amaze. From the lips of Kate Leroy, too, there burst a stifled cry, for there, before them, his clear cut, refined face perfectly outlined in the brilliant moonlight—there, clad in the rough garb of a private soldier, stood the courteous, helpful, distinguished looking stranger of the night of the collision.

Mainwaring must have had a love for the dramatic.

"Corporal Rice," said he deliberately, "take Trooper Hunter to the guard-house and confine him by my order on the charge of conniving at the robbery and destruction of the magazine."

CHAPTER XIII.

In the 48 hours that followed the arrest and incarceration of Trooper Hunter one excitement chased another with such rapidity that it was hard to keep track of them, and Mainwaring, with almost a sigh of relief, welcomed the premature return of old Stannard, to whom somebody (believed to be Ray) had given the tip by telegraph that the sooner he got back the better.

"Take this infernal regiment and see what you can do with it," said Mainwaring despairingly. "I thought I knew something about soldiering, but there's too d—d much individuality in the —th for me."

(To be Continued.)

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