

pliable rejoicing when she said to him, "I am Miss Maitland," it would have jarred him to know that she was wife; he was happy, kneeling by the side of the beautiful girl he had never seen before that very evening, and delighted that he could be of service to her. All this was retrospect worth indulging; but then arose the black shadow on his vision. How came Dr. Quin striding in there as though "native and to the manner born"?—how came he to call her "Gladys"? Perry had been pondering over this matter for full half an hour on the homeward ride before he bethought him of Mrs. Lawrence's remarks about the signal-lights. One thing led to another in his recollection of her talk. The doctor answered the signals,—no one else; the doctor and no one else was received at Dunraven; the doctor had declined to answer any questions about the people at the ranch,—and had been silent and mysterious, yet frequent in his visits. And then, more than all, what was that Mrs. Lawrence had said or intimated, that Mrs. Quin, "such a lovely woman, too," had taken her children and left him early that spring, and all on account of somebody or something connected with Dunraven Ranch? Good heavens! It could not be "Gladys." And yet—

Instead of taking a bath and going to bed, Mr. Perry poked his head into Parke's bachelor chamber as he reached the little cottage they shared in common. No Gladys disturbed the junior's dreams apparently, for he was breathing regularly, sleeping the sleep of the just; and so, finding no one to talk to and being in no mood to go to bed at an hour so comparatively early when he had so much to think about, Perry filled a pipe and perched himself in a big chair by the window seat, intending to think it all over again. He was beginning to hate that doctor: he would have chafed at the idea of any bachelor's being before him in acquaintance with Gladys Maitland, but a married man, knowing her so well as to make his wife jealous, and himself indifferent to the fact,—knowing her so well as to drive "such a lovely woman, too," into taking her children and quitting the marital roof,—that was too much of a bad thing, and Perry was sore discomfited. He got up, impatient and restless, passed out to a little piazza in front of his quarters, and began pacing up and down, the glow from his corn-cob pipe making a fiery trail in the darkness. He would have been glad to go back to the colonel and keep watch with him, but there was one thing connected with his visit to Dunraven that he could not bear to speak of, especially as those words of Mrs. Lawrence recurred again and again to his memory. He had not said one word—he did not want to tell—of Gladys Maitland.

"And so it happened that Perry, too, was awake and astir when the footsteps of the cavalry sergeant was heard on their way to Captain Stryker's quarters. Listening, he noted that the soldier had halted at the colonel's, held a brief conversation with that officer, and then turned back across the parade. Instantly divining that the news had come of Sergeant Gwynne, Perry seized his forage cap and hurried in pursuit. He overtook the trooper just beyond the guard house, and went with him eagerly to the stables. A moment more, and he was bending over a soldier's bedside in a little room adjoining the forage shed and by the dim light of a dim stable-lantern looking down into the bruised and battered features of the non-commissioned officer whom he had pronounced of all others at Rossiter the most respected and highly thought of by the cavalry garrison.

"Sergeant, I'm very sorry to see you so badly mauled," said Perry. "How on earth did it happen?"

Gwynne turned his head painfully until the one unbanged eye could look about and see that none of the stable-guard were within hearing, then back again and up into the sympathetic face of his young superior.

"Lieutenant, I must tell you and the captain; and yet it is a matter I profoundly wish to keep as secret as possible,—the story of my day's adventure, I mean."

"You need not tell me at all if you do not wish to," said Perry; "though I think it is due to yourself that the captain should know how it was you were gone all day and that your horse and you came back in such condition."

"I understand, sir, fully," answered Gwynne, respectfully. "I shall tell the captain the whole story, if he so desire. Meantime, I can only ask that no one else be told. If the men in the troop had an inkling of the true story there would be endless trouble; and so I have tried to account for it by saying my horse and I had an ugly fall while running a coyote through the timber. We did see a coyote, down near the ranch on the Monee, and I did have an ugly fall, I was set upon by three of those ranchmen and badly handled."

"Yes, damn them!" said Perry, excitedly and wrathfully. "I've had an experience with them myself to-night, while we were searching for you."

"So much the more reason, sir, why my mishap should not be told among the men. The two affairs combined would be more than they would stand. There are enough Irishmen here in our troop alone to go down and wipe that ranch out of existence; and I fear trouble as it stands."

"Whether there will be trouble or not will depend very much on the future conduct of the proprietor and manager down there. Of course we cannot tolerate for an instant the idea of their maintaining a gang of ruffians there who are allowed to assault officers or men who happen to ride around that neighborhood. You were not inside their limits, were you?"

"Yes, sir," said the sergeant painfully, "I was: I had tied my horse outside and ventured in to get a near look at the building."

"What time did it happen?"

"This morning, sir; not more than an hour and a half after you spoke to me in the valley."

"Indeed! Then you must have lain there all day! Why, Gwynne, this will never do. I'll go and get the surgeon and have him look you over. You must have been brutally mauled, and must be utterly exhausted."

(To be Continued.)

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