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Miss Travers, almost as pale and quite as silent as the captain, was busying herself in helping his mother clear the supper table, but she looked up quickly when the band began playing across the parade when the nature of the disturbance had been. She, too, had suggested Clancy, but the officer by her side set his teeth as he replied that he wished it had been Clancy. She had heard, too, the message brought by a cavalry trumpeter from Mr. Blake: He wanted Capt. Ray to come to Mr. Hayne's as soon as he had seen Mrs. Ray safely home, and would he please ask Mrs. Stannard to come with him at the same time? Why should Mr. Blake want Mrs. Stannard at Mr. Hayne's? She saw Mr. Foster run up and speak a few words to Mrs. Waldron and heard that lady reply, "Certainly; I will go with you now." What could it mean? At last, as she was returning to her sister's room after a moment's absence, she heard a question at which her heart stood still. It was Mrs. Rayner who asked:

"But the creature was there, was she not?"

The answer sounded more like a moan of anguish:

"The creature was his sister. It was her husband who"——

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 near 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 cities, and was nursing her husband. 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 soft eyed, and with a gentle demeanor that touched the colonel more than he could tell. Her cheek 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 but that full justice would be meted out to the instigator or instigators of the assault; but, as a 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 striven 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 time for Mr. Van 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 Warrener, 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 in none of Buxton's wildest dreams had he conjured up the picture of the lady he had insulted and her husband in close embrace at the station really twice at 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 Hayner 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 as 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 Warrener 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 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 gossipy chats among the ladies. Indeed, it so happened that only to 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.

Now, Buxton was a cousin of 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 and 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 pro tem. 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 first satisfy himself she was there, then 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 like the eavesdropping sneak he was, saw again the shadow of the graceful form and heard the silvery, happy laugh, and then it was he 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 knocking, 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 houpds! I'll kill 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 at him 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 done 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.

Hold as it was—as it had to be—all over the department, there seemed to be but one thing to say, and that referred to Buxton: "Well! isn't he a phenomenon?"

CHAPTER XVI.

She seized a wrap and stepped to the doorway.

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 foul of 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.

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 affair was left to stand as it was, 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 let 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 everybody knew was sure to happen the moment he got in command. If it hadn't been that it would have been something else. The only certainty was that Buxton would never lose a chance of making an ass of himself.

Instead of being furious with him, the whole regiment—officers and men—simply ridiculed and laughed at him. He had talked of preferring charges against Blake for insubordination, and asked the adjutant what he thought of it. It was the first time he had spoken to the adjutant for weeks, and the adjutant rushed out of the office to tell the crowd to come in and "hear Buxton's latest." It began to look as though nothing serious would ever come of the affair, until Rayner reappeared and people saw how very ill he was. Dr. Pease had been consulted; and it was settled that he as well as his wife must go away for several months and have complete rest and change. It was decided that they would leave by the 1st of May. All this Mr. Hayne heard through his kind friend, Mrs. Waldron.

One day when he first began to sit up, and before he had been out at all, she came and sat with him in his sunshiny parlor. There had been a silence for a moment as she looked around upon the few pictures and upon that bareness and coldness which, do what he will, no man can eradicate from his abiding place until he calls in the deft and dainty hand of woman.

"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, if 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 sighed deeply. "I had expected to see the major about it the very day he got back from the court; but we have had no chance to talk."

"Mr. Hayne," she said, impulsively, "a woman's intuition is not always at fault. Tell me if you believe that any one on the post has any inkling of the truth. I have a reason for asking."

"I did think it possible, Mrs. Waldron. I cannot be certain now; and it's too late, anyway."

"How, too late? What's too late?"

He paused a moment, a deeper shadow than usual on his face; then he lifted his head and looked fairly at her.

"I should not have said that, Mrs. Waldron. It can never be too late. But what I mean is that—just now I spoke of offering no woman a clouded name. Even if it were unclouded, I could not offer it where I would."

"Because you have heard of the engagement?" was the quick, eager question. There was no instant of doubt in the woman as to where the offering would be made, if it only could.

"I knew of the engagement only a day ago," he answered, with stern effort at self control. "Blake was speaking of her, and it came out all of a sudden."

He turned his head away again. It was more than Mrs. Waldron could stand. She leaned impetuously towards him, and put her hand on his.

"Mr. Hayne, that is no engagement of heart to heart. It is entirely a thing of Mrs. Rayner's doing; and I know it. She is poor—dependent—and has been simply sold into bondage."

"And you think she cares nothing for the position, the wealth and social advantages this would give her? Ah, Mrs. Waldron, consider."

"I have considered. Mr. Hayne, if I were a man, like you, that child should never go back to him. And they are going next week. You must get well."

It was remarked that Mr. Hayne was out surprisingly quick for a fellow who had been so recently threatened with brain fever. The Rayners were to go east at once, so it was said, though the captain's leave of absence had not yet been ordered. The colonel could grant him seven days at any time, and he had telegraphic notification that there would be no objection when the formal application reached the war department. Rayner called at the colonel's office and asked that he might be permitted to start with his wife and sister. His second lieutenant would move in and occupy his quarters and take care of all his personal effects during their absence and Hank. Hayne was a most thorough officer, and he felt that in turning over his company to him he left it in excellent hands. The colonel saw the misery in the captain's face, and he was touched by both looks and words:

"You must not take this last affair too much to heart, Capt. Rayner. We in the —th have known Capt. Buxton so many years that with us there is no question as to where all the blame lies. It seems, too, to be clearly understood by Mr. Hayne. As for your previous ideas of that officer, I consider it too delicate a matter to speak of. You must see, however, how entirely beyond reproach his general character appears to have been. But here's another matter: Clancy's discharge has arrived. Does the old fellow know you had requested it?"

"No, sir," answered Rayner, with hesitation and embarrassment. "We wanted to keep him straight, as I told you we would, and he would probably get on a big tear if he knew his service days were numbered. I didn't look for its being granted for forty-eight hours yet."

"Well, he will know it before night; and no doubt he will be badly cut up. Clancy was a fine soldier before he married that harridan of a woman."

"She has made him a good wife since they came into the Riflers, colonel, and has taken mighty good care of the old fellow."

"It is more than she did in the —th, sir. She was a handsome, showy woman when I first saw her—before my promotion to the regiment—and Clancy was one of the finest soldiers in the brigade the last year of the war. She ran through all his money though, and in the —th we looked upon her as the real cause of his break down, especially after her affair with that sergeant who deserted. You've heard of him probably. He disappeared after the Battle Butte campaign, and we hoped he'd run off with Mrs. Clancy; but he hadn't. She was there when we got back, big as ever and growing ugly."

"Do you mean that Mrs. Clancy had a lover when she was in the—th?"

"Why, she had, Gower, if she ever posed is was commonly known. He was a fine looking, black eyed, dark haired, dashing fellow, of good education, a great swell among the men the short time he was with us, and Mrs. Clancy made a dead set at him from the start. He never seemed to care for her very much."

"This is something I never heard of," said Rayner, with grave face, "and it will be a good deal of a shock to my wife, for she had arranged to take her east with Clancy and Kate, and they were to invest their money in some little business at their old home."

"Yes; it was mainly on the woman's account we wouldn't recognize Clancy in the —th. We could stand him, but she was too much for us—and for the other sergeant, too. He avoided her before we started on the campaign, I recall. Odd! I can't think of his name—it was—what was the name of that lowbrow of a sergeant who was in Hull's troop at Battle Butte—time Hull was killed? I mean the man that Mrs. Clancy was said to have eloped with."

"Sergt. Gower, sir," said the adjutant, without looking up from his work. He did look up, however, when a moment after the captain hurriedly left the office, and he saw that Rayner's face was deathly white; it was ghastly.

"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 sniffle 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 unfinished. 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. Notes sometimes change 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 feminines 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 could give no excuse for her presence, 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; a came here to tell the captain. Shure he's discharged, ma'am, an' his heart's broke entirely, an' mother says we're all to go with the captain to-morrow, and he swears he'll kill himself before he'll go, an' I can't find him, ma'am. It's almost dark now."

"Go back and tell your mother I want her instantly. We'll find your father. Go!" she repeated, as the child shrank 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 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 cosy 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."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

One of the compositors on the Cincinnati *Enquirer* is a one-armed man. His name is Harry Penrod, and his left arm was cut off in a railroad accident. He has, however, so well mastered his infirmity as to be one of the best typos in the city.

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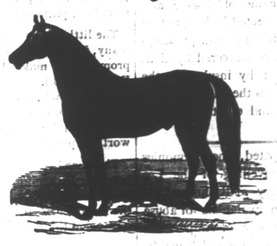

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