

PRIVATE BARNEY HOGAN'S LAST FIGHT

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It was a night in February, and a genuine blizzard was raging. The thermometer hanging at the front door of my quarters registered forty degrees below zero, and the cutting north-west wind blew the snow against the window-panes with such force as to sound like hail. Through the whitening glass nothing was visible, and it was dangerous even to attempt finding one's way to the front gate. The paymaster, who, in the teeth of the storm had just arrived from the far away railroad station, was congratulating himself over having reached my comfortable quarters by nightfall, when there came a pounding at the front door, and with the cold wind and snow which entered with a rush came a tall and muscular figure, so muffled in fur overcoat, cap and gloves as to be unrecognizable. Out of the furs came a well-known voice: "Sorr, Private Hogan reports as arderly for the paymaster, and the commanthing officer sinds his compliments and sez the major naden't report tili marnin', bein' such a noight, sorr."

"Very well, orderly," returned the major; "you may go to your quarters and report in the morning at seven. But hold on a minute," he added, and then, calling me aside—

"Is this man perfectly trustworthy?"

"Perfectly so. Why," I replied.

"Because if you can let him sleep here in your quarters to-night, I'd feel much easier. The fact is," lowering his voice to a whisper, "you know I came directly here through the storm and dismissed my escort, without, as usual, locking up my funds in the traders safe. The consequence, is that with the money for the Colorado posts, I have a considerable sum to stay overnight with you."

"How much, by the way?" I asked with some curiosity.

"A cool fifteen thousand in gold and greenbacks."

"The dickens!" was my startled rejoinder.

"I don't propose," continued the major, "taking it to the store on a night like this myself; and I certainly shall not trust it to any other person to take there for me."

So it was soon decided that Barney was to remain, and it did not take long to install him comfortably in one of the back rooms

of my bachelor quarters, where the pungent odour of his short black pipe soon announced to the rest of the house that he was enjoying himself in his own way. It was between one and two o'clock that night that I was awakened by a loud pounding on my door, followed by the voice of the major, as he shouted in excited tones—"Hurry up, man, for God's sake! Some one has made off with my valise!" And then, pell mell, he rushed downstairs. Fairly jumping into my clothes, I was, a few moments later, in the lower hall. The front door was wide open, and, grabbing my overcoat from the rack as I passed, I rushed out into the night. The storm still raged, and, blindly groping my way to the front gate, I unexpectedly ran up against the major, who was returning, bareheaded and scantily clad.

"It's no use, my boy; nothing can be seen or heard in such a storm," he hoarsely shouted, and together we returned to the house. Then, as if actuated by a common impulse, we strode in silence to the room which Hogan had occupied. A light revealed the soldier's blankets thrown back as if he had just arisen. His overcoat and fur cap lay carelessly over the back of a chair, and his heavy cavalry boots were alongside, where he had evidently pulled them off. The major and I looked at each other askance. Nei-her spoke. Five minutes later we had forged through the drifts to the guard-house, and, while the major led the sergeant and a patrol of the guard across to the officers' line, I roused the companies. Soon the barracks were ablaze with light, and the troops were quickly formed in their squad-rooms for roll-call. A messenger had meanwhile been despatched to the colonel's quarters, and soon he and his adjutant came stumbling through the blizzard to the guard-house. It did not take long to call the rolls, and in a very few minutes, down through the blinding mist, from the right and from the left, came the first sergeants to make their reports to the adjutant. Only two men in the entire command were shown by the reports to be missing and not accounted for, and these were Private Hogan of Troop "C" and Private Eckstein of Troop "H." Supplied with lanterns, one search-party attempted to find the tracks of the missing men around my snow-bound quarters; while the others, keeping well together for mutual protection, made as thorough a search as was possible, in such a storm, of the barracks, stables and outbuildings. No horses were found missing, but the most diligent search