



By Capt. Charles King, U. S. A.

Author of "DUNRAVEN RANCH," "THE COLONEL'S DAUGHTER," "MARION'S FAITH," ETC.

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But, as Capt. Rayner buried his battered face in his hands at this juncture, the rest of the sentence was inaudible. Miss Travers had heard quite enough, however. She stood there one moment, appalled, dropped upon the floor the bandage she had been making, turned and sought her room, and was seen no more that night.

Over the day or two that followed this affair the veil of silence may best be drawn, in order to give time for the sediment of truth to settle through the whirlpool of stories in violent circulation. The colonel came back on the first train after the adjournment of the court, and could hardly wait for that formality. Contrary to his custom of "sleeping on" a question, he was in his office within half an hour after his return to the post, and from that time until next tattoo was busily occupied taking the statements of the active participants in the affair. This was three days after its occurrence; and Capt. Rayner, though up and able to be about, had not left his quarters. Mrs. Rayner had abandoned her trip to the east, for the present at least.

Mr. Hayne still lay weak and prostrate in his darkened room, attended hourly by Dr. Pease, who feared brain fever, and nursed assiduously by Mrs. Hurley for whom Mrs. Waldron, Mrs. Stannard, and many other ladies in the garrison could not do enough to content themselves. Mr. Hurley's wrist was badly sprained and in a sling; but the colonel went purposely to call upon him and to shake his other hand, and he begged to be permitted to see Mrs. Hurley, who came in pale and soiled, and with a gentle demeanor that touched the colonel more than he could tell. Her check flushed for a moment as he bent low over her hand, and told her how bitterly he regretted that his absence from the post had resulted in so grievous an experience; it was not the welcome he and his regiment would have given her had they known of her intended visit. To Mr. Hurley he briefly said that he need not fear that full justice would be meted out to the instigator or instigators of the assault; but, as something to make partial amends for their suffering, he said that nothing now could check the turn of the tide in their brother's favor. All the cavalry officers except Buxton, all the infantry officers except Rayner, had already been to call upon him since the night of the occurrence, and had driven to show how distressed they were over the outrageous blunders of their temporary commander.

Buxton had written a note expressive of a desire to see him and "explain," but was informed that explanations from him simply aggravated the injury; and Rayner, crushed and humiliated, was fairly in hiding in his room, too sick at heart to want to see anybody, and waiting for the action of the authorities in the confident expectation that nothing less than court martial and disgrace would be his share of the outcome. He would gladly have resigned and gone at once, but that would have been resigning under virtual charges; he had to stay, and his wife had to stay with him, and Nellie with her. By this time Nellie Travers did not want to go. She had but one thought now—to make amends to Mr. Hayne for the wrong her thoughts had done him. It was a matter of Antwerp to come to the wide west and look after his interests, but Mrs. Rayner had ceased to urge, while he continued to implore her to bring Nellie east at once. Almost any man as rich and independent as Steven Van Antwerp would have gone to the scene and settled matters for himself. Singularly enough, this one solution of the problem seemed never to occur to him as feasible.

Meantime the colonel had patiently unraveled the threads and had brought to light the whole truth and nothing but the truth. It made a singularly simple story, after all; but that was so much the worse for Buxton. The only near relation Mr. Hayne had in the world was this one younger sister, who six years before had married a manly, energetic fellow, a civil engineer in the employ of an eastern railway. During Hayne's "mountain station" exile Hurley had brought his wife to Denver, where far better prospects awaited him. He won promotion in his profession, and was now one of the principal engineers employed by a road running new lines through the Colorado Rockies. Journeying to Salt Lake, he came around by way of Warren, so that his wife and he might have a look at the brother she had not seen in years. Their train was due there early in the afternoon, but was blocked by drifts and did not reach the station until late at night. There they found a note from him begging them to take a carriage they would find waiting for them and come right out and spend the night at his quarters; he would send them back in abundant time to catch the westward train in the morning. He could not come in, because that involved the necessity of asking his captain's permission, and they knew his relations with that captain.

It was her shadow Buxton had seen on the window screen; and as none of Buxton's acquaintances had ever mentioned that Hayne had any relations, and as Hayne, in fact, had had no one for years to talk to about his personal affairs, nobody but himself and the telegraph operator at the post really knew of their sudden visit. Buxton, being an unmitigated cad, had put the worst interpretation on his discovery, and, in his eagerness to clinch the evidence of conduct unbecoming an

officer and a gentleman upon Mr. Hayne, had taken no wise head into his confidence. Never dreaming that the shadow could be that of a blood relation, never doubting that a fair, frail companion from the frontier town was the explanation of Mr. Hayne's preference for that out of the way house and late hours, he stated his discovery to Rayner as a positive fact, going so far as to say that his sentries had recognized her as she drove away in the carriage. If he had not been an ass as well as a cad, he would have interviewed the driver of the carriage; but he had jumped at his theory, and his sudden elevation to the command of the post gave him opportunity to carry out his virtuous determination that no such goings on should disgrace his administration.

He gave instructions to certain soldier clerks and "daily duty" men employed in the quartermaster, commissary and ordnance offices along Prairie avenue to keep their eyes open and let him know of any visitors coming out to Hayne's by night, and if a lady came in a carriage he was to be called at once. Mr. Hurley promised that on their return from Salt Lake they would come back by way of Warren and spend two days with Hayne, since only an hour or two had they enjoyed of his company on their way west; and the very day that the officers went off to the court came the telegram saying that the Hurleys would arrive that evening. Hayne had already talked over their prospective visit with Maj. Waldron, and the latter had told his wife; but all intercourse of a friendly character was at an end between them and the Rayners and Buxtons; there were no more gossiping chats among the ladies. Indeed, it so happened that only one or two people had Mrs. Waldron had time to mention that Mr. Hayne's sister was coming, and neither the Rayners nor Buxtons had heard of it; neither had Nellie Travers, for it was after the evening of her last visit that Mrs. Waldron was told.

Hayne ran with his telegram to the major, and the latter had introduced himself and Maj. Stannard to Mrs. Hurley, when, after a weary wait of some hours, the train arrived. Blake, too, was there, on the lookout for some friends, and he was presented to Mrs. Hurley while her husband was attending to some matters about the baggage. The train went on eastward, carrying the field officers with it. Blake had to go with his friends back to the post, and Mr. and Mrs. Hurley, after the former had attended to some business affairs, seen some railway associates of his at the hotel, took the carriage they had had before and drove out to the garrison, where Private Schweinkopf saw the lady rapturously welcomed by Lieut. Hayne and escorted into the house, while Mr. Hurley remained settling with the driver out in the darkness. It was not long before the commanding officer protocol was called from the hop room, where the dance was going on delightfully, and notified that the mysterious visitor had again appeared, with evident intention of spending the night, as the carriage had returned to town.

"Why, certainly," reasoned Buxton. "It's the very night he would choose, since everybody will be at the hop; no one will be apt to interfere, and everybody will be unusually drowsy and less inclined to take notice in the morning." Here was ample opportunity for a brilliant stroke of work. He would not surely neglect himself, and he would surround the house with sentries so that she could not escape, while he, with the officer of the day and the corporal of the guard, entered the house and confronted him and her. That would wind up Mr. Hayne's career beyond question; nothing short of dismissal would result. Over he went, full of his project, listened at Hayne's key as the eavesdropper sneak he saw again the shadow of the graceful form and heard the silvery, happy laugh, and then it was sent for Rayner. It was near midnight when he led his forces to the attack. A light was now burning in the second story, which he thought must be Sam's; but the lights had been turned low in the parlor and the occupants had disappeared from sight and hearing. By inquiry he had ascertained that Hayne's bedroom was just back of the parlor.

A man was stationed at the back door, others at the sides, with orders to arrest any one who attempted to escape; then softly he stepped to the front door, telling Rayner to follow him, and the corporal of the guard to follow both. To his surprise, the door was unlocked, and a light was burning in the hall. Never mocking, he stepped in, marched through the hall into the parlor, which was empty, and, signaling "Come on!" to his followers, crossed the parlor and seized the knob of the bedroom door. It was locked. Rayner, looking white and worried, stood just behind him, and the corporal but a step farther back. Before Buxton could knock and demand admission, which was his intention, quick footsteps came flying down the stairs from the second story, and the trio wheeled about in surprise to find Mr. Hayne, dressed in his fatigue uniform, standing at the threshold and staring at them with mingled astonishment, incredulity and indignation. A sudden light seemed to dawn upon him as he glanced from one to the other. With a leap like a cat he threw himself upon Buxton, hurled him back, and stood at the closed door confronting them with blazing eyes and clinching fists.

"Open that door, sir!" cried Buxton. "You have a woman hidden there. Open, or stand aside." "You hounds! I'll fill the first man who dares enter!" was the furious answer, and Hayne had snatched from the wall his long infantry sword and flashed the blade in the lamplight. Rayner made a step forward, half irresolute. Hayne leaped like a tiger. "Fire! Quick!" shouted Buxton, in wild excitement. Bang! went the carbine, and the bullet crashed through the plaster overhead, and, seeing the gleaming steel at his superior's throat, the corporal had sent the heavy butt crashing upon the lieutenant's skull only just in time; there would have been murder in another second. The next instant he was standing on his own head in the corner, seeing a multitude of twinkling, whirling stars from the midst of which Capt. Rayner was reeling backward over a chair and a number of soldiers were rushing upon a powerful picture of furious manhood—a stranger in shirt sleeves, who had leaped from the bedroom.

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"I shall be so glad when you have a wife, Mr. Hayne," was her quiet comment. "So shall I, Mrs. Waldron," was the response. "And isn't it high time we were beginning to hear of a choice? Forgive my intrusiveness, but that was the very matter of which the major and I were talking as he brought me over." "There is something to be done first, Mrs. Waldron," he answered. "I cannot offer any woman a clouded name. It is not enough that people should begin to believe that I was innocent and my persecutors utterly in error; it not perjured. I must be able to show who was the real culprit, and that is not easy. The doctor and I thought we saw a way not long ago, but it proved delusive." And he

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Mr. Hayne was up and around again. The springtime was coming, and the prairie roads were good and dry, and the doctor had told him he must live in the open air awhile and ride and walk and drive. He stood in no want of "mounts," for three or four of his cavalry friends were ready to lend him a saddle horse any day. Mr. and Mrs. Hurley, after making many pleasant acquaintances, had gone on to Denver, and Capt. Buxton was congratulating himself that he, at least, had not run into the engineer's powerful fists. Buxton was not in arrest, for the case had proved a singular "poser." It occurred during the temporary absence of the colonel; he could not well place the captain under arrest for things he had done when acting as post commander. In obedience to his orders from department headquarters, he made his report of the affair, and indicated that Capt. Buxton's conduct had been inexcusable. Rayner had done nothing but, as was proved, reluctantly obey the captain's orders, so he could not be tried.

She seized a wrap and stepped to the doorway.

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Hayne, who had committed one of the most serious crimes in the military catalogue—that of drawing and raising a weapon against an officer who was in discharge of his duty (Rayner), had the sympathy of the whole command, and nobody would prefer charges against him. The general decided to have the report go up to division headquarters, and thence it went with its varied comments and indorsements to Washington; and now a court of inquiry was talked of. Meantime poor bewildered Buxton was left severely alone. What made him utterly miserable was the fact that in his own regiment, the —th, nobody spoke of it except as something that Capt. Rayner had done nothing but, at the moment he got in command. If it hadn't been that 'twould have been something else. The only certainty was that Buxton would never lose a chance of making an ass of himself.

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