

ton; but this the soldier positively forbade. He had eight months still to serve and he meant to carry out his contract to the letter. Stryker offered him a furlough, and Gwynne thankfully took a week, that he might be by his father's side and help nurse him to better health. "By that time, too, the garrison will have grown a little more accustomed to it, sir, and I shall have less embarrassment in going on with my work."

Two days before his return to duty there came a modified sensation in the shape of the report that a trooper of Wayne's company had deserted. He was a man who had borne a bad reputation as a urbulent, mischief-making fellow, and when Sergeant Leary heard of his going he was in a state of wild excitement. He begged to be allowed to see his captain, and to him he confessed that one of his little party of three had seen the ring drop from Mr. Maitland's finger the night of the first visit to Dunraven, had managed to pick it up and carry it away in the confusion, and had shown it to his friend in Wayne's troop when they got back. The latter persuaded him to let him take it, as the lockers of the men who were at Dunraven were sure, he said, to be searched. It was known that he had a grudge against Gwynne; he was one of the men who *was* to have gone to the ranch the night they proposed riding down and challenging the Englishmen to come out and fight, but had unaccountably failed at the last moment. They believed that he had chosen that night to hide the ring in the sergeant's chest: he could easily have entered through the window. And this explanation—the only one ever made—became at once accepted as the true one throughout the garrison.

During the week of his furlough the sergeant found time to spend many hours by the bedside of Lieutenant Perry, who was rapidly recovering, and who by the end of the week had been lifted into an easy invalid chair and wheeled in to see Mr. Maitland. When not with Mr. Perry, the young trooper's tongue was ever wagging in his praise. He knew many a fine officer and gallant gentleman in the service of the old country, he said, and he admired many a captain and subaltern in that of his adopted land, but the first one to whom he "warmed"—the first one to win his affection—was the young cavalryman who had met his painful wound in their defence. Old Maitland listened to it all eagerly,—he had already given orders that the finest thoroughbred at Dunraven should be Perry's the moment he was able to mount again,—and he was constantly revolving in mind how he could show his appreciation of the officers who had befriended his son. Mrs. Cowan, too, never tired of hearing Perry's praises, and eagerly questioned when the narrator flagged. There was another absorbed auditor, who never questioned, and listened with downcast eyes. It was she who eldome came near Perry during his convalescence, she who startled and astonished the young fellow beyond measure, the day the ambulance came down to drive him back to the fort, by withdrawing the hand he had impulsively seized when at last he appeared to bid him adieu, and cutting short his eager words with "Mrs. Belknap will console you, I dare say," and abruptly leaving the room.

Poor Ned! In dire distress and perplexity he was driven back to Rosier, and that very evening he did a most sensible and fortunate thing: he told Mr. Sprague all about it; and, instead of condoling with him and bidding him strive to be patient and saying that all would come right in time, the little woman's eyes shone with delight, her cheeks flushed with genuine pleasure; she fairly sprang from her chair, and danced up and down and clapped her hands and laughed with glee, and then, when Perry ruefully asked her if that was the sympathy he had a right to expect from her, she only laughed the more, and at last broke forth with,—

"Oh, you great, stupid, silly boy! You ought to be wild with happiness. Can't you see she's jealous?"

And the very next day she had a long talk with Dr. Quin, whose visits to Dunraven still continued; and one bright afternoon when Gladys Maitland rode up to the fort to return calls, she managed to have a quiet chat with her, despite the fact that Mrs. Belknap showed a strong desire to accompany that fair English girl in all three of her visits. In this effort, too, the diplomatic services of Captain Stryker proved rather too much for the beauty of the garrison. Was it possible that Mrs. Sprague had enlisted him also in the good cause? Certain it is that the dark-featured captain was Miss Maitland's escort as she left the garrison, and that it was with the consciousness of impending defeat that Mrs. Belknap gave utterance to the opening sentence of this chapter: Mr. Perry had distinctly avoided her ever since his return.

One lovely evening late in May Mr. Perry was taking his first ride on the new horse, a splendid bay, and a perfect match for Gladys Maitland's favorite mount. Already had this circumstance excited smiling comment in the garrison; but if the young man himself had noted the close resemblance it conveyed no blissful augury. Everybody remarked that he had lost much of his old buoyancy and life; and it must be confessed he was not looking either blithe or well. Parke had suggested riding with him,—an invitation which Perry treated so coldly that the junior stopped to think a moment, and began to see through the situation; and so Mr. Perry was suffered to set forth alone that evening, and no one was surprised when, after going out of the west gate as though bent on riding up the Monee, he was presently seen to have made the circuit of the post and was slowly cantering down towards the lower valley. Out on the eastern prairie another horseman could be seen; and presently the two came together. Colonel Brainard took down his binocular and gazed out after them.

"I declare," said he, "those two figures are so much alike I cannot tell which of them is Perry."

"Then the other is Sergeant Gwynne, colonel," said Stryker, quietly. "Put him in our uniform, and it would indeed be hard to tell the two figures apart. Mr. Maitland told me last week that that was what so startled and struck him the first time he saw Perry?"

(To be Continued.)

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