

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

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

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"What took Rayner off so suddenly?" said the colonel, wheeling around in his chair.

"I don't know, sir, unless there was something to startle him in the name."

"Why should there be?"

"There are those who think that Gower got away with more than his horse and arms, colonel; he was not at Battle Butte, though, and that is what made it a mystery."

"Where was he, then?"

"Back with the wagon train, sir, and he never got in sight of the Buttes or Rayner's battalion. You know Rayner had four companies there."

"I don't see how Gower could have taken the money, if that's what you mean, if he never came up to the Buttes; Rayner swore it was there in Hull's original package. Then, too, how could Gower's name affect him if he had never seen him?"

"Possibly he has heard something. Clancy has been talking."

"I have looked into that," said the colonel. "Clancy denies knowing anything—says he was drunk and didn't know what he was talking about."

All the same it was queer, thought the adjutant, and he greatly wanted to see the doctor and talk with him; but by the time his office work was done the doctor had gone to town, and when he came back he was sent for to the laundress' quarters, where Mrs. Clancy was in hysterics and Michael had again been very bad.

Soon after the captain's return to his quarters, it seems, a messenger was sent from Mrs. Rayner requesting Mrs. Clancy to come and see her at once. She was ushered up stairs to madame's own apartment, much to Miss Travers' surprise, and that young lady was further astonished when Mrs. Clancy reappeared, nearly an hour later, to see that she had been weeping violently. The house was in some disorder, most of the trunks being packed and in readiness for the start, and Miss Travers was entertaining two or three young officers and waiting for her sister to come down to luncheon.

"The boys" were lachrymose over her prospective departure—at least they affected to be—and were variously sprawled about the parlor when Mrs. Clancy descended, and the inflamed condition of her eyes and nose became apparent to all. There was much chaff and fun, therefore, when Mrs. Rayner finally appeared, over the supposed affliction of the big Irish woman at the prospect of parting with her patroness. Miss Travers saw with singular sensations that both the captain and her usually self-reliant sister were annoyed and embarrassed by the topic and strove to change it; but Foster's propensity for mimicry and his ability to imitate Mrs. Clancy's combined brogue and snuffle proved too much for their efforts. Kate was in a royally bad temper by the time the youngsters left the house, and when Nellie would have made some laughing allusion to the fun the young fellows had been having over her morning caller, she was suddenly and tartly checked with:

"We've had too much of that already. Just understand now that you have no time to waste, if your packing is finished. We start to-morrow afternoon."

"Why, Kate! I had no idea we were to go for two days yet! Of course I can be ready; but why did you not tell me before?"

"I did not know it—at least it was not decided—until this morning, after the captain came back from the office. There is nothing to prevent our going, now that he has seen the colonel."

"There was not before, Kate; for Mr. Billings told me yesterday morning, and I told you, that the colonel had said you could start at once, and you replied that the captain could not be ready for several days—three at least."

"Well, now he is; and that ends it. Never mind what changed his mind."

It was unsafe to trifle with Nellie Travers, as Mrs. Rayner might have known. She saw that something had occurred to make the captain eager to start at once; and then there was that immediate sending for Mrs. Clancy, the long secret talk up in Kate's room, the evident mental disturbance of both females on their respective reappearances and the sudden announcement to her. While there could be no time to make formal parting calls, there were still some two or three ladies in the garrison whom she longed to see before saying adieu; and then there was Mr. Hayne, whom she had wronged quite as bitterly as any one else had wronged him. He was out that day for the first time, and she longed to see him and longed to fulfill the neglected promise. That she must do at the very least. If she could not see him she must write, that he might have the note before they went away. All these thoughts were rushing through her brain as she busied herself about her little room, stowing away dresses and dropping everything from time to time to dart into her sister's room in answer to some querulous call. Yet never did she leave without a quick glance from her window up and down the row. For whom was she looking?

It was just about dusk when she heard crying downstairs—a child—and apparently in the kitchen. Mrs. Rayner was with the baby, and Miss Travers started for the stairs, calling that she would go and see what it meant. She was down in the hall before Mrs. Rayner's imperative and repeated calls brought her to a full stop.

"What is it?" she inquired.

"You come back here and hold baby. I know perfectly what it is. It is Kate Clancy, and she wants me. You can do nothing."

Too late, madame! The intervening doors were opened, and in marched cook, leading the poor little Irish girl, who was sobbing piteously. Mrs. Rayner came down the stairs with all speed, bringing her burly son and heir in her arms. She would have ordered Nell aloft, but what excuse could she give? And Miss Travers was already bending over the child and striving to still her heartbreaking cries.

"What is it? Where's your father?" demanded Mrs. Rayner.

"Oh, ma'am, I don't know! I came here to tell the captain. Shure he's discharged, ma'am, an' his heart's broke entirely, an' his mother says we're all to go."

"Go back and tell your mother I want her instantly. We'll find your father. Go!" she repeated, as the child sobbed and hesitated. "Here—the front way!"

And little Kate sped away into the shadows across the dim level of the parade. Then the sisters faced each other. There was a fire in the younger's eye that Mrs. Rayner would have escaped if she could.

"Kate, it is to get Clancy away from the possibility of revealing what he knows that you have planned this sudden move, and I know it," said Miss Travers.

"You need not answer," she said, as she seized a wrap from the hat rack and stepped to the doorway. Mrs. Rayner threw herself after her.

"Nellie, where are you going? What will you do?"

"To Mrs. Waldron's, Kate; if need be, to Mr. Hayne's."

A bright fire was burning in Maj. Waldron's cozy parlor, where he and his good wife were seated in earnest talk. It was just after sunset when Mr. Hayne dropped in to pay his first visit after the few days in which he had been confined to his quarters. He was looking thin, paler than usual, and far more restless and eager in manner than of old. The Waldrons welcomed him with more than usual warmth, and the major speedily led the conversation up to the topic which was so near to his heart.

"You and I must see the doctor and have a triangular council over this thing, Hayne. Three heads are better than none; and if, as he suspects, old Clancy really knows anything when he's drunk that he cannot tell when he's sober, I shall depart from Mrs. Waldron's principles and join the doctor in his pet scheme of getting him drunk again. 'In vino veritas,' you know. And we ought to be about it, too, for it won't be long before his discharge comes, and once away we should be in the lurch."

"There seems so little hope there, major. Even the colonel has called him up."

"Ay, very true, but always when the old sergeant was sober. It is when he's drunk that his conscience pricks him to tell what he either knows or suspects."

A light, quick footstep was heard on the piazza, the hall door opened, and without knock or ring, bursting impetuously in upon them, there suddenly appeared Miss Travers, her eyes dilated with excitement. At sight of the group she stopped short, and colored to the very roots of her shining hair.

"How glad I am to see you, Nellie!" exclaimed Mrs. Waldron, as all rose to greet her. An embarrassed, half-distraught reply was her only answer. She had extended both hands to the elder lady; but now, startled, almost stunned, at finding herself in the presence of the very man she most wanted to see, she stood with downcast eyes, irresolute. He, too, had not stepped forward—had not offered his hand. She raised her blue eyes for one quick glance, and saw his pale, pain-thinned face, read anew the story of his patience, his suffering, his heroism, and realized how she too had wronged him and that her very awkwardness and silence might tell him that shameful fact. It was more than she could stand.

"I came—purposely. I had hoped to find you, Mr. Hayne. You—you remember that I had something to tell you. It was about Clancy. You ought to see him. I'm sure you ought, for he has just known—about Mrs. Clancy—something about your—your trouble; and I've just this minute heard that they—that he's going away to-morrow, and you must find him to-night, Mr. Hayne; indeed you must."

Who can paint her as she stood there, blushing, pleading, eager, frightened, yet determined? Who can picture the wild emotion in his heart, reflect it in his face? He stepped quickly to her side with the light leaping to his eyes, his hands extended as though to grasp hers; but it was Waldron that spoke first:

"Where is he going? How?"

"Oh, with us, major. We go to-morrow, and they go with us. My sister has some reason—I cannot fathom it. She wants them away from here, and Clancy's discharge came today. He must see him first," she said, indicating Mr. Hayne by a nod of her pretty head.

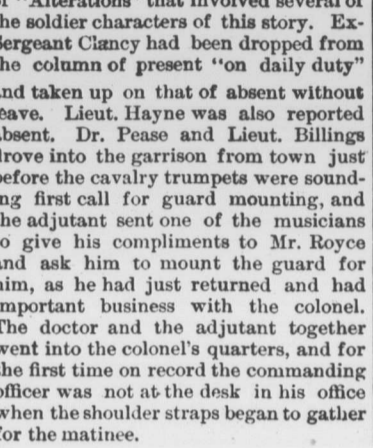
"They say Clancy has run off and got away from his wife. He doesn't want to be discharged. They cannot find him now; but perhaps Mr. Hayne can. Mr. Hayne, try to. You—you must."

"Indeed we must, Hayne, and quick about it," said the major. "Now is our chance, I verily believe. Let us get the doctor first; then little Kate will best know where to look for Clancy. Come, man, get your overcoat." And he hastened to the hall.

Hayne followed as though in a dream, reached the threshold, turned, looked back, made one quick step toward Miss Travers with outstretched hand, then checked himself as suddenly. His yearning eyes seemed fastened on her burning face, his lips quivered with the intensity of his emotion. She raised her eyes and gave him one quick look, half entreasy, half command; he seemed ineffectually struggling to speak—to thank her. One moment of irresolution, then, without a word of any kind, he sprang to the door. She carried his parting glance in her heart of hearts all night long. There was no mistaking what it told.

CHAPTER XVII.

The morning report of the following day showed some items under the head of "Alterations" that involved several of the soldier characters of this story. Sergeant Clancy had been dropped from the column of present "on duty" and taken up on that of absent without leave. Lieut. Hayne was also reported absent. Dr. Pease and Lieut. Billings drove into the garrison from town just before the cavalry trumpets were sounded first call for guard mounting, and the adjutant sent one of the musicians to give his compliments to Mr. Royce and ask him to lead the guard for him, as he had just returned and had important business with the colonel. The doctor and the adjutant together went into the colonel's quarters, and for the first time on record the commanding officer was not at the desk in his office when the shoulder straps began to gather for the matinee.



"Never mind! Don't fire!"

Ten minutes after the usual time the adjutant darted in and plunged with his characteristic impetuosity into the pile of passes and other papers stacked up by the sergeant major at his table. To all questions as to where he had been and what was the matter with the colonel he replied, with more than usual alertness of manner—the alertness engendered of some years of having to answer the host of questions propounded by vacant minds at his own busiest hour of the day—that the colonel would tell them all about it himself; he had no time for a word. The evident manner of suppressed excitement, however, was something few failed to note, and every man in the room felt certain that when the colonel came there would be a revelation. It was with something bordering on indignation, therefore, that the assemblage heard the words that intimated to them that all might rest. The colonel had come in very quietly, received the report of the officer of the day, relieved him, and dismissed the new officer of the day with the brief formula, "Usual orders, sir," then glanced quickly around the silent circle of grave, bearded or boyish faces. His eyes rested for an instant with something like shock and trouble upon one, pale, pale, haggard, with almost bloodless lips, and yet full of fierce determination—a face that haunted him from day to day, and was the cause of all his agony, of all his suspense, almost of pleading—the face of Capt. Rayner.

Then, dispensing with the customary talk, he quietly spoke the disappointing words:

"I am somewhat late this morning, gentlemen, and several matters will occupy my attention; so I will not detain you further."

The crowd seemed to find their feet very slowly. There was visible disinclination to go. Every man in some inexpressible way appeared to know that there was a new mystery hanging over the garrison, and that the colonel held the key. Every man felt that he ought to be told all about it when the colonel came, as looked reproachfully at Billings, as though to remind him of their expectations. Stannard, his old stand-by, passed him with a gruff "Thought you said the colonel had something to tell us," and went out with an air of injured and defrauded dignity.

Rayner arose, and seemed to be making preparations to depart with the others, and some of the number, connecting him unerringly with the prevailing sensation, appeared to hold back and wait for him to precede them and so secure to themselves the satisfaction of knowing that, if it was a matter connected with Rayner, they "had him along" and nothing could take place about their hearing it. These men were very few, however; but Buxton was one of them. Rayner's eyes were fixed upon the colonel and searching for a sign, and it came—a little motion of the hand and a nod of the head that signified "Stay." Then, as Buxton and one or two of his stamp still dallied irresolute, the colonel turned somewhat sharply to them: "Was there any matter on your mind which you wished to see me, gentlemen? and, as there was none, they had to go. Then Rayner was alone with the colonel, for Mr. Billings quickly arose, and with a significant glance at the commander, left the room and closed the door.

Mrs. Rayner, gazing from her parlor windows, saw that all the officers had come out except one—her husband—and with a moan of misery she covered her face with her hands and sank upon the sofa. With cheeks as white as her sis-

ter's, with eyes full of trouble and perplexity, but tearless, Nellie Travers stepped quickly into the room and put a trembling white hand upon the other's shoulder:

"Kate, it is no time for so bitter an extravagance as this. I have done simply what our soldier father would have done had he been here. I am fully aware of what it must cost me. I knew when I did it that you would never again welcome me to your home. Once east again, you and I can go our ways; I won't burden you longer; but is it not better that you should tell me in what way your husband or you can have been injured by what I have done?"

Mrs. Rayner impatiently shook away the hand.

"I don't want to talk to you," was the blunt answer. "You have carried out your threat and—ruined us; that's all."

"What can you mean? Do you want me to think that because Mr. Hayne's innocence may be established your husband was the guilty man? Certainly your manner leads to that inference, though his does not, by any means."

"I don't want to talk, I tell you. You've had your way—done your work. You'll see soon enough the hideous web of trouble you've entangled about my husband. Don't you dare say—don't you dare think—now and see how with sudden fury—that he was the—that he lost the money! But that's what all others will think."

"If that were true, Kate, there would be this difference between his trouble and Mr. Hayne's: Capt. Rayner would have his wife, wealth and friends to help him bear the cross; Mr. Hayne has borne five long years unaided. I pray God the truth has been brought to light."

What fierce reply Mrs. Rayner might have given, who knows? but at that instant a quick step was heard on the piazza, the door opened suddenly, and Capt. Rayner entered with a rush. The pallor had gone; a light of eager, half-credulous joy beamed from his eyes, he threw his cap upon the floor, and his wife had risen and thrown her arms about his neck.

"Have they found him?" was her breathless question. "What has happened? You look so different."

"Found him? Yes; and he has told everything."

"Told—what?"

"Told that he and Gower were the men. They took it all."

"Clancy—and Gower! The thieves, do you mean? Is that—is that what he confessed?" she asked, in wild wonderment, in almost stupefied amazement, releasing him from her arms and stepping back, her eyes searching his face.

"Nothing else in the world, Kate. I don't understand it at all. I'm all a tremble yet. It clears Hayne utterly. It at least explains how I was mistaken. But what—what could she have meant?"

Mrs. Rayner stood like one in a dream, her eyes staring, her lips quivering; and Nellie, with throbbing pulses and clasping hands, looked eagerly from husband to wife, as though beseeching some explanation.

"What did she mean? What did she mean? I say again," asked Rayner, pressing his hand to his forehead and gazing fixedly at his wife.

A moment longer she stood there, as though a light—a long hidden truth—were slowly forcing itself upon her mind. Then, with impulsive movement she hurried through the dining room, threw open the kitchen door, and started the domestics at their late breakfast.

"Ryan," she called to the soldier servant who rose hastily from the table, "go and tell Mrs. Clancy I want her instantly. Do you understand? Instantly!" And Ryan seized his forage cap and vanished.

It was perhaps ten minutes before he returned. When he did so it was apparent that Mrs. Rayner had been crying, and that Miss Travers, too, was much affected. The captain was pacing the room with nervous stride in mingled relief and agitation. All looked up expectant as the soldier re-entered. He had the air of a man who knew he bore tidings of vivid and mysterious interest, but he curbed the excitement of his manner until he should have through his snapping eyes, saluted, and reported with professional gravity:

"Mrs. Clancy's clean gone, sir."

"Gone where?"

"Nobody knows, sir. She's just lit out with her trunk and best clothes some time last night."

"Gone to her husband in town, maybe?"

"No, sir. Clancy's all right; he was caught last evening, and hadn't time to get mor'n half drunk before they lodged him. Lutenant Hayne got him, sir. They had him afore a justice of the peace early this morning."

"Yes, I know all that. What I want is Mrs. Clancy. What has become of her?"

"Faith, I don't know, sir, but the women in Sudsville they say she's run away, sir—taken her money and gone. She's afraid of Clancy's peaching on her."

"By heavens! the thing is clearing itself!" exclaimed Rayner to his gasping and wild-eyed wife. "I must go to the colonel at once with his news." And away he went.

And then again, as the orderly retired, and the sisters were left alone, Nellie Travers with trembling lips asked the question:

"Have I done so much harm, after all, Kate?"

"Oh, Nellie! Nellie! forgive me, for I have been nearly mad with misery!" was Mrs. Rayner's answer, as she burst into a fresh paroxysm of tears. "That—that woman has—has told me fearful lies."

There was a strange scene that day at Warrenner when, towards noon, two carriages drove out from town and, entering the east gate, rolled over towards the guard house. The soldiers clustered about the barrack porches and stared at the occupants. In the first—a livery hack from town—were two sheriff's officers, while cowering on the back seat, his hat pulled down over his eyes, was

poor old Clancy, to whom clung faithful little Kate. In the rear carriage—Maj. Waldron—were Mr. Hayne, the major, and a civilian whom some of the men had no difficulty in recognizing as the official charged with the administration of justice towards offenders against the peace. Many of the soldiers strolled slowly up the road, in hopes of hearing all about the arrest, and what it meant, from straggling members of the guard. All knew it meant something more than a mere "break" on the part of Clancy; all felt that it had some connection with the long continued mystery that hung about the name of Lieut. Hayne.

Then, too, it was being noised abroad that Mrs. Clancy had "skipped," and between two suns had fled for parts unknown. She could be overhauled by telegraph if she had left on either of the night freights or gone down towards Denver by the early morning passenger train; it would be easy enough to capture her if she were "wanted," said the garrison; but what did it mean that Clancy was pursued by officers of the post and brought back under charge of officers of the law? He had had trouble enough, poor fellow!

The officer of the guard looked wonderingly at the carriages and their occupants. He saluted Maj. Waldron as the latter stepped briskly down. The pallor had gone; a light of eager, half-credulous joy beamed from his eyes, he threw his cap upon the floor, and his wife had risen and thrown her arms about his neck.

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Snaggs—Been fishing this season? Jaggs—No; the doctor said that I must stop drinking or it would kill me.

Stubborn children readily take Dr. Low's Worm Syrup. It pleases the child and destroys the worms.

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"Many men, many minds," but all men and all minds agree as to the merits of Burdock Pills, small and sugar-coated.

It is a very awkward thing for