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IN...

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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.)

"I can't go if I've hurt him. I must help him up," he began, but she clutched his arm with trembling hands and whirled him about toward the barracks. "No, no; leave everything to me. Don't come here till I tell you. Don't



"No, no; leave everything to me."

you speak of this to a soul, unless you want to kill me. He'll never harm me now unless he sees you still here, but not a word of it. I can keep him quiet." Then she pushed him violently from her, just as the sergeant, staggering to his feet, held forth a feeble hand as though seeking support.

And at that moment, up along the line of barracks, the trumpets began the spirited music of the tattoo. The doors of neighboring cottages began to open and soldier forms, enveloped in the long caped overcoats, hastened forth. Irresolute, bewildered, hardly knowing what he did and far from knowing what he ought to do, Trooper Hunter hurried from the spot, breasted the slope to the "bench" on which was spread the garbison proper, and found full two-thirds of his troop already gathered in front of their quarters awaiting the signal to form ranks--the quick, stirring assembly.

"Did you see Doyle? He was looking for you, Hunter," chirruped a little Patlander. "You're blowing, man. Where you running from?"

But Hunter made no reply. Hooking the collar of his overcoat and buttoning it throughout, he stepped quietly to the point where the center of his troop usually formed for roll call, for his place in ranks was close behind a tall corporal who marked the left of the first platoon. The first sergeant, silent and solitary, his swinging lantern in his hand, stood a few yards away, gazing out across the dim parade at the bright lights in the distant quarters of the officers. The soldierly form of the second lieutenant could be dimly discerned a few yards beyond the sergeant. To the right and left, in front of the other barrack buildings, big black groups of men were gathered and sergeants' lights were gleaming, all awaiting the next signal. Suddenly it came, quick, rippling, merry. "Fall in," were the hoarse words growled from half a dozen soldier throats. The groups quickly resolved themselves into two long columns of files that faced to their left the instant the music ceased and stood motionless while, with the ease and rapidity of daily practice, the sergeant called the roll.

The noncommissioned head of the sorrel troop twice repeated one name in a questioning, surprised tone, then faced his lieutenant and reported, "Sergeant Merriweather absent, sir." The officer acknowledged the salute, said, "Dismiss the troop," and, facing about, found himself confronting the unexpected apparition of Captain Ray and heard in the soft dialect of the Blue Grass his captain's words:

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## DODD'S

"Send Trooper Hunter to me, sergeant, directly you dismiss."

And while Lieutenant Scott went away to report the result of roll call to the adjutant and the sergeant again faced his company Hunter felt his heart sink within him. Already Merriweather, then, had managed to get word to his captain, and the captain was there to wreak vengeance on him, the luckless offender. In violation of the strictest articles of war he, Hunter Gray, had struck down his superior officer and was now to suffer the penalty of the law.

"You hear, Hunter, the captain wants you." Then "Break ranks! March!" was the order, and the troop, cohesive and compact but the moment before, dissolved at the word and fell to pieces, leaving the new member standing all alone. For one moment he remained there to pull himself together; then, nerved to face the worst, strode out to meet his fate, his heart thumping in his breast.

"Hunter," said the captain, "did I not understand you to say that you were a total stranger west of the Missouri and that you had neither friends nor enemies out here?"

"Yes, sir," was the trooper's reply. His hand still at the cap visor.

"Then how did you come to know that prisoner in the lot brought in by the sheriff?"

Hunter was silent.

"You admit having seen him before?"

"I do, sir."

"Where and when?"

"Before I joined the regiment, sir. I met him with another man at Pawnee." Captain Ray was silent a moment. He stood scrutinizing in deep concern the pale, clear cut face before him.

"When I vouched for you in the adjutant's office the day of your enlistment, I felt somehow that you were a truthful man and not a runagate, and I don't wish to be disappointed in you. I don't want to find a man with a clouded record in my troop. What do you know about that robbery?"

"Nothing more than everybody else, sir--that it took place and that"--But here again he hesitated.

"Well, that what, Hunter?" said Captain Ray, noting the soldier's significant pause.

"Nothing more, sir. I met one of the prisoners at Pawnee in a restaurant some few weeks ago. I never saw him before, and I've never seen him since--except that day."

Ray stood calmly studying his man. "I told you it was taking chances to enlist an applicant who looked as though he might have been a man of high social standing," said he presently, "and yet looked me in the eye and said I shouldn't regret taking you in my troop. You've been with me barely a week, and already you are the object of suspicion. How long will it be before I hear you directly accused of something to make me deeply regret my overconfidence?"

Hunter started as though to speak, but the words died on his lips. From the direction of the barracks a soldierly step was swiftly approaching. The turf beneath their feet began to vibrate with the gleam of a nearing lantern. It was the first sergeant again, and Hunter heard him abruptly halt, true to the formal etiquette of the old cavalry days, and await his captain's signal to approach.

"Remain here a moment," said Ray to his anxious recruit. "What is it, sergeant?"

"I found Sergeant Merriweather, who was absent from roll call, at his quarters, sir."

Ray frowned. Another instance of Merriweather's falling off since his marriage.

"What excuse had he for his absence?" was the brief question.

"Well, sir, his wife says that he had met with a mishap--had a fall in the dark. But it looked to me more like a blow, and he couldn't deny it, sir."

"A blow? Assaulted? When, and by whom?"

"Just a few minutes ago, sir. Close to his own door, I think."

Ray's head went back with a jerk, an odd old trick of his when mentally aroused. "He must know who did it, unless he was struck from behind. Did you ask him?"

"Certainly, sir, and he declares he didn't see, and Mrs. Merriweather declares it was two men, and they ran away toward barracks the moment they downed him."

For a few seconds the sergeant stood looking at his captain's perplexed face. Then the recruit suddenly and impulsively stepped forward. Before he could speak Captain Ray threw up his hand in warning gesture, as though commanding silence. The first sergeant whirled abruptly and stood facing toward the distant south gate. Before

there and from the direction of the guardhouse a soldier came rushing like a Wyoming gale.

"What is it, Kid?" sang out the sergeant to the sprinter.

"Sheriff Conway--stabbed, and his prisoners loose. They want the doctor."

"Why," said Ray in surprise, "what business could he have out here? What does it mean?"

"They were telling me just before tattoo, captain, that Conway came out with a warrant for some one here at the fort, but asked to see Prisoner Healy, one of the two that escaped the night of the train robbery--the one of the two that was recaptured. The man must have knifed him and got away."

"Is Captain Ray there?" came a call from the darkness in the deep, well known voice of the colonel, and Ray sprang to answer. Then the sergeant turned on Trooper Hunter.

"Look here, young feller," said he. "They tell me you're the chap Conway wanted."

### CHAPTER VIII.

A general court martial had convened at Ransom for the trial of such enlisted men, as should be brought before it, and the president thereof looked out from behind his newspaper during a lull in the proceedings, and, with the characteristic expression which seemed to say, "Don't you dare lie to me now," popped the following question:

"Blake, what's the name of the Three Guardsmen?"

And Blake, never laying down his paper or changing a muscle of his long, hollow countenance, placidly and promptly responded, "Clotho, Lachesis and Atropos."

Captain Gregg, sitting at the right of the presiding officer, after reflecting profoundly a moment, slowly nodded, as though to say, "Right, though I didn't think you knew." Captain Truett, sitting opposite Gregg and busily occupied with a letter, glanced quickly from under his heavy lashes and compressed his lips. Some of the youngsters farther down the long table looked a bit mystified, but Blake's balance wheel, Captain Ray, was not a member of the court and probably would have accepted the reply as authoritative had he been there, for Ray was no reader. It was the questioner who looked dissatisfied, and the questioner, as usual, was Mainwaring.

For a moment he pondered, scowling at Blake the while, then outspoke:

"Well, that's all right, probably, but what I want to get at is the name of that other fellow with 'em--Dee--something--how do you pronounce it?"

"Depends on whether you're in a galon or a saloon, major," answered Blake. "Dartanian in one case and Dee Artagnan in t'other. What have you stumbled on now?"

"Nothing much. Reading about a fellow that named his horse that and thinks he's going to sweep the race tracks from Jerome park to Jerusalem. Dee--what'd you call him? I wouldn't ride one of their steeplechases on an English saddle if you'd give me \$1,000."

"I wouldn't care to ride one on any other kind--certainly not on one of our service saddles," said Blake, whose long legs could wrap around any horse in the regiment. "Those high, sharp pom-poms are the worst kind of thing to use across country."

(To be Continued.)

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