A Wounded Name

Charles King

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Author: Charles King

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CAPT. CHARLES KING

A WOUNDED NAME.

BY

CAPTAIN CHARLES KING, U.S.A.

AUTHOR OF

"Warrior Gap," "An Army Wife," "Fort Frayne," "A Garrison Tangle,"
"Noble Blood and a West Point Parallel,"
"Trumpeter Fred," etc.

"Poor wounded name! My bosom as a bed
Shall lodge thee, till thy wound be throughly healed."

—Two Gentlemen of Verona

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CHAPTER I.

The stage coach was invisible in a cloud of its own dust as it lurched and rolled along the alkali flats down the valley, and Sancho, the ranch-keeper, could not make out whether any passengers were on top or not. He had brought a fine binocular to bear just as soon as the shrill voice of Pedro, a swarthy little scamp of a half-breed, announced the dust-cloud sailing over the clump of willows below the bend. Pedro was not the youngster's original name, and so far as could be determined by ecclesiastical records, owing to the omission of the customary church ceremonies, he bore none that the chaplain at old Camp Cooke would admit to be Christian. Itinerant prospectors and occasional soldiers, however, had suggested a change from the original, or aboriginal, title which was heathenish in the last degree, to the much briefer one of Pedro, as fitting accompaniment to that of the illustrious head of the establishment, and Lieutenant Blake, an infantry sub with cavalry aspirations which had led him to seek arduous duties in this arid land, had comprehensively damned the pretensions of the place to being a "dinner ranch," by declaring that a shop that held Sancho and Pedro and didn't have game was unworthy of patronage. Sancho had additional reasons for disapproving of Blake. That fine binocular, to begin with, bore the brand of Uncle Sam, for which reason it was never in evidence when an officer or soldier happened along. It had been abstracted from Blake's signal kit, when he was scouting the Dragoon Mountains, and swapped for the vilest liquor under the sun, at Sancho's, of course, and the value of the glass, not of the whisky, was stopped against the long lieutenant's pay, leaving him, as he ruefully put it, "short enough at the end of the month." Somebody told Blake he would find his binocular at Sancho's, and Blake instituted inquiries after his own peculiar fashion the very next time he happened along that way.

"Here, you Castilian castaway," said he, as he alighted at Sancho's door, "I am told you have stolen property in the shape of my signal glass. Hand it over instanter!"

And Sancho, bowing with the grace of a grandee of Spain, had assured the Señor Teniente that everything within his gates was at his service, without money and without price, had promptly fetched from an adjoining room a battered old double-barreled lorgnette, that looked as though it might have been dropped in the desert by Kearny or Fauntleroy, or some of the dragoons who made the

burning march before the Gadsden purchase of 1853 made us possessors of more desert sand and desolate range than we have ever known what to do with.

"This thing came out of the ark," said Blake, rightfully wrathful. "What I want is the signal glass that deserter sold you for whisky last Christmas."

Whereat Sancho called on all the saints in the Spanish calendar to bear witness to his innocence, and bade the teniente search the premises.

"He's got it in that bedroom yonder," whispered old Sergeant Feeney, "and I know it, sir."

And Blake, striding to the door in response to the half-challenge, half-invitation of the gravely courteous cutthroat owner, stopped short at the threshold, stared, whipped off his scouting hat, and, bowing low, said: "I beg your pardon, señora, señorita; I did not know—" and retired in much disorder.

"Why didn't you tell me your family had come, you disreputable old rip?" demanded he, two minutes later, "or is that too—stolen property?"

"It is the wife of my brother and his daughter," responded the ranchman with unruffled suavity.

Nothing could equal Sancho's equanimity in the presence of those he desired to placate; nothing exceed the frenzy of his wrath when angered by those whom he could harm without fear of reprisals. Blake was backed by a troop of horse and the conviction that Sancho was an unmitigated rascal; therefore were his palpable allusions to be accepted as mere pleasantries or deprecated as unmerited injustice. Blake had blackened the character of the ranch *cuisine,* even if he had been unequal to the task of blackening that of the owner. Blake had declared Sancho's homestead to be a den of thieves, and the repast tendered the stage passengers a Barmecide feast—the purport of which was duly reported to Sancho, who declared he would ultimately carve his opinion of Blake on that officer's elongated carcass, and until he could find opportunity so to do it behooved him to lull the suspicions of the prospective victim by elaborate courtesy of manner, and of this is the Spaniard or his Mexican half-brother consummate master. Blake left without a glimpse of his glass, but not without another of "the daughter of my brother" but recently arrived, and that peep made him desirous of a third. Riding away, he waved his hand.

"*Adios,* Sancho; *hasta otra vista!*" he had hailed, but his gaze sought the little

window in the adobe wall where a pair of dark, languorous eyes peered out from between the parted curtains and a dusky face dodged out of view the instant it saw it was seen. What Sancho said in answer is not recorded, but now he was watching the coming of the stage from Yuma. Some one had warned him Lieutenant Blake would return that way, ordered back to the old post to the north as witness before an important court-martial.

Those were later termed "the days of the Empire" in Arizona. Perhaps five thousand souls were counted within its borders at the time our story opens, not counting the soulless Apaches. Arizona had the customary territorial equipment of a governor, certain other officials constituting the cabinet, and a secretary. Nine men out of the dozen Americans in the only approach to a town it then possessed—Tucson—would have said "Damfino" if asked who was the secretary, but all men knew the sheriff. The grave, cigarro-smoking, serape-shrouded caballeros who rode at will through the plaza and ogled dark-eyed maidens peeping from their barred windows, could harbor no interest in the question of who was president of the United States, but the name of the post commander at Grant, Lowell or Crittenden was a household word, and in the eyes of the populace the second lieutenant commanding the paymaster's escort was illimitably "a bigger man" than the thrice distinguished soldier and citizen whose sole monument, up to that time, was the flagstaff at the adobe corral and barracks sacred to his name. Mr. Blake had never been in such a God-forsaken country or community before, but there was something in the utter isolation, the far-stretching waste of shimmering sand, the desolate mountain ranges sharply outlined, hostile and forbidding, the springless, streamless, verdureless plains of this stricken land, that harmonized with the somewhat savage and cynical humor in which he had sought service in the most intolerable clime then open to the troops of Uncle Sam. Blake had been jilted and took it bitterly to heart. Wearing the willow himself, he cherished it as the only green and growing thing in the Gila valley; whereas, had he sought sympathy he would have found other young gentlemen similarly decorated, and therefore as content as he to spend the months or possibly years of their embittered life just as far from the madding crowd and, as Blake cynically put it, "as near hell." Blake was a man of distinction, as relatives went, and those were days when friends at court had more to do with a fellow's sphere of duty—very much more—than had the regimental commander or even the adjutant-general. Blake took Arizona in preference to a tour in the signal office at Washington. He wanted to get as far away from the national capital and the favorite haunt of "the Army and Navy forever" as he possibly could. It was the most natural thing in the world to him

that he should ask for duty in the land of deserts, centipedes, rattlesnakes, and Apaches. He put it on the ground of serious bronchial trouble which could be cured only in a dry climate, but the war office knew as well as the navy department that it was an affair of the heart and not of the throat. He wasn't the first man, by any manner of means, to fall in love with Madeleine Torrance, the prettiest girl and most unprincipled flirt that ever wore the navy button or tormented a sailor father. Blake sought the roughest duty—that of escorting inspectors, staff officers or paymasters on their wearisome trips through the wilderness—and no one denied him. The cavalry was short of officers and he got assigned to Sanford's troop, and the biggest surprise that had come since his commission met him one day at Gila Bend, when that same old red stage, a relic of California days, emerged from the dust-cloud of its own manufacture, and a quiet youth in pepper-and-salt and sand-colored costume, looked up from behind a pair of green goggles saying:

"Hullo, Blake!"

It was the voice, not the face, that the tall trooper recognized.

"Well—of—all—the—Why, what in the name of Pegasus brings you here, Loring? I thought you had graduated into the engineers."

"Fact," said the newcomer sententiously.

"Well, what's an engineer doing in Arizona? I'd as soon look to see an archbishop."

"Scouting," said the dust-colored man. "Where's dinner?"

"In the shack yonder, if your stomach's copper-lined. Better come over to my camp and take pot-luck there."

Which Loring gladly did, and then went on his dusty way, leaving Blake with something to think of beside his own woes. Within half a year of his graduation from West Point the young engineer, one of the stars of his class, had been ordered to report to the general commanding the Division of the Pacific and was set to work on a military map in that general's office. Loring found all maps of Arizona to be vague and incomplete, and was ordered forthwith to go to the territory and gather in the needed data. That he, too, should be lass-lorn never for a moment occurred to his comrade of the line. Had such facts been confessed among the exiles of those days many a comradeship of the far frontier would

have been strengthened. That the girl who duped Gerald Blake should have been known to her who had captivated Mr. Loring was suspected by neither officer at the time, and that, despite the efforts and the resolution of both men, both women were destined to reappear upon the stage, and temporarily, at least, reassume their sway, was something neither soldier would have admitted possible. Yet stranger things had happened, and stranger still were destined to happen, and the first step in the drama was taken within the fortnight of this chance meeting at Gila Bend.

Sancho, studying the coming stage with Blake's binocular until it dove into the arroyo five hundred yards to the west, handed that costly instrument to the silent, dumpy, dark-skinned woman who stood patiently at his side, and said briefly, "*Dos*" at which she vanished, and after restoring the glass to its hiding-place in her bedroom, was heard uplifting a shrill, raucous voice at the back of the house, ordering dinner to be ready for two. When the vehicle came rattling up to the door Sancho stood at his threshold, the old lorgnette in hand, bowing profoundly as two travelers, officers of the army apparently, emerged in their dusters and stiffly alighted.

"Have any letters or dispatches been left here for me?" asked in quiet tone the elder of the two, limping slightly as he advanced, leaving to his comrade the responsibility of seeing that none of their luggage had been jolted out of the rickety vehicle. One or two hangers-on came languidly, yet inquisitively, within earshot.

For answer the ranch-keeper, with another elaborate bow, produced a bulky official envelope. The officer hastily glanced at the superscription, said "This is for me," strode within the adobe-walled corral, halted under a screen of brown canvas, and there tore open the packet. Several personal letters fell to the ground, but he at first paid little heed to them. Rapidly his eyes ran over a sheet of closely-written matter, then he turned to the silent and ceremonious ranchman.

"When did this come?" he asked.

"At sunset yesterday, Señor Comandante."

"Where's the courier?"

"He returned before dawn to-day."

The loungers drew still nearer as the senior calmly turned to his companion,

who, having assured himself that their *impedimenta* were all safe, came with quick, springy step to join him.

"Where do you suppose Blake and his detachment to be at this moment, Loring?"

"Perhaps thirty miles ahead, sir; over toward Maricopa. Do you need him, colonel?"

"Yes, and at once. Our bird has flown. In other words, Nevins has skipped."

CHAPTER II.

Just what an officer's actual rank might be in the days that followed close on the heels of the war was a matter no man could tell from either his dress or address. Few indeed were they who escaped the deluge of brevets that poured over the army and soaked some men six deep. There were well-authenticated cases of well-preserved persons who had never so much as seen a battle, and were yet, on one pretext or another, brevetted away up among the stars for "faithful and meritorious services" recruiting, mustering or disbursing. We had colonels by title whose functions were purely those of the file-closer. We had generals by brevet who had never set squadron in the field and didn't know the difference between a pole yoke and a pedometer. Every captain, except one or two who had laughingly declined, wore the straps of field officers, some few even of generals, and so when one heard a military-looking man addressed as colonel the chances were ten to one that he was drawing only the stipend of a company officer, and in matters of actual rank in the army it was money that talked.

But there could be no questioning the right of the senior of the two officers who had alighted at Sancho's to the title of colonel. Soldier stood out all over him, even though his garb was concealed by a nondescript duster. His face, lined, thin-lipped and resolute, was tanned by desert suns and winds. His hair, once brown, was almost white. His beard, once flowing and silky, was cropped to a gray stubble. His steely blue eyes snapped under their heavy thatch, his head was carried high and well back, and his soft felt hat, wide-brimmed, was pulled down over the brows. His deep chest, square shoulders, erect carriage and straight muscular legs all told of days and years in the field, and every word he uttered had about it the crisp, clear-cut ring of command. It was safe to bet that no mere company was the extent of this soldiers authority, and Sancho, keen observer, had put him down for a lieutenant-colonel at least. Full colonels were mostly older men, and Arizona had but one in "the days of the Empire."

The ranchman had eagerly whispered questions to the loungers as to the identity of the two arrivals, but without success. Both were strangers, although the junior had been seen at the ranch once before, the day Blake's troop was camped there on the way back from the Dragoons. There was the packet left by the orderly to be called for by officers arriving on the Yuma stage, addressed in clerkly hand, but Sancho, alas! could not read. Hovering as near as the gravity and dignity of

his station would permit, he had heard the colonel's query about Blake. He pricked up his ears at once. Teniente Blake! Thirty miles east on the Maricopa road! Why, how was this? Some one had told him Blake had been to the Colorado and was coming back by this very stage. How did Blake get to the east of Sancho's ranch, after having once gone west, without Sancho's knowing it? Suspiciously he watched the two soldiers, the grizzled colonel, the slim lieutenant. They were talking together in low tones, at least the colonel was talking, eagerly, energetically, and with much gesticulation. The junior listened wordless to every word. What had he meant by "the bird had flown?" Why should Nevins "skip?" An unpleasant fear seized upon Sancho. He knew Nevins, at least a Nevins, a captain whom everybody knew, in fact, and few men trusted. What had Nevins been doing? or rather, what that he had been doing was he to be held to account for? Why should the colonel so eagerly ask where they could reach Blake? Time was when Sancho flattered himself that there was no deviltry going on in Arizona, except such as originated with the Indians, in which he had not at least the participation of full knowledge, yet here came two officials, hastening by stage instead of marching with military deliberation and escort, and they were in quest of the Señor Capitan Nevins of whom all men had heard and at whose hands many had suffered, for was not he a player whom the very cards seemed to obey? Was it not he who broke the bank at Bustamente's during the *fiesta* at Tucson but five months agone? Was it not Nevins who won all the money those two young tenientes possessed—two boys from the far East just joining their regiment and haplessly falling into the hands of this dashing, dapper, wholesouled, hospitable comrade who made his temporary quarters their home until they could find opportunity to go forward to the distant posts where their respective companies were stationed? Was it not Nevins who, right there at Sancho's ranch, finding a party of prospectors, several ex-Confederate soldiers among them, languidly staking silver at the monte table presided over by Sancho's own brother, had calmly opened a faro "layout" and enticed every man from the legitimate game and every peso from their pockets before the two-day's session was finished? Well did Sancho recall his own wrath and that of his brother at this unlicensed interference with their special business, and the surprising liberality, too, with which the Señor Capitan had silenced their remonstrance. Rascal though he was, Sancho had sense enough to know that such proceedings were not seemly in a man bearing the commission of an officer. But Sancho little knew how many a congressman along at the close of the war, finding himself compelled to provide some kind of living for political "heelers," or some impersonal reward for services rendered, had foisted his henchmen into the army, then being enlarged and reorganized, and Nevins was

one of the results of the iniquitous system.

Commissioned a first lieutenant of a regiment that had had a proud record in the regular division of the Army of the Potomac, and had been hurried at the close of the war to the Pacific coast, Nevins had joined at Fort Yuma and served a few weeks' apprenticeship as a file-closer, just long enough to demonstrate that he knew nothing whatever about soldiering and too much about poker. All his seniors in grade, except the West Pointers graduated in '65, had brevets for war service, and Nevins' sponsor was appealed to to rectify the omission in the lieutenant's case. Nevins had held a commission in a volunteer regiment in the defenses of Washington the last few months of the war, and that was found amply sufficient, when a prominent member of the committee on military affairs demanded it, to warrant the bestowal of a brevet for "gallant and meritorious services." Hence came the title of captain. Then, as company duty proved irksome, and Nevins' company and post commander both began to stir him up for his manifold negligences and ignorances, the aid of his patron in congress was again invoked. A crippled veteran who could do no field service was in charge of a supply camp for scouting parties, escorts, detachments, etc., and, to the wrath of the regimental officers, this veteran was relieved and Lieutenant and Brevet-Captain Nevins by department orders was detailed in his place. This made him independent of almost everybody, beside placing in his hands large quantities of commissary and quartermaster stores which were worth far more to the miner, prospector and teamster than their invoice price. The stories that began to come into Yuma and Drum Barracks, and other old-time stations, of the "high jinks" going on day and night at Nevins' camp, the orders for liquors, cigars and supplies received at San Francisco and filled by every stage or steamer, the lavish entertainment accorded to officers of any grade and to wayfarers with any sign of money, the complaints of victims who had been fleeced, the gloomy silence of certain fledgling subalterns after brief visits at "Camp Ochre," as Blake had dubbed it, all pointed significantly to but one conclusion, that, so far from living on his pay, Nevins was gormandizing on that of everybody else, and doubtless "raising the wind" in other ways at the expense of Uncle Sam. Even in Arizona in the days of the Empire it could not last forever. Easy come, easy go. Nevins had lavishly spent what was so lightly won. Tucson and Yuma City were within easy stage ride, even San Francisco had twice been found accessible. Dashing associates of both sexes were ever at hand. The sudden turn of the tide came with the order that broke up the supply camp, required him to turn over his funds and stores to the quartermaster at Camp Cooke, and report for duty in person at that post. Then came the expected

discovery of grievous shortages in both funds and property, the order for the arrest of the delinquent officer and his trial by court-martial. Colonel Turnbull, inspector-general of the department, was hurried out from the shores of the Pacific to sit as one of the senior members of the court. Lieutenant Loring, vainly striving along the Gila to find some resemblance between its tracing on a government map and its meanderings through the desert, was selected to perform the duties of judge advocate. The court was authorized to sit without regard to hours, and to sift the official career of the *protégé* of the house committee of military affairs without regard to consequence, when that volatile and accused person took matters into his own hands, and between the setting and rising of the sun, disappeared from the brush, canvas and adobe shelters of old Camp Cooke and left for parts unknown, taking with him the best horse in the commanding officer's stable, and, as genius has ever its followers, the admiration if not the regard of much of the garrison.

But other followers were needed at once. "That man must be caught at any cost, Loring," said the colonel. "No one begins to know the extent of his rascalities, and you and Blake must catch him."

For answer the engineer took out his watch—it was just a quarter to one—stepped out into the glare of the sunshine and gazed to the far horizon. The plain to the east was flat as a board for many a mile and well nigh as barren. Then he turned sharply on Sancho. "Dinner ready?" he asked.

"In one—two minutes, Señor Capitan," responded the ranchman gravely, conferring on the officer the brevet of courtesy.

Out in front of the ranch the old red stage, long since faded to a dun color, stood baking in the burning rays. The mules had been taken into the corral for water, fodder and shade. The driver was regaling himself within the bar. The few loungers, smoking, but silent, seemed dozing the noontide away. Loring stepped to the side of the vehicle and drew forth a leather valise, swung it to his shoulder and strode back to where the colonel stood pondering under the canvas screen.

"Good hefting power in that right arm of his," muttered one of the loungers to a mate sprawled full length on the sand beneath the shelter of the tent fly, and watching the officer from under his half-closed lids. A grunt of assent was the only reply.

"Know what regiment he belongs to?" queried number one.

"No, but it's cavalry," was the murmured answer. "Saw him straddling a broncho at Maricopa Wells last week. He knows how."

Somewhere within the ranch a triangle began to jangle. "*Quim-a-do!*" shrilled little Pete, and three or four lazy, drowsing forms began slowly to get to their feet and to shuffle away toward the doorless aperture in the adobe wall, the entrance to the dining-room of the stage and ranch people. Two men lingered, the two who were speculating as to the military connections of the young officer. One of them, after a quiet glance about the neighborhood, strolled out toward the stage, hands deep in the pockets of his wide trousers. There he seemed casually to repeat his leisurely survey of the surroundings, then he lounged back.

"No go," said he, in low tones, "both of 'em there yet. Young feller changing his dress. Their dinner's ready though. The colonel's writing."

Presently Sancho, grave and deliberate as became his race, emerged from the shadows of the bar and came close before he spoke.

"He goes to ride—that youth. Know you whither? And he has no horse."

And, as though to confirm this statement, with his quick, elastic step, Loring came forth to the side gate, dumped his valise into the stage, turned and looked keenly over the group, then as quickly approached them. He had discarded his linen coat and trousers in favor of a pair of brown cord breeches with Hualpai leggings and light spurs. A broad belt with knife and revolver was buckled to his waist. A silk handkerchief was loosely knotted at his throat. A light-colored felt hat was pulled down to his eyebrows, and dust-colored gantlets were drawn upon his hands. "Sancho," said he, "have that roan of yours saddled in ten minutes. How much if I keep him a week?"

"Everything in my house is at the service of the Señor Capitan," began Sancho grandiloquently, "but as to that horse——"

"No other will do. How much a week? though I may keep him only a day."

"Señor, he is the horse of my brother, and my brother is not here. If harm should come——"

"Full value will be paid. Here!" and a glittering gold piece, a double eagle, flashed in the sun. "Waste no talk now. Take this and saddle him."

Slowly, gingerly, with thumb and finger tips the ranchman plucked the coin from

the open and extended palm, then bowed with the same native grace and gravity.

"Come, Loring," growled the colonel impatiently, "dinner," and Sancho caught the name.

"The Señor Loreeng—will not ride him hard—or far? It is to the camp of the major he goes?"

But, turning on his heel, not another word would Loring say. Ten minutes later, his hunger appeased with bacon, *frijoles* and chocolate, he mounted and rode quietly away eastward until Sancho's ranch was two miles behind, then gave the roan both rein and spur and sped like the wind up the Gila, two of Sancho's oldest customers vainly lashing on his trail.

CHAPTER III.

Three days later, just at sundown, the loungers at Sancho's were treated to a sensation. Up from the south—the old Tucson trail—came, dusty, travel-stained and weary, half a troop of cavalry, escorting, apparently, some personage of distinction, for he was an object of the utmost care and attention on part of the lieutenant commanding and every man in the detachment. As the cavalcade approached the dun-colored walls of the corral and, without a word or sign to the knot of curious spectators gathered at the bar-room door, filed away to the spot where wandering commands of horse were accustomed to bivouac for the night (tents would have been superfluous in that dry, dewless atmosphere), the women whispering together behind their screened window place, stared the harder at sight of the leaders. One was Lieutenant Blake—no mistaking him, the longest legged man in Arizona. Another was big Sergeant Feeney, a veteran who bad seen better days and duties, but served his flag in the deserts of the Gila as sturdily as ever he fought along the Shenandoah three years before. Between these two, dapper, slender, natty, with his hat set jauntily on one side and his mustache and imperial twirled to the proportions of toothpicks, rode a third cavalier whom every one recognized instantly as the fugitive of Camp Cooke, the urgently-sought Captain Nevins. And, though Nevins' arms and legs were untrammeled by shackles of any kind, it was plain to see that he was a helpless prisoner. He had parted with his belt and revolver. His spurs were ravished from his heels, and his bridle-rein, cut in two, was shared between Blake and his faithful sergeant. Behind these three rode another set. Sandwiched between two troopers was a man whom Sancho's people well remembered as Nevins' clerk and assistant, despite the fact that a bushy beard now covered the face that was smooth-shaven in the halcyon days of the supply camp. Then came some thirty horsemen in long, straggling column of twos, while, straight from the flank to the gate of the corral, silent and even somber, rode the engineer, Lieutenant Loring. To him Sancho whipped off his silver-laced sombrero and bowed, while two jaded-looking *vaqueros*, after one long yet furtive stare, glanced quickly at each other and sidled away to the nearest aperture in the wall of the ranch, which happened to be the dining-room door. Loring mechanically touched his hat-brim in recognition of the ranch-keeper's obeisance, but there was no liking in his eye. At the gate he slowly, somewhat stiffly, dismounted, for it was evident he had ridden long and far. The roan with hanging head tripped eagerly, yet wearily, to

his accustomed stall, and a swarthy Mexican unloosed at once the *cincha* and removed the horsehair bridle. Thus Sancho and the engineer were left by themselves, though inquisitive ranch folk sauntered to the gateway and peered after them into the corral. Over at the little clump of willows Blake's men were throwing their carbines across their shoulders and dismounting as they reached the old familiar spot, and Loring cast one look thither before he spoke.

"Who were the two men who followed me?" he calmly asked, and his eyes, though red-rimmed and inflamed by the dust of the desert, looked straight into the dark face of the aggrieved Sancho.

"Surely I know not, Señor Teniente"—he had dropped the "capitan" as too transparent flattery.

"Don't lie, Sancho. There's ten more dollars," and Loring tossed an eagle into the ready palm. "That's thirty, and I shall want that horse again in the morning."

"To-morrow, señor! Why, he will not be fit to go."

But to this observation Mr. Loring made no reply. Straight from Sancho's side he walked down the corral, halted behind two rangy, hard-looking steeds that showed still the effects of recent severe usage, and these he studied coolly and thoroughly a few minutes, while peering from two narrow slits in the ranch wall between the windows two sun-tanned frontiersmen as closely studied him. With these latter, peeping from the shaded window, was "the wife of my brother," exchanging with them comments in low, guarded tones. In the adjoining room, a bedroom, a girl of perhaps sixteen, slender, graceful and dark-eyed, peeped in the opposite direction, over toward the willows where Blake's men were now unsaddling—whence presently, with giant strides came Blake himself, stalking over the sand. Sancho, despite his anxious scrutiny of Loring's silent movements, saw the coming officer and prepared his countenance for smiles. But with a face set and forbidding Blake went sternly by, taking no notice of the proprietor, and made directly for the little group now muttering at the dining-room door. The loungers, some of whom had deserted the supper-table for a sight of the captives and the cavalcade, sidled right and left as though to avoid his eye, for into each face, most of them hang-dog visages, he gazed sharply as though in search of some one, yet never faltered in his stride. Back from her barred window shrank the young girl as the tall soldier came within a dozen paces. To one side or another, smoke inhaling, and striving to look unconcerned, edged the swarthy constituents of the group, and with never a word to one of them, straight through

their midst and the doorway beyond went Blake, catching the three peepers, "the wife of my brother" and the brace of palpable cutthroats at their loopholes. So unexpected was the move that it had not even occurred to one of the creatures at the door to mutter a word of warning. So engrossed were the three in their scrutiny that Blake's entrance was unheard. True, he had discarded boots and spurs, and his feet were encased in soft Apache moccasins. The floor, too, was earthen, but he had made no effort at stealth, and in the gloom and shadow of the low-roofed room it was for a moment difficult to distinguish the human figures against the opposite wall. It was his ear that first gave warning, for low, yet distinct, he heard the words:

"If he'd taken any horse but that roan—or knew less about riding—we'd 'a caught him twenty miles out, and they'd never 'a caught Nevins. Dash, dash the whole dashed blue-bellied outfit, and be dash, dash, dashed to their quadruple dashed souls!" and the concentrated spite and hatred of the speaker hissed in every syllable.

"'Taint a question of what we couldn't do. What *can* we do? He's got money and plenty of it *cached* somewhere about the old camp, and five hundred dollars of it's mine. That's what I want. I don't care a damn what they do with him so long as they don't send him to prison where we can't nail him. That's what that bloody court will do though, an' I know it."

"How d'ye know?" fiercely demanded the other; "'nless you've been in the army—which you swear you haven't. Where'd you desert from? Come, own up now," and, turning for an instant from his peephole, the speaker became suddenly aware of the silent form of Lieutenant Blake.

"None of your dashed business," began the other, when a harsh "Shut up!" brought him around in amaze and he, too, confronted the dark figure standing like a sign post between them and the violet light beyond the open doorway. Instinctively the hands of both men sought their pistol-butts, but Blake made never a move. The woman, looking around for the cause of the sudden silence, caught sight of the statuesque intruder and, with a low cry, threw her shawl over her head and, bending almost double, with outstretched, groping hands, scurried to where the mission-made blanket hung at the doorway of the bedroom and darted through the aperture like a rabbit to its form, the folds of the heavy wool falling behind her.

And still the tall lieutenant neither spoke nor moved. His revolver hung at his

right hip, his hunting-knife slept in its sheath, but his hands sat jauntily on his thighs. The stern, set look of his clear-cut face had given place to something like a grin of amusement. First at one, then at the other, of the two bewildered worthies he gazed, looking each deliberately from head to foot as they hovered there, both irresolute and disconcerted, one of them visibly trembling. There was a doorway leading into the room in which was set the table for stage passengers of the better class, officers and the few ladies who had ventured to follow their lords into far-away Arizona, or the *gente fine*, which included Amazons whose money could pay their way pretty much anywhere and was made pretty much anyhow. But that room was empty and the one beyond it, the bar, had only one or two occupants, too far away to see what was going on. There was a doorway and a swinging screen of dirty canvas just beyond the loophole lately occupied by "the wife of my brother," a doorway that gave on the corral, and to each of these each silent "tough" had given a quick, furtive glance, but not a step was taken. How long the strain of the situation might have lasted there is no saying. It was broken by the sudden lifting of that dirty canvas screen, as sudden and perceptible a start on part of each of the confronted men and the quick entrance of the engineer. For another second or two no word was spoken. Loring's eyes were evidently unable at the instant to penetrate the gloom. Then he recognized Blake, then gradually the two men at the wall, and then at last Blake spoke.

"There are your followers, Loring."

A moment's careful scrutiny, then a nod of assent was Loring's answer.

"Now, then, you two," said Blake. "I've suspected you before. Now I more than suspect you. You—the long villain—I warn never to come nosing about our camp again, and you, the shorter, I'll trouble to come into camp forthwith. No, don't draw that pistol unless you want a dozen bullets through you. Half a troop is right here at my back. Your soldier name was Higgins and you're a deserter from Cram's battery, New Orleans."

For a moment there was a silence, broken only by the hard breathing of the two cornered men, then came a flash, a sharp report, a piercing scream as the lithe Mexican girl sprang forth from behind the blanket and hurled herself on Blake, a panther-like leap of the accused man under cover of the flash and smoke, a thwack like the sound of the bat when it meets a new baseball full in the middle, and Loring's fist had landed full on Higgins' jowl and sent him like a log to the floor.

CHAPTER IV.

The court-martial that met at Camp Cooke in compliance with orders from division headquarters at 'Frisco had, three weeks later, practically finished the case of Brevet-Captain Nevins, and that debonair person, who had appeared before it on the first day, suave, laughing, and almost insolently defiant, had wilted visibly as, day after day, the judge advocate unfolded the mass of evidence against him. All that Nevins thought to be tried for was a charge of misappropriation of public funds and property, and it was his purpose to plead in bar of trial that he had offered to make complete restitution, to replace every missing item, and doubly replace, if need be, every dollar. This, indeed, he had lost no time in doing the moment he was handed over to the post commander, two days after the exciting episode at Sancho's, but he coupled with the offer a condition that all proceedings against him should be dropped, and the veteran major commanding, while expressing entire willingness to receipt for any funds the accused might offer, would promise nothing whatever in return. That Nevins should be charged with desertion and breach of arrest the accused officer regarded as of small importance. He was merely going to Tucson fast as he could to get from business associates, as he termed them, the money deposited with them, and owed to him, and this must also excuse his having borrowed the major's best horse. His friends in congress would square all that for him, even if the court should prove obdurate. That grave charges should have followed him from a former sphere of operations, that his record, while retained in the volunteer service until the spring of '66 and assigned to some mysterious bureau functions in the South, should all have been ventilated and made part and parcel of the charges, that it should be shown that he, as a newly commissioned officer of the army, had made the journey from New Orleans to the Isthmus and thence to San Francisco with men whom he knew to be deserters from commands stationed in the Crescent City, that he should have gambled with them and associated with them and brought one of them all the way with him to Yuma and concealed from the military authorities his knowledge of their crime, that it should be proved he was a professional "card sharp," expert manipulator and blackleg he never had contemplated as even possible, and yet, with calm and relentless deliberation "that cold-blooded, merciless martinet of a West Pointer," as he referred to the judge advocate at an early stage in the proceedings, had laid proof after proof before the court, and left the case of the defense at the last

without a leg to stand on. And then Nevins dropped the debonair and donned the abject, for the one friend or adviser left to him in the crowded camp, an officer who said he always took the side of the under dog in a fight, had told him that in its present temper that court, with old Turnbull as one of its leaders, would surely sentence him to a term of years at Alcatraz as well as to dismissal from the military service of the United States. Dismissal he expected, but cared little for that. He had money and valuables more than enough to begin life on anywhere, and the pickings of his accustomed trade were all too scant in Arizona. He needed a broader field, and a crowding population for the proper exercise of his talents; and the uniform of the officer, after all, had not proved to be so potent in lulling the suspicions of prospective victims as he had expected it might be. But Alcatraz! a rock-bound prison! a convict's garb! hard labor on soft diet! that was indeed appalling.

"That man Loring has made you out an innate blackguard, Nevins. You've got to plead for mercy," said his shrewd adviser, and Nevins saw the point and plead. He laid before the court letters from officers of rank speaking gratefully of his aid during the prevalence of yellow fever in the Gulf States. He begged the court to wait until he could show them the affidavits of many statesmen and soldiers, whom it would take months to hear from by mail, and there was then no telegraph in Arizona. He begged for time, for pity, and the court was moved and wrote to Drum Barracks for instructions, and adjourned until the answer came, which it did by swift stage and special courier within a week. "Advices from Washington say that the congressional backers of the accused have declared themselves well rid of him and suggest the extreme penalty of the law," and this being the advice of Washington it was simply human nature that the court should experience a revulsion of feeling and consider itself bound to see that the poor fellow was not made to suffer martyrdom. Most of the members were men from the volunteers or from the ranks. West Pointers were the exception, not the rule, in the line of the army for years after the war. Most of the court had been the recipients of Nevins' exuberant hospitality at one time or other. He had objected to the few who had lost heavily to him at cards, and the objection had been sustained, and when the last day for the long session arrived and a sad-eyed, pale-faced, scrupulously groomed and dressed accused arose before the dignified array and the little line of curious spectators, to make his last plea, a silence not unmixed with a certain sympathy, fell upon all hearers, as in low voice and faltering accents the friendless fellow began his story. Partly from manuscript, which he seemed to find hard reading, but mainly as an extemporaneous effort, his remarks were substantially as follows:

"I've come to make a clean breast of it, gentlemen. I'm not fit to wear your uniform. I never was. I never wanted to. It was practically forced upon me by men who ought to have known better, who did know better, but who didn't care so long as they got me out of the way. My father as much as owned more than one congressman in York State. The Honorable Mr. Cadger, of the Military Committee, couldn't 'a been renominated if it hadn't been for him, and he didn't want me round home any more. He got me kept on bureau work long after all but a few volunteers were mustered out and shoved me down to New Orleans, where I'd often been steamboating before the war. I had the fever there when I was only twenty. Perhaps he thought I could get it again, and that would be the end of me. If there's a worse place for a young officer to start in than that infernal town was just after the war it ain't on the map o' these United States. I had the luck and the opportunities of the devil for nigh onto a year. I got more money and learned more ways of getting it than I knew how to use, and then I got married. A homeless woman, a woman with brains and good looks and education, married me for the position I could give her, I suppose. They told me afterward she did it out of spite or desperation; that she was a Northern girl who had been employed as governess in an old Southern family that was ruined by the war; that she had a younger sister in New York whom she was educating, a girl who had a magnificent voice and wanted to go on the stage, and all the money she could save went to her. She got employment when Ben Butler took command, for she knew all the Southern families, and who had money and plate and jewels, and who had nothing but niggers. She fell in love, they told me afterward, with a swell colonel who came there on staff duty, for he cut a dash and made desperate love to her until his wife got wind of it and came down there all of a sudden just after the smash-up of the Confederacy, and put a stop to his fun. That was in May, and I got there in July. We were married that winter, and I loaded her with the best I could buy and gave her all she could spend on her sister until she found out how my money was made there—in cotton and cards. She thought, and I'd let her think so, that I had big property in the North. It was another woman gave her the tip, and then the trouble began. She swore we must give up the house we lived in, the horses and carriage, and go to a cheap boarding-house. She got the jewelers to take back the watch and every trinket I'd given her—at their own valuation, about a quarter of what they cost me. She argued and pleaded and prayed, and swore she'd confess the whole thing to General Sheridan, who came there right after the riots of '66 and took command, and that would have sent me to the penitentiary. There were regular officers in the deals beside me, and they got wind of it and tried to bribe her; and she'd cry all night and mope all day, and swore she'd leave me unless I cut loose from the

whole business and restored what I'd made. By God, I couldn't! I'd spent it! I was no worse than three or four others who had eyes open to their opportunities—two of 'em in the regular army now—bang-up swells, and at last I couldn't stand it and got to drinking, and then I lost my card nerve and the money went with it, and it made me desperate, crazy, I reckon; for one night when I came home drunk and she made a scene I suppose I must have struck her, and then she took sick and got delirious, and I was horribly afraid, and so were my partners, that she'd give up the whole business; so they got me leave of absence. They saw me aboard the steamer for New York. My money was running short, and they gave me enough to place her in a sanitarium on the Hudson and get her sister with her, and then I came back, and bad luck followed. I was strapped when the old man told me I'd have to go out and join my regiment, for he'd got me appointed in the regulars. Why, some of Sheridan's officers when they saw my name in the papers, wrote to stop it, but it was no use. The military committee in congress couldn't go back on Mr. Cadger, and he daren't go back on my father. But they got me sent out here to be as far away as possible; and yes, there were three deserters from Cram's battery aboard the steamer, so I learned, and one of them, the man you call Higgins, who was betrayed to Lieutenant Blake by another deserter just as bad as him, was staking the other two, for he had money in plenty until after I had done with him. What my life's been out here you know well enough; same as it was in New Orleans—all luck and plenty at first, then all a collapse. I'm ruined now. When I had hundreds and thousands I helped everybody who wanted it. There are men in Yuma and Tucson now whom I set on their pins, and they give me the cold shoulder. All that offer to the major was a bluff. They've got all my money. I haven't a cent anywhere, and so far as I'm personally concerned I don't care. If there was no one on earth dependent on me I'd as lief you'd shoot me to-morrow.

"But, gentlemen, there's the rub. I own it now. There's my poor wife and her sister. I've lied to them both. She got well at the sanitarium. She's believed my promises and she's come all the way to San Francisco, and was expecting me there when—when the bottom fell out of the whole business. She's there now, she and her sister. They've got enough to pay their expenses perhaps a month or so, and that's all. I can make a living, I can get along and provide for her if you'll only give me a chance. I know I deserve dismissal. That's all right; but for God's sake, gentlemen, don't send me to Alcatraz—don't put me in jail, leave me free to work. There's men in this territory that owe me nearly a thousand dollars to-day. Let me gather that up and go to my wife—I—I—She's a good woman, gentlemen—" and here the tears came starting from the pleading culprit's eyes,

and one or two sympathetic souls about the rude tables sniffed suspiciously. "It ain't for me to talk of such things. Perhaps you won't believe me, but—" and he fingered the leaves of the blue-bound copy of the regulations that lay to the left of the judge advocate's elbow, "I—I love that woman and I want to care for her, and take good care of her. Look here," he continued, as with sudden, impulsive movement he unbuttoned his trim-fitting, single-breasted frock coat and displayed a snowy shirt bosom on which sparkled and glistened a great diamond set in the style much affected by the "sporting gent" of the day. "See this diamond. It cost eleven hundred dollars in San Francisco six months ago; and here, this solitaire," and he produced from an inner pocket an unquestionably valuable ring and, with trembling hands, laid them upon the table in front of the judge advocate; "and here," and he whipped from the waistband of his trousers a massive and beautiful watch. "There are all the valuables I have in the world. These I place in the hands of the worthy officer and gentleman who has only done his duty in representing the government through this long and painful trial. These I publicly turn over to him with the request that he personally hand them to my poor wife as soon as he reaches San Francisco as earnest of my intention to lead an honest life and to care for her in the future. And now, gentlemen, I've nothing to ask for myself—nothing but liberty to go and work for her. I'm not fit to sit with such as you."

He finished and, quivering as with suppressed emotion, turned his back upon the court, pressed his handkerchief to his streaming eyes and groped his way to the little table set apart for him a few yards to the left of the judge advocate. The silence among the members and along the benches whereon were seated the dozen spectators was for a moment unbroken by a sound except a little shuffling of feet. Then one veteran member cleared his throat with a "hem" of preparation to speak, yet hesitated. The junior officer of the court, a lieutenant of cavalry, slowly stretched forth his hand, picked up the solitaire and eyed it with an assumption of critical yet respectful interest. The president, a grizzled, red-faced veteran, presently stole a glance at Turnbull, who sat with stolid features immediately on his right. One by one the nine members (two of the original eleven having been challenged and excused) began to look cautiously about them. A captain of infantry was observed to be very red about the eyelids, but—that might have been, and possibly was, the result of cocktails. Loring alone remained in the same position. He had half turned his back to Nevins when the latter began to speak, rested his left elbow on the table, and his head on his hand, his eyes shaded under the curving palm against the glare of light that came from without. There was no room or building big enough for the purpose at the post,

and the court had held its session under a brace of hospital tent flies stretched on a framework adjoining the office of the major commanding, and Camp Cooke, as a rule, looked on from afar. The spectators who ventured beneath the shade were officers of the little garrison, the sutler and half a dozen "casuals" of the civilian persuasion, among whom, if not among the members of the court, Nevins' harangue had created undoubted sensation, for glances indicative of surprise if not of incredulity passed among them.

At last as though he felt that something must be said rather than that he knew what was appropriate to say, the presiding officer addressed the member who had cleared his throat.

"You were about to say something, major?"

"I—er—should like to ask the accused whether—his wife is informed of his—er—predicament?"

And Nevins, slowly turning, answered, "I wrote last week confessing everything. It will be a relief to her that I am no longer in the army. She said she could never look an officer in the face." There was another pause, then Nevins spoke again. "I hope I have not imposed too much on the judge advocate. I have asked because he is the only gentleman here who is not entirely a stranger to my wife."

Then all eyes were on Loring as he slowly dropped his hand and looked with undisguised astonishment at the accused. Blake, a spectator, suddenly drew his long legs under him and straightened up in his seat. It was needless for Loring to speak. His eyes questioned.

"I do not mean that Mr. Loring knows my wife, but—she has heard of him from her sister. They hoped to find him in Frisco."

Loring had picked up a pencil as he turned. Its point was resting on the pine-topped table. He never spoke. His eyes, still steadily fixed upon the twitching face of Nevins, questioned further, and every man present strained his ears for the next word.

"I should explain—her sister is Miss Geraldine Allyn."

And with a snap that was heard all over the assemblage the lead of Loring's pencil broke short off. He sat staring at Nevins, white and stunned.

CHAPTER V.

The sutler's "shack" at Camp Cooke was crowded with officers that evening and the episode of Nevins' address was the talk of all tongues. Certain civilians were there, too, frequenters of Sancho's place, but they were silent, observant and unusually abstemious. To say that Nevins had astonished everybody by an exhibition of feeling and an access of conscience would be putting it mildly. But the fact was indisputable. He himself, after adjournment, exhibited to the interrogative major two long letters, recently received from San Francisco, in graceful feminine hand, and signed "Your sad but devoted wife, Naomi." One of these referred to Lieutenant Loring, "whom Geraldine met at West Point and saw frequently the summer and fall that followed his graduation."

There were members of the court who sought to hear what Loring had to say on the subject, but he proved unapproachable. All men noted the amaze—indeed, the shock—that resulted from Nevins' public and somewhat abrupt mention of the sister's name. The judge advocate sat for a moment as though stricken dumb, his eyes fixed and staring, his face pallid, the muscles of his compressed lips twitching perceptibly, his hand clinched and bearing hard upon the table. There were few army women at Camp Cooke in those days, only two or three veteran campaigners and one misguided bride, but had the post been full of them there could hardly have been curiosity more lively than was exhibited by most of the court all that long afternoon and evening. Conjecture, comment, suggestion passed from, lip to lip. One or two men even went so far as to drop in at the tent assigned to the lonely accused and after expressing interest and sympathy and a desire to see that he got "fair play and a fresh start," they ventured to inquire if Nevins knew why Mr. Loring had been so much astonished, if not overcome, by the mention of the name of Nevins' sister-in-law. Nevins didn't know, but at that moment he would have given his hopes of mercy to find out. He was writing to his wife when his visitors came, and demanding explanation. He could think of several possibilities, any one of which in his unenlightened mind might give him a claim, even a hold on the hitherto intractable West Pointer. Why, why had he not heard or dreamed before this long trial came to its dramatic close that there was some strong and mysterious connection between him and Loring, between prosecutor and accused? The one plausible theory was that Loring and Geraldine were or had been affianced. From all his wife had told him in their few days of

moderate content and apparent bliss, he knew Geraldine to be beautiful, gifted and attractive to any man, despite her poverty. That she had been petted and spoiled, that she was selfish to the core, grasping and ambitious, he had never heard, yet might have inferred from Naomi's faltering pleas on her sister's behalf early in the days of their wedded life. In his eagerness to learn something of the truth he sent a messenger during the afternoon, after the final adjournment, and begged that Mr. Loring should come to see him. The reply was that Mr. Loring would do so later. Only two men succeeded in seeing Loring that afternoon and evening, the post commander, Major Stark, at whose quarters he was housed, and the veteran president of the court. On the plea of being very busy writing the record of the week's session, he had excused himself to everybody else. There had been something of a scene before the adjournment that morning. The court was ordered to try "such other prisoners as might properly be brought before it," and it was understood that two deserters, captured at Tucson, had announced their intention of pleading guilty and throwing themselves on the mercy of the court. Higgins had been sent to Fort Yuma. It would take long weeks to get the evidence in his case from New Orleans, but the two victims at Cooke knew well that their case was clear. There was no use in fighting. The sooner they were tried the shorter term would they serve as prisoners. Nevins finished at ten o'clock. Loring's brief stupefaction was conquered not without evident effort. Vouchsafing no response to the plea of the accused for mercy, he announced that he submitted the case without remark, and the president nodded to Nevins the intimation that he might retire. Nevins slowly gained his feet, took a long look about the silent array, hesitated, and then with his eyes on Loring said:

"I should like to be assured that the judge advocate accepts the trust. It will be two or three months before the orders in my case can get back from Washington, meantime my pay is stopped and has been for three months back. My wife must have means to live on, and that's all I have to offer. There is no other way of getting it to her that I consider safe."

Loring's white hand was trembling visibly, but his head was bowed as though in painful thought. The president had to speak. "I presume you will not refuse, Mr. Loring?"

For another moment there was silence. At last, slowly, the judge advocate looked up, turned to the accused and said, "Write Mrs. Nevins' address on that," holding forth as he did so a heavy official envelope. Wrapping the pin and ring together in note paper he stowed them in a smaller envelope, moistened the gummed flap, closed it and slid it within the heavier one which Nevins, after addressing, laid

before him. Then turning to the president, Loring calmly bowed and said, "I will accept, sir."

Five minutes later, cleared of all persons except the members and the judge advocate, who in those days did not withdraw during the deliberations of the court, this open-air temple of military justice was given over to the discussion on the findings and the determination of the sentence. In low, grave tones those members who had opinions to express gave utterance to their views. The votes on each specification and to the various charges were recorded, and finally the sentence was arrived at. By 11:30 the case of Brevet-Captain Nevins was practically concluded and the president, eager as were his associates to finish their work after their long detention at this hot, barren, yet not inhospitable post, looked briskly up at the silent, somber young officer at the opposite end of the long table.

"Shall we take ten minutes' recess and have a stretch before you go on with the next case, Mr. Judge Advocate? I understand both victims plead guilty and we can do 'em up in thirty minutes."

Nevins' watch was going the rounds of the court at the moment, its beautiful and costly case and workmanship exciting general admiration. Again the judge advocate was slow and hesitant in his reply, utterly unlike the prompt, alert official whose conduct of the trial had won golden opinions from every man, old or young, in the service. It was nearly half a minute before he spoke, and then only after the president reminded him that several officers wished to start that afternoon for the Gila so as to meet the eastward stage at Sancho's two days later.

"Give me an hour, sir. I cannot go on sooner."

Out under the canvas shelter at the adjutant's office stood the two prisoners with their guards. For an hour or more they had been waiting their turn. A shade of disappointment stole over one or two faces, but the president's answer was prompt.

"Certainly, Mr. Loring. The court owes it to you," and the recess was declared accordingly. The post quartermaster was one of the junior members and Loring detained him. Bidding the orderly remain in charge of the premises he turned to this official.

"You have a safe at your office. Will you permit me to place these in it?—and come with me until I do so?"

"Certainly. Come right along. It's but a step."

Wrapped in a silken handkerchief Nevin's watch, with the envelope containing the diamonds, was stored in a little drawer within the safe and securely locked. "You need a drink," said the quartermaster to the engineer, noting again his pallid face.

"None, I thank you," said Loring briefly, and without another word he took himself straightway to Major Starke's. At 12:30 when court reconvened the judge advocate went swiftly and methodically through his work, read the orders, propounded the usual questions, swore the court, took his own oath, read the charges and recorded the pleas without loss of a second of time or use of a superfluous word. At 1:15 the court stood adjourned *sine die*, leaving the president and judge advocate to finish and sign the record. By 3 P. M. five of its members, in the one "four-mule" road wagon belonging at Cooke, were speeding southward, hoping to catch the stage to take them to their posts lying far to the east. By midnight the record was well-nigh complete, and Loring, locking up the papers, stepped softly out into the starlight.

Over across the contracted parade a lamp was burning dimly at the guard tents and several others flared at the brush and canvas shack of the sutler. Everywhere else about Camp Cooke there was silence and slumber. The muttered word of command as the half-past-twelve relief formed at the guard tent, the clink of glasses and murmur of voices, sometimes accentuated by laughter, came drifting on the night from the open clubroom. Beyond the guard tents the dim walls of the corral loomed darkly against the dry, cloudless, star-dotted sky that bordered the eastern horizon. The sentry, slowly pacing his beaten path along the *acequia* that conducted the cool waters of the Yavapai, from the northward hills to the troughs in the corral, moved noiseless, dim and ghostly, and Loring, listening for a moment to the faint sounds of revelry at the shack, turned away to the north, passed the rude shelters which had been built by the labor of troops for the accommodation of the officers and the few families there abiding, and found himself presently on the open plain full a hundred yards out from the buildings and beyond the post of the sentry on that flank, who, far over at the west end of his long beat at the moment, was dreaming of the revels he'd have when his discharge came, and neither heard nor saw the solitary officer whose one desire was to get away by himself to some point where he could calmly think. He needed to be alone. Even Blake, whom he had grown to like and whom he believed to be still at the camp, would have been in the way.

A strange fellow was Loring, a man grown, so far as judgment and experience were concerned, when at the age of twenty he entered West Point, and from the very start became one of the leaders of his class in scholarship, and later one of the prominent officers of the battalion of cadets. In scientific and mathematical studies, indeed, he had no superior among his comrades, but languages and drawing, as taught in those days at the academy, threw him out of the head of the class, but could not prevent his landing a close second to the leader in general standing. Never a popular man in the corps, he commanded, nevertheless, the respect and esteem of the entire battalion, and little by little won a deeper regard from his immediate associates. He was a man of marked gravity of demeanor. He rarely laughed. His smile was only a trifle more frequent. He was taciturnity personified and for two years at least was held to be morose. Of his antecedents little was known, for he never spoke of them and seldom of himself. He was methodical in the last degree, exercising just so long in the gymnasium every morning during the barrack days and putting on the gloves for fifteen minutes every evening with the best middleweight in the corps. There were times in his early cadet days when he was suspected of having an ugly temper, and perhaps with reason. Exasperated at some prank played at his expense by a little "yearling" toward the close of his first—the "plebe"—encampment, Loring actually kicked the offender out of his tent. The boy was no match for the older, heavier man, but flew at him like a wildcat then and there, and Loring suddenly found himself in a fierce and spirited battle. The little fellow had pluck, science and training, and Loring's eyes and nose were objects to behold in less than a minute. For that moment, shame-stricken, he fought on the defensive, then, stung by the taunts of the swift-gathering third classmen, he rushed like a bull, and two heavy blows sent the yearling to grass and that fight was ended. But challenges rained on him from "men of his size and weight," and the very next evening he went out to Fort Clinton with one of the champions of the upper class and in fifteen minutes was carried away to a hospital a total wreck. It was ten days before he was reported fit for duty. Then camp was over and barrack life begun. Not a word would he or did he say about his severe defeat, but systematically he went to work to master "the noble art of self-defense," and two years from that time the corps was treated to a sensation. Loring, back from cadet furlough, had been made first sergeant of Company "D," in which as a private and first classman was the very cadet who had so soundly thrashed him. Loring proved strict. Certain "first-class privates" undertook to rebel against his authority, his former antagonist being the ringleader. Matters came to a crisis when Loring entered the names of three of the seniors on the delinquency book for "slow taking place in ranks at formation for dinner." It was declared an affront. His old

antagonist demanded satisfaction in the name of the aggrieved ones, and that fight was the talk of the corps for six months. Loring named the old battle-ground at Fort Clinton as the place, and in ten minutes utterly reversed the issue of his plebe effort, and the first classman was the worst whipped victim seen in years, for he fought until fairly knocked senseless. That was Loring's last affair of the kind. He went about his duties next day as seriously and methodically as ever, without the faintest show of triumph, and when the vanquished cadet finally returned from hospital, treated him with scrupulous courtesy that, before the winter wore away, warmed even to kindliness, and when the springtime came the two were cordial friends. The summer of his graduation Loring was ordered on temporary duty as an instructor during the encampment of cadets. He did not dance. He cared little for society, but one evening at Cozzens' he was thrilled by the sweetness of a woman's song, and gazing in at her as she sang to an applauding audience in the great parlor, Loring saw a face as sweet as the voice. Several evenings he spent on the broad veranda, for every night she sang and ere long noticed him; so did prominent society women and read his unspoken admiration. "Let me present you to her, Mr. Loring," said one of the latter. "She is a lovely girl, and so lonely, you know. She is engaged as companion, it seems, to Miss Haight—a dragon of an old maid who is a good deal of an invalid and seldom out of her room. That is why you never see the girl at the 'hops' at the Point, yet I know she'd love to go."

Loring felt that he blushed with eagerness and pleasure, though he merely said "please," and so Miss Geraldine Allyn met Lieutenant Loring of the engineers, and within the fortnight he knew, though he strove to hide it, that he was madly in love with her. Such beauty, such a voice, such appealing loneliness were too much for him. Six long weeks, though he became her shadow, Loring struggled against his passion. He had planned that for years he should remain single until he had saved a modest nestegg; then, when he had rank and experience, had moved in the world and had ample opportunity to study women, he would select for himself and deliberately lay siege to the girl he thought to make his wife.

But when his duties were completed with the twenty-eighth of August and he should have gone to his home, Loring remained at the Point fascinated, for Miss Haight and her musical companion stayed at Cozzens through September. In October they were to go to Lenox, and before the parting Loring's ring was on that little finger. She had promised to be his wife. Home then he hurried in response to the pleading of his sister, but the moment the Lenox visit was over and Miss Haight returned to New York thither went Loring to find his *fiancée* at the piano, with a middle-aged, somewhat portly civilian bending eagerly over her and so engrossed that he never saw or heard the intruder. This was November fourth. The engagement was barely six weeks old, but Loring's ring was not on her finger as she rose in confusion to greet him. More than that, she wrote a piteous letter to him, begging for her release. She "really had not known her own mind." Loring gave it without a word to or without other sight of her, packed his trunk, and left New York on the morning train. There was a sensation at the Point when it was announced that Miss Allyn was to marry Mr. Forbes Crosby, a wealthy "board-of-trade man" of forty. Loring reappeared no more. He got his orders for San Francisco and sailed late in the fall, and barely had he gone than the story spread from lip to lip that Mr. Crosby had broken the engagement, that Miss Haight had decided to go abroad and would not require a companion what was more, that Forbes Crosby had been making very judicious investments for Miss Haight herself, and people really wouldn't be surprised if—and then Geraldine Allyn, too, disappeared from New York and was next heard of living very quietly with a married sister, herself an invalid, a Mrs. Nevins, whose husband was said to be somewhere in the army.

And so that girl whom Loring had so deeply loved was sister to the wife of this military castaway, this unprincipled gambler, swindler and thief, and he, Loring, had charged himself with a commission that might bring him once more face to face with her who had duped him.

Circling the camp at wide distance, he had crossed the *acequia* and reached the Gila road. To the north now lay the camp, and the twinkling lights of the sutler's bar, and between him and these twinkling lights two dark objects bobbed into view some thirty yards distant, and, as plain as he could hear his own heart beat, Loring heard a voice say: "Then I'll count on you not to let him out of your sight," and the voice was that of Nevins—Nevins who was supposed to confine himself, day and night in arrest, to the limits of the garrison.

CHAPTER VI.

The members of the court had scattered to their posts, all save the veteran president and Colonel Turnbull, the department inspector. Lieutenant Blake, to his disgust, had been sent scouting up the Hassayampa where the Apaches had been seen some days before, but couldn't be found now—it being the practice of those nimble warriors to get far from the scene of their deviltries without needless delay, and the rule of the powers that were, until General Crook taught them wiser methods, to promptly order cavalry to the spot where the Indians had been, instead of where they had presumably gone. A buckboard *en route* to Date Creek, with two of the array that had sat in judgment on Nevins, had been "held up" at night by a gang of half a dozen desperadoes and the three passengers relieved of their valuables, consisting of one gold watch and two of silver, one seal ring, three revolvers, three extra-sized canteens, a two-gallon demijohn, and in the aggregate three gallons of whisky. The victims had submitted to the inevitable so far as their gold and silver were concerned, but pathetically pointed out to the robber chief the hardship of being bereft at one fell swoop of the expensive and only consolation the country afforded, and despite his wrath and disappointment at finding that the gentlemen had already been robbed, two of them having spent four nights hand-running at the post poker-room—the leader was not so destitute of fellow-feeling as to condemn the hapless trio to the loss of even the necessaries of life, and mercifully handed back half a gallon.

"We hope to catch some of you gentlemen when you haven't been playing poker," said he, striving to stifle his chagrin. "Who got it all, anyhow?" he asked, with an eye to future business. "Ah, yes—might have known it," he continued in response to the rueful admission of one of the party. "Wonderfully smart outfit that at Cooke, wonderfully—most as smart as some of our people at Sancho's. Well, so long, gentlemen. 'F any of your friends are coming this way recommend our place, won't you? We've treated you as well as we knew how. Drive on, Johnny. Nobody else will stop you this side of Date. They know we got here first."

Arizona was an interesting region in those days of development that followed close on the heels of the war. Hundreds of experienced hands had been thrown out of employment by the return of peace, and the territories overflowed with outlaws, red and white, male and female. It was taking one's life in one's hands

to venture pistol shot beyond the confines of a military post. It was impossible for paymasters to carry funds without a strong escort of cavalry. The only currency in the territory was that put in circulation by the troops or paid to contractors through the quartermaster's department. Even Wells-Fargo, pioneer expressmen of the Pacific slope, sent their messengers and agents no further then than the Colorado River, and Uncle Sam's mail stage was robbed so often that a registered package had grown to be considered only an advertisement to the covetous of the fact that its contents might be of value.

And so when the record of the court was duly signed and sealed in huge official envelope, and Lieutenant Loring, even more grave and taciturn than usual, went the rounds of the rude quarters to leave his card or pay his ceremonious parting call on the officers who knew enough to call on him—which in those crude days of the army many did not—he was asked by more than one experienced soldier whether he had requested an escort in view of the fact that he was burdened with valuables that, though small in bulk, were convertible into cash that was anything but small in amount. To such queries Mr. Loring, who had an odd aversion to answering questions as to what he was going to do, merely bowed assent and changed the subject. Lieutenant Gleason, an officer who had recently joined the infantry and was one of Nevins' victims, a man of unusual assurance despite his few months of service, had persisted in his queries to the extent of demanding from what quarter Loring expected to get an escort, Blake being away at the Hassayampa, and no other cavalry being within sixty miles; and Gleason felt resentful, though he deftly hid the fact, because the engineer ignored the question until it had been thrice repeated, and then he said, somewhat tartly: "That is my affair, Mr. Gleason." Everybody thought that Loring was decidedly unsociable, and some went so far as to call him supercilious and haughty.

"Too damned big to mingle with men who fought all through the war while he was a schoolboy at the Point," said Gleason, who had never seen a skirmish.

This latter gentleman took it much amiss that Loring had won the shoulder-straps of a first lieutenant the day he first donned his uniform (many vacancies then existing in the Corps of Engineers), while Gleason and others, with what he called war records, were still second lieutenants. Officers of the caliber of Turnbull and Starke saw much to respect in the grave, silent, thoughtful young officer, but the juniors—the captains and lieutenants—though they had marked the ease and ability with which Loring handled what was probably his first case as judge advocate, nevertheless agreed that he was "offish" toward the general

run of "the line," held himself aloof as though he considered himself of superior clay, didn't drink, smoke, swear, or play cards, and was therefore destitute of most elements of soldier companionship as then and there defined. It was resented, too, by almost everybody that Loring would not say when and how he expected to leave Camp Cooke. He had come on Sancho's famous roan, but had returned that animal by special courier without delay. Starke and Turnbull were informed, but at Loring's request saw fit to hold their tongues. No one should know, he had said to them, if he was to be responsible for those valuables. It might leak out, and the veteran officers saw the point. The juniors could not well ask them, the veterans, but they could and did ask Loring, and held it up against him in days to come that he declined to be confidential.

There was a man at Cooke who could have told them Loring showed wisdom in his observance of caution, and that man was Nevins, who had been sent for by the commanding officer the morning after the adjournment of the court, and subjected to a questioning and a lecture that nobody else heard, but that everybody speedily knew must have been severe, because Nevins, lately so meek and lachrymose, was seen to go to his tent flushed with rage, and then from within those canvas walls his voice was heard uplifted in blasphemy and execration. Nor did he take advantage of garrison limits the rest of that day, nor once again that day appear outside. At so great a distance from civilization trifles prove of absorbing interest, and callers came to see what they "could do for him," and learn for themselves, and Nevins' face was black as a storm and his language punctuated with profanity. He raved about tyranny and oppression, but vouchsafed no intelligible explanation of what he confessed to be the commanding officer's latest order—that he was remanded to close arrest.

Let it be here explained for the benefit of the lay reader that when an officer is accused of a crime, or even of a misdemeanor, he is placed in arrest, which means that he is suspended for the time being from the exercise of command, must not wear a sword, and must confine himself to certain limits—to his tent or quarters if in close arrest, as for one week the officer generally is, and to the limits of the parade or garrison if allowed out for exercise. No sentry is posted, for an officer is supposed to be on honor to observe the prescribed restrictions, and only when he breaks his arrest, by visiting the quarters of some brother officer or by going outside of camp, is he in danger of other humiliation. To none of his few visitors did Nevins reveal the fact that on the previous night, if not before, he had broken his arrest and gone far out on the mesa back of the post, that he had been detected, by whom he knew not, reported to the commanding

officer, and by him severely reprimanded and threatened with close confinement under guard, as when first brought back to the post, if he again ventured beyond the restricted limits now assigned him.

"I have twice sent to ask that Mr. Loring should come to see me," railed Nevins. "I have important matters—papers and messages from my wife, and he holds aloof. By God, Gleason! you tell him for me that if he can't treat me decently, and come to see me before tattoo this night, I demand that he hand back those diamonds and things! Do you understand?"

And that message Mr. Gleason, who of all things loved a sensation, faithfully promised to deliver and fully meant to, but the game at the sutler's developed into a big one that eventful night. Jackpots were the rule before the drums of the infantry hammered out first call for tattoo, and in the absorbing nature of his occupation he never thought of Nevins' charge except as something to be attended to later, and not until guard-mount of another day, when his head was muddled with the potations of an all-night session and the befogging cocktails of the morning, did Mr. Gleason approach the engineer upon the subject, and then there was a scene.

Loring was standing at the moment in front of the rude brush and adobe quarters of Major Starke conversing with two or three officers, or rather listening in silence to their observations. Turnbull was seated under the shelter of a sort of arbor made of framework and canvas signing some papers. The president of the court had disappeared and a rumor was flitting about the post that early in the morning, before the dawn, in fact, that hardy veteran had pushed ahead in saddle, escorted by most of Blake's troop, which had unexpectedly returned during the previous night, but merely unsaddled and, after a "rub-down, feed and water," had gone on again. If that were true, they had left as silently and mysteriously as they came, and only a corporal's guard remained. Had Gleason been intent on anything but the manner in which he could make his communication most public and significant, if not offensive, he would have noticed that both Turnbull and Loring were in riding dress. But while it could not be said of him that in his condition he was capable of seeing only one thing at a time, those things which he did see were duplicate images of the same object, and he lurched up to the dual Loring and the hazy figures that seemed floating about him, and, with an attempt at majestic impressiveness, thickly said: "Mr. Loring, I'm bearer of a message from my fren' Mr.—Captain Nevins, d'manding the me'dy't r'turn of the diamon's an' valu'bles he placed in your p'ssession."

Other officers within earshot heard, as Gleason intended they should hear, and turned instantly toward the group, all eyes on the two—the flushed, swaying subaltern in fatigue uniform; the calm, deliberate man in riding dress. A faint color, as of annoyance, quickly spread over Loring's face, but for a moment he spoke not a word. Angrily the post, commander came hurrying forth, bent on the prompt annihilation of his luckless subaltern, and was about to speak, but Loring interposed.

"One moment, sir, I beg." Then turning again on Gleason the engineer looked him calmly over from head to foot a second or two and then as calmly said:

"Too late, sir, they've gone."

CHAPTER VII.

Three days after the adjournment of Nevins' court Camp Cooke had dropped back to the weary monotone of its everyday life. Everybody was gone except the now sullen and complaining prisoner and the little garrison of two companies of infantry. Vanished even were all but two or three of the colony of gamblers and alleged prospectors, who occupied, to the annoyance of the commanding officer and the scandal of the sutler, a little ranch just outside the reservation lines whither venturesome spirits from the command were oft enticed and fleeced of the money that the authorized purveyor of high-priced luxuries considered his legitimate plunder. By this time Camp Cooke waked up to the fact that it had been dozing. While its own little force of cavalry was scouting the valleys of the Verde and the Salado to the east and Blake's troop had been rushed up the Hessayampa to the north, and there was no one apparently to do escort duty through the deserts along the Gila, Camp Cooke and the outlying prowlers believed that those costly trinkets which Nevins had begged Mr. Loring to take to his wife would not be withdrawn from the quartermaster's safe, much less sent forth upon their perilous way. Not until after Colonel Turnbull and the engineer had ridden off southward, escorted by a sergeant with six tough-looking troopers; not until after Loring's announcement that the jewels themselves had been sent ahead; not until after Mr. Gleason had been remanded to his quarters to "sober up," and the adjutant dispatched to Captain Nevins with the intimation that if his too audible imprecations were not stopped he and his tent would be transferred to a corner of the corral, did Camp Cooke learn that Major Starke had sent a fly-by-night courier after Blake, recalling the troop, that it had halted on that stream ten miles above the post, resting all afternoon and evening, had ridden silently in toward camp an hour after midnight and, after receiving certain instructions from Starke and a visit from Loring, had gone on southward, silently as it came, accompanied by the presiding officer of the court, who hated day marches and the sun-scorched desert, and leaving escort for those who were still to follow. There was mild surprise in camp, but untold wrath and vituperation along the line to Sancho's, for from far and near the choicest renegades of Arizona had been flocking to the neighborhood only to find themselves outwitted by the engineer. Not half an hour after the burst of blasphemy from Nevins' tent informed the camp that something more had happened to agitate anew his sorely ruffled temper, and the story flew from lip to lip that it was

because the precious jewels were already on their way to 'Frisco, guarded presumably by Blake and forty carbines, a swarthy half-breed courier spurred madly southward from the outlying roost on the borders of the reservation, with the warning that it would be useless risk to meddle with the Teniente Loring's party when it came along—there were no valuables with them; they had been sent with the cavalry hours before the dawn.

Yes, even the sealed record of the court must have been sent at that time, too, for at ten o'clock in the morning, when Colonel Turnbull and Mr. Loring mounted and gravely saluted the cap-raising group of officers as they rode away from the major's quarters, it was observed that Loring had not even saddle-bags, and the major's striker admitted that he had hoisted the lieutenant's valise to the pommel of a trooper's saddle at two o'clock in the morning. Various were the theories and conjectures at the sutler's all the rest of the day as to the information possessed by Lieutenant Loring which led to such extreme precaution. The major was close-mouthed, and, for him, rather stern. He held aloof from his juniors all day long and seemed to be keeping an eye and an ear attent on Nevins. That officer's conduct was a puzzle. Six months before he was the personification of all that was lavish, hospitable, good-natured, extravagant. Everybody was apparently welcome to the best he had. Then came the collapse, his arrest, his flight, his capture and confinement, his laughing defiance of his accusers until he found how much more they knew than he supposed, his metaphorical prostration at the feet of his judges, his humility, repentance, suffering and sacrifice, his pledge of future atonement, his protestations of love for his long-suffering wife, his surrender of his valuables for her benefit, his meekness of mien until the court had concluded his case and gone. Then, his sudden resumption of bold, truculent, defiant manner, his midnight breach of arrest, which had leaked out through the guard that was promptly sent forth to fetch him in; then his demand for the return of his property, and his furious outburst on learning that Loring had taken him at his word and sent it without delay by the safest possible hands.

That proved an exciting day. The adjutant's message had temporarily awed and quieted the man, but toward three P. M. the mail carrier arrived from the Gila with his sack of letters and papers. He reported having been stopped only five miles out from Sancho's by masked men who quickly examined his big leather bag, silently pointed to a curious mark, a dab of paint that must have gotten on it while he was there at the ranch, and sent him ahead without a word being spoken. He saw other men, but they passed him by in wide circuit. He met Lieutenant Blake and the troop, and the lieutenant bade him hurry, so the letters

were delivered nearly two hours earlier than usual. In the mail were a dozen missives for Captain Nevins, two in dainty feminine superscription postmarked San Francisco, several that might be bills, others that were local, one postmarked Tucson, and one slipped in at Sancho's. The major himself looked these envelopes over as though he thought their contents ought to be examined, but even a convicted man had his rights, and the letters were sent to him. In less than three minutes thereafter the hot, breathless air of the long afternoon was suddenly burdened with another eruption of oaths and ravings. One or two women sitting in the shade of their canvas shelters across the parade clapped their hands to their ears and ran indoors, and the major's orderly dashed full tilt for the guard. Half an hour later Captain Nevins was escorted to a new abode, a tent pitched just outside, not within, the corral, and there he was left to swear at will, with the sentry on No. 4 warned to call the corporal of the guard if the gentleman for one moment quit the seclusion of his solitary quarters.

And this was the status of affairs when the sun went down at the close of the third day after adjournment. When it rose upon the fourth all was quiet about the impetuous captain's canvas home—too quiet, thought the officer of the day after his visit to the guard at reveille, and therefore did he untie the cords that fastened the flaps in front and peer within. Five minutes later two new prisoners were placed in charge of the guard, of which they had been members during the night —Privates Poague and Pritzlaff, of the first and second reliefs, respectively. But the aggregate gain in the column of "in arrest or confinement" was only one, for Captain Nevins had disappeared.

Of course there was a rush to the outlying ranch, whose few remaining occupants grinned exasperatingly and shrugged their shoulders, but gave no information. Of course a courier was sent scurrying away on the trail of the cavalry, but he came back sore-footed at night, relieved of his horse, arms and equipments, and thanking God for his life. Of course another courier was started by night to make the perilous ride to the Salado and order the instant return of at least a platoon, but nothing more was heard of him for a week, and it was nearly five days before these desert-bound exiles of Camp Cooke got another atom of reliable news from Sancho's, and meantime wondrous other things had happened.

It did not take long to determine the means by which Nevins had succeeded in getting away. There was little, indeed, to prevent his doing so if he saw fit to go, for, unless sentries were posted on all four sides of his tent, he might crawl off in the darkness unobserved. The sentry on No. 4 had received orders merely to

summon the corporal and report to him if the officer ventured to leave his tent, and as No. 4 was a post over a hundred yards in length, and the sentry responsible for all of it, there was no right or reason in demanding of him that he should give his undivided attention to what might be going on close to the corral. In fact, by removing Nevins from the inner quadrangle of the camp and placing him outside the walls, Major Starke had made it all the easier for him to skip a second time if he saw fit to do so; but Starke reasoned that Nevins still had some hope that congressional influence would save him from dismissal, and therefore would not peril his chances by a second flight. Starke did not know that Nevins was honest at least in one statement, that he expected dismissal. His fate was sealed, his pay was confiscated to square shortages. There was actually nothing to be gained by staying at Cooke in virtual confinement, perhaps eight or ten weeks, until his case could be decided in Washington and the orders received back in Arizona. It actually simplified matters in many ways for Nevins to go. Somebody, for instance, would have to pay the cost of his subsistence all that time at Cooke. Thrice a day his meals were sent to him from the little bachelors' mess, already sorely taxed for the "entertainment" of the members of the court, and the four poor fellows who constituted that frontier club had been only too glad when its members from other stations insisted that they should pay their share of the long three weeks' burden on the culinary department. But Nevins now was penniless, so he said, and why should impecunious infantry subalterns support in idleness a disgraced and virtually dismissed officer? Yet that is precisely what the government compelled them to do—or starve him. Thinking it all over during the day, Major Starke concluded that at least Camp Cooke had something to be thankful for, and sending for Privates Poague and Pritzlaff, he sternly rebuked them for their probable negligence (for "discipline must be maintained"), and with dire threats of what they might expect in the way of punishment if they transgressed in the slightest way for six months to come, he bade them go back to duty, released, which they did, each with his tongue in his cheek and a wink of the inner eye, as they strode off together and went grinning to the guard-tents for their blankets.

All the same Starke wished to know whither Nevins had gone, and whether anything new had started him. This time no horse or mule had disappeared, but the tracks of two quadrupeds were found on the Mesa coming from "Rat Hell," as Captain Post, who had done time in Libby, named the gambling ranch outside the reservation—to a point within one hundred yards of the corral, and thence bore away southward straight as the flight of the crow. Two reprobates in the captain's company declared that the black-bearded clerk arrested with Nevins,

but released because he was a civilian over whom the military had no jurisdiction, had been over at the ranch all the previous day. Sentry Poague frankly admitted that he had heard horses' hoofs out on the Mesa and voices in the captain's tent, but saw nobody crossing his post and couldn't be expected to in the pitchy darkness. Whither Nevins went was therefore a matter that could only be conjectured in the light of later events. How he went was a matter of little moment. It was good riddance to bad rubbish, said Starke, until at last the next mail came from Sancho's. For nearly five days the major declared himself content if he never saw Nevins again. Then he turned to and prayed with all his soul that he might catch him—if only for five minutes.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was two long days' cavalry march from Sancho's to Camp Cooke, and many a time it had taken three. Midway, very nearly, the Hassayampa emptied its feeble tribute into the murky Gila. There was water enough, such as it was, for man and beast along the way, but, except in the winter months, both man and beast preferred the night hours for the journey. In order to provide mounts for the three officers Blake had left as many of his men at Cooke, and pushed ahead with the veteran president two hours before the dawn. That his march was watched from afar by mounted men he knew as soon as the sun rose upon his pathway, but Blake's only concern was that they kept at respectful distance. Not more than half a dozen did he see, and these were as single scouts or in pairs. He felt little anxiety for Turnbull and Loring; they, too, were well guarded. The only thing he hated about the whole affair was having to dismount any of his men, but there were only two ambulances at Cooke, one was undergoing repairs and, the inspector being present, the post surgeon wisely protested against the other being sent to the distant south. It was the plan of the party to ride leisurely to Sancho's, there to await the coming of the stage, which should pass through on its way to Yuma Saturday noon.

And early Friday evening the troop went into bivouac at the same old willow clump, and Sancho, profusely and elaborately courteous, had come forth, sombrero in hand, to implore the caballeros to partake of his hospitality. His brother was returned from a visit to Guaymas and Mazatlan, and he had brought wine of the finest and cigars such as Arizona never had known, and Sancho was manifestly disconcerted at the regrets or refusals, coldly courteous on the part of Loring, blunt and brusque on the part of Blake. The veterans, however, saw no harm in going and were sumptuously entertained by mine host in the best room of the ranch. Blake caused a strong guard to be posted at camp, a most unusual thing, and one instantly noted among Sancho's people, and after making the rounds and giving strict instructions to the three sentries, and further ordering side lines as well as lariats for the horses—all this as a result of a low-toned conference with Loring—he came back to find that officer with his valise rolled in a blanket and used as a bolster, while the owner lay on his back gazing dreamily up at the stars. A trooper was silently making down the bedding of the other officers. The sand was soft and dry, no campfire was needed, no tent, no

mattress. All four were hardened campaigners and the night was warm and dewless.

For a moment or two Blake fidgeted about. Good wine and cigars were as acceptable him as to anybody. It was Sancho and Sancho's brother he could not stomach, and he would not be beholden to either.

"You can think of nothing else in the way of precaution, Loring?" he presently asked, as he threw himself down beside him, puffing at his little brier-root.

"Nothing."

"It would take a nervier gang than Arizona owns to try and rob this outfit," and Blake looked complacently around among the shadowy forms of the troopers flitting about the bivouac.

"We are all right so long as we've got you and your men," said Loring quietly.

"Well, there's no order that can come in time to take us away from you, old man. I'll send one platoon ahead at daybreak to camp halfway, and they'll be fresh to ride into Yuma with you Sunday morning."

Loring nodded appreciatively.

From the open doorway of the ranch came the faint clink of glasses and the murmurous flow of voices. Presently the boom of the veterans' jovial laugh swelled the "concourse of sweet sounds," and Blake stirred uneasily.

"Wonder what that old thief is giving them," muttered he. "Uncle Billy's telling his bear story."

Quarter of an hour passed. The infant moon had sunk below the westward horizon. The sounds of joviality increased, and Blake's mouth watered. "Damn those heartless profligates!" he muttered. "Reckon I'll have to go and reconnoiter. You don't mind being left to your own reflections, Loring?"

"Go ahead," said Loring, and so presently the tall, shadowy form of "the longest-legged officer in Arizona" was dimly seen stalking forth from the gloom of the willows and threading its way through the open starlight toward the bright and welcoming doorways of the ranch. Only one or two of the usual loungers had been seen about the premises since the cavalry came in. Sancho and his brother were practically destitute of other guests than the officers whom they were

entertaining. Slowly and more slowly did the lieutenant saunter, open-eared, toward the scene of revelry. More than half the distance had he gone when, suddenly from another and smaller clump of willows below the ranch there came floating on the still night, faint and cautious, the musical tinkle of a guitar, and then soft, luring, yet hardly sweet or silvery, the voice of a girl was timidly uplifted in song. Blake knew it at once. "The daughter of my brother" was out there in the willows, a most unusual thing. Blake remembered how her eyes had spoken to him twice before, how she had thrown herself upon him the night of Higgins' arrest. Could it be, was it possible, that she was signaling to him now? Much as his curiosity and interest had previously been aroused by the occasional peeps he had had at this attractive little Mexican girl, the events of that night had intensified them. True, it was a moment of thrilling excitement. Higgins, cornered like a rat, had drawn and fired, not with either aim or idea of shooting his accuser, but in the hope of so startling both officers that in the confusion he could leap to the back doorway and escape. Loring's imperturbable nerve and practiced fist had defeated that scheme and laid the deserter low, and Higgins was now languishing at Yuma, awaiting trial on triple charges. But Blake for a second or two had felt the clasp of soft arms about him, the wild flutter of a maiden heart much below his own, and Blake was human. Somewhere he had met that slender girl before. Twice he had danced at the *bailes* in Tucson, and once attended a masquerade, where for nearly an hour he had enjoyed the partnership of and been tantalized by a maid of just about the stature of this dark-eyed "daughter of my brother." Blake knew as well as does the reader that this was no time for philandering, and had been told, but not yet taught, the wisdom of keeping well away from the damsels who, like the sirens of old, twanged the vibrating strings and sang their luring songs. Why should she have flung herself between him and the desperadoes at that perilous moment and thrown her arms around him unless—unless she was the girl he had been making love to, in broken Spanish, during the *fiesta* at Tucson? He would not have let Loring know where he was going, or why, for a good deal. But once away from him, Blake was alone with no one to interpose objection, and—he went. In three minutes he had made his cautious way to the westward willows, and his heart began beating in spite of his determination to be guarded and even suspicious, for there sat the little señorita alone. That fact in itself should have opened his eyes, and would have done so a year or two later, but Blake was still a good deal of a boy, and in another moment he stepped quickly to her side and almost swept the ground with his broad-brimmed scouting hat, as he bowed low before her. Instantly the song ceased, the guitar dropped with an æolian whine upon the sand, and as Blake stooped to raise it she sprang to her feet—a half-stifled cry

upon her lips. With smiling self-assurance he bowed low again as he would have restored the instrument to the little hands that were half-upraised as though to warn him back; but she began coyly retreating from the bench on which she had been seated, and he quickly followed, murmuring protest and reassurance in such Spanish as he could command, declaring he had never yet had opportunity to thank her for a deed of daring that perhaps had saved his life (he knew it hadn't—the long-legged, nimble-tongued reprobate), and trembling, timorous, sweetly hesitant she lingered; she even let him seize her hand and only faintly strove to draw it away. She began even to listen to his pleading. She shyly hung her pretty head and coyly turned away and furtively peeped across the starlit level toward the ranch, where two dark forms serape-shrouded, were lurking at the corner of the corral. They had come crouching forward a dozen yards when something, some sudden sound, drove them back to shelter, and in the next moment Blake heard it, and the girl, too, for like a frightened fawn she darted away and went scurrying to the rear entrance of the ranch, leaving him to confront and hail two horsemen, "Gringos," evidently, who came loping in on the Yuma trail, and at his voice the foremost leaped from saddle and called:

"Is it Lieutenant Blake? We've come with dispatches, sir, from Yuma," and, unfastening his saddle-bag, the trooper placed a packet in the officer's hand.

"Come this way," said Blake briefly, leading toward the light, and inwardly bemoaning an ill-wind that had blown him far more good than he dreamed. A few strides took him to the door of the ranch. The dispatches were for the president of the late court at Camp Cooke, for Turnbull, for Loring and for himself. Sending the courier to camp, he tore open his order—a brief letter of instructions to furnish such escort as might be deemed sufficient for the safe conduct of Lieutenant-Colonels Vance and Turnbull to Tucson. Then he waited to hear from them. With Sancho eagerly scanning their faces the two veterans had opened and read their orders, then looked up at each other in evident surprise. Presently they arose, and, begging their host to excuse them a moment and beckoning Blake to follow, stepped into the lighted bar beyond. Another court had been convened, another officer was to be tried, and the two who had officiated as seniors at Camp Cooke were directed to proceed at once to the old Mexican capital for similar duty there.

Before sunrise, escorted by a dozen troopers, Vance and Turnbull were on their way, their farewell words to Blake being an injunction to see Loring and his precious charges safe to Yuma City.

As long as he lived Gerald Blake was destined to remember the Saturday that dawned upon them as the little party rode away south-eastward. Even the men seemed oddly depressed. Neither to Turnbull, to Loring nor to Blake had this detachment suggested itself as possible. What with having to send a large portion of his command forward on the Yuma road so as to provide comparatively fresh horsemen to accompany the stage with its relays of mules, Blake found himself at reveille with just eighteen men all told, awaiting the coming of that anxiously-expected vehicle. He prayed that it might bring at least one or two officers from Grant or Bowie. He vainly sought another peep at or word with Pancha; but, though Sancho was everywhere in evidence, grave, courteous, hospitable, imperturbable; though one or two ranchmen rode in and out during the morning, and there was a little gathering, perhaps half a dozen of men and *mozos*, apparently awaiting the coming of the stage at noon, the women kept out of sight. At twelve the old lorgnette was brought to bear on the eastward trail, but, to the apparent surprise of the loungers, one o'clock came and no stage, and so did four and five and then Blake and Loring took counsel together in the seclusion of the willow copse, while their men, silent and observant, gathered about the horses thirty yards away, grooming and feeding and looking carefully to their shoeing, for there was portent on the desert air and symptoms of lively work ahead.

At six came Sancho, oppressed with grievous anxiety as to the safety of the stage. There has been rumors of Apache raids to the east of Maricopa. Only three days before he had warned the caballeros—the gentlemen of the court who were going back to Grant and Bowie, to be on their guard every inch of the way beyond the Wells, and now his heart was heavy. He feared that, disdainful of his caution, they had driven straight into ambush. Ought not the Teniente Blake to push forward at once with his whole force and ascertain their fate? Blake bade him hold his peace. If harm had come to that stage, said he, it was not on the eastward, but the westward run, not at the hands of Apaches, but of outlaws, and Sancho went back looking blacker than night and saying in the seclusion of the corral, to beetle-browed *hermano mio* and his dusky wife, things that even in Spanish sounded ill and would not be publishable in English. Both officers by this time felt that there was mischief abroad. It was decided between them that if by midnight the stage did not arrive, Loring, with the precious packet in one saddle-bag and the court proceedings in the other, should take eight men as escort and gallop for the west until he reached the platoon sent forward at dawn. From that point the danger would be less, and with either the same or a smaller number of fresh riders he could push on for Yuma, sending all the others back to

join Blake, who meantime, with what little force he had, would scout eastward for news of the stage.

But that plan was destined never to be carried out. The long day came to an end. The darkness settled down over sandy plain and distant mountain. The silence of midnight reigned over the lonely bivouac and the somber ranch, yet had not Blake given orders that every man must remain close to the horses throughout the evening, adventurous spirits from the troop could surely have heard the ominous whisperings within the corral and marked the stealthy glidings to and fro. At nine o'clock the famous roan was cautiously led forth from the gateway and close under the black shadow of the wall, and not until well beyond earshot of the willows was he mounted and headed eastward. At ten Loring was sleeping soundly in preparation for the night ride before him, and Blake, nervously puffing at his pipe, was listening to the low, murmurous chat where the guard were gathered about their watchfires, when soft, timid, luring, sweet, again he heard the tinkle of that guitar. It ceased abruptly. There was a minute of silence, then, a trifle louder, it began again; again ceased as though waiting reply, and Blake sat up and listened. Once more, not at the westward willows, not at the ranch, not on the open plain, but somewhere close at hand, close to his side of the bivouac, away from the guard, away from the occasionally stamping, snorting horses, and equally far from the dark, shadowy buildings of the stage station, and Blake slowly, noiselessly got to his feet and, after listening one moment to Loring's deep, regular breathing, buckled on his revolver belt and stole forth into the starlight. Yes, there was the sound again—a few notes, a bar or two of the song Pancha was singing at the willows the night before, and close to the edge of the willows crouched the musician. With his hand on the butt of his revolver, Blake strode slowly toward the shrinking form, and, beckoning, it rose and moved swiftly away.

"Halt where you are," growled the lieutenant, "if you want me to stay here."

For answer there came the same softly played bars and another gesture as though imploring him to come farther away from hearing of the ranch or even of his bivouac, and, whipping out his revolver, the tall trooper sprang forward and a heavy hand came down on the shoulder of the shawl-hidden form, and there, trembling, imploring, ay weeping, was Pancha. Before he could speak one word she began, and, to his amaze, began in English—broken English to be sure, disjointed, incoherent, tremulous—and he listened, at first incredulous, then half-convinced, then utterly absorbed, too absorbed to note that a dark form went scurrying from the shelter of some stunted brush straight toward the ranch,

whence presently a bright light shone forth and loud voices harshly shouted the name of Pancha! Pancha! whose wrist he still grasped—Pancha! who, weeping, had implored him to hasten with all his men, that the stage was not three miles away with officers from Grant aboard, that wicked men had planned to murder them to prevent their joining him, and now, in terror, she sought to break away. She begged him to release her. They would kill her if they knew——

And even as she pleaded, far out on the dark, eastward plain there suddenly uprose a chorus of yells, a rattling fusillade, and Blake darted back to the bivouac, shouting as he ran, "Up with you, 'C' troop! Mount, men, mount!" and then all was stir and bustle and excitement. Springing from their blanket beds the troopers threw their carbine slings over their shoulders and flew to their horses. "Never mind your saddles—no time for that!" yelled Blake, as he slipped the bit between the teeth of his startled charger, then threw himself astride the naked back. "Up with you and come on!" Then with a dozen ready fellows at his heels away he darted into the gloom, guided only by the yells and flashes far out over the sandy plain. In less than two minutes every trooper in the little command had gone spurring in pursuit, and Lieutenant Loring, suddenly aroused from slumber, revolver in hand, looking eagerly about for explanation of the row, found himself standing guard over his treasure-laden saddle-bags—utterly alone.

Then came the whish of a riata through the pulseless air, the quick whir-r-r of the horse-hair rope through the loop as it settled down over his head, a snap as it flew taut, a sudden and violent shock as his feet were jerked from under him, the crack of his revolver—aimless, a stunning blow on his prostrate head, then oblivion.

CHAPTER IX.

A week later the surgeon at Camp Cooke found himself minus one of his ambulances after all. In response to a penciled note from Blake it had been hurried from what there was of the shack aggregation at that point to what was left of Sancho's, Major Starke and the doctor with it. They found much of the corral in ruins and one end of the rancho badly scorched. "The wife of my brother," with Pancha, and that ceremonious copy of the Castilian himself had disappeared, but Sancho was still there, a much wronged man, and Pedro and José and Concho and a decrepit mule or two, all under the surly surveillance of Sergeant Feeny and half a dozen troopers whose comrades were afield chasing banditti through the deserts and mountains, while those who were detailed to remain spent long, anxious hours watching over and striving to soothe a young officer delirious from injuries to the head and resultant fever. Loring a sick man, indeed, when the surgeon reached him; but poor Blake, wearing himself down to skin and bone in fruitless chase, would gladly have been in his place.

The stage which he and his men had rushed to rescue was actually out there to the east, as Pancha had declared, "held up" among some little sand dunes, but it bore neither passengers nor treasure, and what on earth the robbers should have detained him for nearly twenty miles east of Gila Bend—held him in the hot sun from nine in the morning until late in the afternoon, then sent him on again, only to be once more "rounded to" with a furious chorus of yells and volleyings of pistols when within only two miles of Sancho's, that bewildered Jehu could not imagine. The marvel of it was that, though the old stage was "riddled like a sieve," as he said, "and bullets flew round me like a swarm of buzzin' bees, not one of 'em more'n just nipped me and raised a blister in the skin." Indeed, even those abrasions were indistinguishable, though Jake solemnly believed in their existence. Then another queer thing! Long before the lieutenant and "his fellers" reached the imperiled vehicle all but two or three of the dozen assailants went scurrying off in the darkness, and when the cavalry came charging furiously through the gloom there was no one to oppose them. Jehu Jake couldn't even tell which way the bandits had gone—every way, he reckoned; and after careering blindly about for half an hour or so, Blake's most energetic men came drifting back and said it was useless to attempt pursuit until dawn, even though that would give the renegades six hours' start. Slowly and disgustedly Blake ordered

his men to form ranks and march back to camp, when suddenly an idea struck him—Loring! Loring, with his precious saddle-bags, had been left alone; and, calling for a set of fours to follow him, Blake clapped his spurless heels to his indignant horse's flanks and galloped for home, only to find Sancho and Pete lamenting over the prostrate, senseless and bleeding form of the engineer, whose arm was still thrown protectingly over the ravished saddle-bags.

The pocket containing that precious envelope was slashed open. The envelope and watch were gone. The record of the court in the other bag was undisturbed.

And then as he bathed his comrade's head and stanched the blood and strove to call him back to consciousness, Blake saw it all, or thought he did, and gnashed his teeth in impotent wrath. He was tricked, betrayed, yes, possibly ruined, all by a gang of miserable "greasers," through the medium of a pretty Mexican girl and his own wretched imbecility. There was no name Blake didn't call himself. There was nothing disreputable he did not not think of Sancho, but what could he prove? Sancho was a heavy loser. Sancho's best mules and all his fine horses, including the famous roan had been spirited away. The gang had made a wreck of the bar and a puddle of his famous liquor. Manuel, his brother, with his beloved wife and child, had fled in terror, said Sancho, else would they now be here nursing the heroic officer who had striven to defend them against such a rush of wretches. Blake drove him away with imprecations, vowing that he, Sancho, was in collusion with the gang, against which unmerited slur Sancho protested in sonorous Spanish, and to prove his innocence pointed to his bespattered bar-room, and as that failed to move the obdurate heart of the raging cavalryman, went sorrowfully back to the dark ranch whence there suddenly arose a sheet of flame and the cry that the villains had set fire to the corral before they left. For half an hour the straw and hay made a fierce blaze, and the troopers turned to and saved the ranch, as Sancho knew they would, and the actual damage was but slight. Some day Sancho would present a claim against the government for twenty times the amount and get such portion of it as was not required by the local agent and lobbying aids who rushed it through congress. Against Sancho there was no proof whatever, and when Blake rode away at dawn to take the trail of the robber band he had to invoke Sancho's assistance in looking after his stricken friend. There were hours that day when Blake could almost have blown his brains out. He, who prided himself on the field record he was making, had been outwitted, tricked, utterly and ridiculously fooled. By heaven! if horses could hold out those rascals should not go unwhipped of justice! Bitter as was his cup the previous year, this was bitterer still.

Not for ten days, after a long and fruitless chase through the Dragoon Mountains and almost into Mexico, did Blake return to the Bend, and by that time Loring was just gone, borne in the ambulance to Yuma. He had regained consciousness under the doctor's care, said old Feeny, but was sorely weak and shaken, and the doctor had gone on with him.

So ended for the time being, at least, the survey of the Gila Valley, for the surgeon at Fort Yuma coincided with the opinion of his brother from Cooke that Lieutenant Loring could perform no duty for weeks, that he should have care, rest and a sea voyage. The record of the court had been sent on by mail stage to San Francisco, and after a fortnight of total quiet at Yuma, Loring was conveyed down the Colorado to the Gulf and shipped aboard the coasting steamer for the two weeks run around Old California and up the Pacific to Yerba Buena. The very day they sailed old Turnbull came to join him on the voyage. Not a trace had been discovered of the fugitive, Captain Nevins, and such suspicious characters as Blake had overhauled were long since released for lack of evidence. Sancho held the fort as imperturbably as ever. The "family of my brother" were reported gone to Hermosillo.

Those were years in which the steamer, plying every month between the Colorado and the Bay of San Francisco, carried heavy burdens of freight, stores, and supplies into the far territory, but took little out. Gold being the monetary standard of California at the time, it cost a captain a month's pay to take that two weeks' voyage. The government paid the way into the territory in the case of officers going under orders, and once landed there a man speedily found himself too poor to think of returning. Therefore was the stout mariner who commanded the Idaho more than surprised to find two army officers on his scanty passenger list. Turnbull he had met before; Loring was a stranger.

"Make yourselves comfortable, gentlemen," said he; "you practically own the ship till we get to Guaymas. There we pick up some Mexican families going to 'Frisco, and two mighty pretty girls."

"Who are they?" asked Turnbull languidly, as he sat on the upper deck, heels lifted on the taffrail, gazing out over an apparently limitless plain, half dim vista of far-spreading sand, half of star-dotted, flawless salt water, the smoke of his cigar curling lazily aloft as the black hull rode at anchor.

"Daughters of old Ramon de la Cruz, for two that I know of, and some cousin of theirs, I believe. They came aboard on our up trip. The old man likes our tap of

champagne and don't care what it costs. He has more ready cash than any Mexican I know. You're a married man, colonel, but how about the lieutenant here?"

Loring, still pallid and listless, smiled feebly and shook his head.

"Well, here's your chance, young man," said the bluff salt, unconscious of giving offense. "No time like a voyage for love making, once the girl gets her sea legs on. You ought to capture one of 'em before we're halfway to the Golden Gate. They rate 'em at two hundred thousand apiece. Don't know how long it takes a soldier to win a prize like that, but give a sailor such a show and she'd strike her colors before we sight St. Lucas. If you don't care for ducats and only want beauty, there's that little cousin. She can sing and play your soul away; give her half a chance and a good guitar."

"Who's she?" queried Turnbull, balancing his half-smoked cigar between the fingers, as he blew a fragrant cloud to the cloudless vault above.

"Didn't get the family name—Pancha they called her, a slip of a sixteen-year-old, going to school, perhaps." And the captain turned away to answer a question from his steward, leaving the two soldiers looking intently at each other, with new interest in their eyes.

"Blake's destroyer was a sixteen-year-old Pancha, wasn't she?" asked the colonel in low tone. He had no mercy whatever on Blake, and was outspoken in condemnation of what he called his idiocy.

Loring was silent a moment, then he drew a letter from an inner pocket. It had come with Turnbull—the last news from Arizona. "Read that when you've time, colonel," said he. "Perhaps had you been in Blake's place at his age you'd have forgotten everything but the stage and the fight. I think I should."

And as this was the longest speech Turnbull had ever heard from Loring's lips, except his arraignment of Nevins before the court, the colonel pondered over it not a little. He took the letter and read it when, an hour later, the Idaho was plowing her lazy way southward through a dull and leaden sea.

"I'm not the first man to be fooled by a slip of a girl, Loring," wrote Blake. "It isn't the first time that a woman has got the better of me, and it may not be the last. But the chagrin and misery I feel is not because I have suffered so much, but because you have, and all through my fault. I suppose you know the general

has ordered me relieved and sent back to my company as no longer worthy to be called a cavalryman. All the same, one of these days I mean to get a transfer. My legs are too long for the doughboys anyhow. Meantime, with all meekness I'll bear my burden—I deserve it; but you'll believe me when I say it isn't the punishment, the humiliation this has cost me that so weighs upon me now; it is the thought of your loss and your prostration. One of these days I may find means to show you how much I feel it. Just now I have only a hint. Last year at this time my most cherished possession was my new spring style, ten-dollar Amidon. A silk hat is as out of place in Arizona as a sunshade in Sitka, yet my striker has just unpacked it and asked, with a grin on his confounded mug, 'What'll I be doin' wid this, sor?'"

> "I know! Sole leather hat box and all, it goes by buckboard to your address at division headquarters. Our heads are about of the same caliber; the main difference is that yours seems loaded. The *Alta* says silk hats are now worn on sunny mornings. Sport mine for me, though it be of the vintage of a by-gone year. I shall not show my face in civilization till I have lived down my shame. So now for two years at least of Yuma and the consolation to be derived from the solitary study of philosophy and Shakespeare.
>
> "Yours in meekness of spirit,
>
> "GERALD BLAKE.
>
> "P. S.—They say that Sancho's brother's real name is Escalante. If ever you come across one of that race keep your eyes peeled."

Another day and the billows of the gulf were breaking under the Idaho's counter and hissing sternward in snowy foam, answering the rush of a strong southwest wind. It was late at evening when the black hull went reeling in toward the lights of Guaymas, and the massive anchor, with prodigious splash dove for the sandy bottom, but late as it was the shore boats and lighters came pulling to the gangway stairs, and merchants, clerks and customs officers nimbly scrambled up the side, and then followed a number of passengers, cigarette smoking and cackling about the swarming deck, and Turnbull and the Engineer hung over the rail and watched for the promised boatload of beauty and presently it came. Two or three small boats were rowed alongside, and there were glimpses of shrouded forms and there were sounds of joyous laughter and murmured gallantries of dark-eyed, dark-skinned caballeros, and the growling injunctions of, presumably, paterfamilias. And presently the ladder-like stairs were cleared, and, one after

another, woman after woman was assisted up the narrow way, and came sailing into the zone of light from the polished reflectors, elder women first, then slender, sparkling-eyed damsels whose white teeth gleamed as they chatted with their escorts. Two undeniably attractive, Spanish-looking girls were objects of most assiduous care. Then came a third, younger, a mere slip of a maid, with but a single cavalier, a grim, grizzled, stern-looking Mexican, who glanced sharply about as he set foot on the solid deck, and then, without a word, Loring's hand was placed on the colonel's arm, and the lieutenant's eyes said "Look!" for as the girl's face was turned for an instant toward them, there stood revealed the dusky little maid of the Gila, Blake's siren—Pancha.

CHAPTER X.

Not for many moons did that voyage of the Idaho lose first place in the memory of the bevy of passengers who watched the lights of Guaymas fading away astern that April night. All had been bustle and gayety aboard during an hour of sheltered anchorage. Señor de la Cruz had verified the captain's verdict and opened a case of Sillery and besought all hands to drink to a joyous and prosperous voyage for his beloved daughters, their duenna and his little niece—their cousin from Hermosillo. "All hands" would have included the ship's company had the captain permitted, so hospitable was the Mexican, and indeed was intended to include every soul on the passenger list, most of them boarding the boat at Guaymas. The Señor Coronel Turnbull was formally presented to the Señor de la Cruz and by him to his charming family and their many friends, but the junior officer, on the score of recent and severe illness, had begged to be excused. Loring stood alone at the taffrail, listening in thoughtful silence to the sound of revelry within the brightly-lighted cabin, while the hoarse screeching of the 'scape-pipe drowned all other voices and proclaimed the impatient haste of the skipper to be off. Straight, but often storm-swept, was the southerly run to La Paz—over on the desolate shore of the long, arid peninsula, and the green surges were rolling higher every moment and bursting in thunder into clouds of wind-driven, hissing spray on the rocks beyond the point. Wind and wave were both against their good ship, and every officer and man was at his station awaiting the order to weigh anchor. The mail sacks were aboard. The consul had gone down over the side and still Don Ramon seemed unable to part from his loved ones and the Idaho's champagne. It was the captain who had finally to put abrupt stop to the lingering leave-takings.

"I must be off at once," he said. "Come, Don Ramon, we'll take the best of care of these ladies and land them all at 'Frisco within the fortnight. Kiss 'em all around now and jump for your boat. Come, Señor—I didn't catch the name. Ah, yes, Escalante—the father of the Señorita Pancha, I suppose. No—only her uncle? Well, I'll be her uncle now," and so saying he led the way to the deck. Loring saw the lively party come surging forth from the companionway—señoras, señoritas, gray-haired men and gay young gallants. There was a moment of clasping, clinging embraces, of straining arms and lingering kisses, of crowdings and murmurings here and there, some little sobbing and many tear-

wet eyes as the father was finally hurried down the ladder, and then there was further delay and shouts for Escalante, and not until then did Loring, silently watching the animated throng on the port side, become aware of two dark forms in the shadow of the deckhouse on the opposite quarter. One was that of a slender girl, and she was sobbing, she was praying in eager words not to be sent away; she was imploring pitifully to be taken back to the shore. Loring had studied Spanish long enough to understand almost every word, and even before he realized that he was an unwonted listener he had heard both her sobbing plea and the abrupt, almost cruel answer.

"You have no home, nor has your father. You may thank heaven for the chance to get away."

The second officer came bustling round in search of them, and, leaving the girl shrinking and sobbing on the narrow bench in the shadow, the Mexican was hurried off. Before the little boats had fairly cast adrift and the swinging steps were raised the throb of the screw was felt churning the waters of the bay, and as the steamer slowly gathered way and her bow swung gradually seaward, women and girls, kerchief waving, came drifting back along the rail, leaning far over and throwing kisses to the tossing shallops on the dark waves beneath, then gathering about the stunted flagstaff at the stern, calling loudly their parting words, all unconscious of Loring, who had stepped aside to give them room and so found himself close to little Pancha, lost to everybody in the desolation of a loneliness and grief that Loring could not see unmoved, yet could not reconcile with what he had believed of her.

Up to this moment he had heard of her only as an artful girl, the confederate of thieves and ruffians. Up to this moment he had seen her only once, the afternoon she threw herself on Blake, as Blake and he had both come to believe, to prevent his drawing revolver on the two rascals at the ranch. Yet, never had Loring heard such pathetic pleading, never had he seen child or woman in such utter abandonment of woe. Never had he thought it possible that Pancha, the siren of Sancho's ranch—cold, crafty, luring, designing, treacherous as any Carmen ever since portrayed upon the stage—could be capable of such intensity of feeling. Drawing his uniform "cape" snugly about him, for now the sharp sea wind was whistling through the cordage and chilling his fever-weakened frame, Loring leaned against the rail, gazing back at the receding shores, trying not to hear the girl's sobbing. The chatter of the flock of women was incessant. Turnbull and two Guaymas merchants had joined the group, but all were intent on those harbor lights now fast glimmering to mere sparks upon the sea, and the lonely

girl sat there forgotten. Not once was voice uplifted in question as to what had become of her. Every moment now the stern was lifted higher in air and then dropped deeper into the roaring, hissing waters, and women tightened their hold upon the taffrail and gave shrill little shrieks, and huddled closer together, and presently one of the elders fell back and begged to be led below, and then another, and by the time the last glimmer of the town had been hid from view and only the steady gleam of the lighthouse shone forth upon their foaming wake, the hardiest of the gay little party of the earlier evening had been carefully assisted down the brass-bound stairway, and when five bells tinkled windily somewhere forward, there, with little hands clasped about the stanchion, a shawl thrown over her head, that head pillowed in her arms, there alone in the darkness and the rush of the wind and sea, there, the very picture of heartbroken girlhood, still sat Pancha, and Loring could bear it no longer.

He was thinking over his Spanish to be sure of his words when the starboard doors of the companion way were suddenly thrown open, and in the bright light from within two burly forms stepped unsteadily forth, then lurched for the nearest support, and Loring heard the jovial tones of Turnbull:

"He must be up here—or overboard; he's nowhere below!" Then glancing sternward, "O! Loring!" he shouted, and at the name Pancha's little dark head was suddenly uplifted, and a pair of black eyes, red-rimmed and swollen with weeping, gazed, startled, toward the dark figures. For the life of him Loring could not answer the hail. Turnbull's voice and words alone had been sufficient to rouse her from a depth of woe, and to give rise to new and violent distress. She was trembling, and he could plainly see it. To answer would only announce to the frightened girl that the man whose name was sufficient to cause such evident dismay was standing there just beyond her seat, within a few paces of her, and had probably been there for some time. Quickly, watching his chance, as the Idaho careened to port, Loring shot round the deckhouse and made his way forward until he reached the companion stairs on that side, and in another moment was clinging to the outer knob of the doorway on the other, and answering the eager questions as to where he'd been and whether he better not turn in. "Have a brandy and water, sir," urged the colonel's new companion. "Nothing like it to head off *mal de mer*. We're in for a lively night. Half the women are sick already, and the colonel here was turning white about the gills."

"The air in the cabin was close after all that champagne. It's fresh in the staterooms, though," answered Turnbull. "Come on, Loring. It's time for you to be abed." Then in low tone he queried: "What's become of the child? Did she see

you? Has she got back to shore?"

For answer Loring pointed to the dark figure shrinking from view half a dozen yards away toward the heaving stern. Their jovial fellow-passenger again interposed.

"Come, gentlemen, brandy and water's what we need, ain't it?" The Idaho's champagne had evidently taken effect.

"Right!" said Turnbull "Run down and order for us, quick, or it'll be too late. We'll join you in a minute." The burly merchant dove for the doorway on the next stomach-wrecking lurch, and collided with the white-capped stewardess, hastening up, with anxiety in her eyes. The two officers clung to the mizzen shrouds opposite the companionway as she emerged from the broad light into the darkness of the wind-swept deck. It was a moment before she could distinguish objects at all. Then with practiced step she went swiftly to the crouching figure at the distant end of the long seat.

"I have learned something of her," murmured Turnbull. "That was her father's brother, Escalante, who came aboard with her. That woman at Sancho's was not her mother. *She* has been dead for many a year. She was own sister to De la Cruz. There is something back of their sending this girl to San Francisco. Hush! Here she comes!"

With her arm thrown about the drooping girl, the stewardess came slowly leading her to the doorway. The swinging portals had slammed shut in the last plunge of the Idaho, and as the buoyant craft rose high on the next billow, Turnbull and Loring both turned to open them. The light shone full on their calm, soldierly faces as the stewardess thanked them, and the shrinking child lifted up her frightened eyes for one brief moment, glanced quickly from one to the other, then, with a low cry, slipped, limp and senseless, through the woman's arms and fell in a dark heap upon the deck.

CHAPTER XI.

Another day and the Idaho was battling for her life and that of every soul aboard. Forging her way southward, she took the furious buffets of the gale on the starboard quarter—"the right front," as Turnbull would have put it had he not been too ill to care a fig where she was hit, and only wished she might go down if that would keep her still. Sea after sea burst over the dripping decks and tossed her like a cockle shell upon the waters. Time and again the bows would plunge deep in some rushing surge and then, uplifting, send torrents washing aft and pour cataracts from her sides. Long before the dawn of day the red-eyed commander had ordered the southward course abandoned and headed his laboring craft for the opposite shores. Harbor there was none north of the deep sheltered bay of La Paz, but there would be relief from the tremendous poundings of the billows when once under the lee of Old California. Obedient to her helm, the Idaho now met "dead ahead" both wind and sea. The rolling measurably ceased. The pitching fore and aft continued, but the passenger list by this time cared no longer to discriminate. It was all one to all but one of their number. Loring, of the engineers, thanks to long weeks of illness of another sort, was mercifully exempted from the pangs of seasickness, but the sights and sounds between decks were more than could long be borne, and, making his way forward shortly after dawn, he had succeeded in borrowing a spare sou-wester and pair of sea boots from the second officer, and, equipped in these and a rubber coat, leaving nothing but his nose and mouth in evidence, he was boosted up the narrow stairway to the shelter of the pilot-house on the uppermost deck—the Idaho had no bridge—and there he saw the sun come up to the meridian and the sea go gradually down as the steamer found smoother waters under the lee of San Ildefonso. Only lightly laden, the stanch little craft had well-nigh "jumped out of her boots," as the jovial skipper expressed it, and now, all brine and beaming satisfaction after his long hours of stormy vigil, he clapped Loring on the shoulder, complimented him on his possession of a "sea stomach" and ordered coffee served forthwith. They were steaming slowly along at half-speed now, taking a breathing spell before attempting the next round, and the captain waxed confidential.

"What's wrong with that pretty little niece?" he asked. "She was bright enough the day they came aboard on our up trip. Now, the stewardess tells me she

fainted dead away and has been begging to be put ashore all night."

Loring couldn't say.

"But you helped carry her down, you and Turnbull. The stewardess says you were both very kind to her, where her own people neglected her. I didn't fancy that scrub Escalante. Do you know anything about him or her own people?"

"Nothing—to speak of," said Loring.

"Fernandez, one of those young Guaymas swells, says the mother was own sister to De la Cruz—married against his wishes when she was a mere girl—died a few years later, and that Don Ramon offered to adopt and educate her little girl, but only lately would the Escalantes give her up. All I know is that she's too damned miserable about something else to be even seasick like the rest of 'em. You'd a-been down there with Turnbull if you hadn't just had more'n your share of illness," added he, with the mariner's slight disapprobation of the landsman who defies initiations of Neptune.

"Very possibly," said Loring.

"The purser tells me Escalante gave him a little packet belonging to her—very valuable, which he ordered kept in the safe until their agent should call for it at 'Frisco."

"Indeed!" said Loring, looking up in quick interest.

"Fact," said the skipper. "Now, have some more coffee? I'm going to turn in for forty winks. Let the steward know when you want anything. Nobody else will. We've got to face some more rollers after awhile. I dassen't go inside Carmen Island."

But Loring had something more engrossing to think of than breakfast or luncheon. So there was a little packet in the purser's safe, was there? Valuable and not to be delivered except to their agent in 'Frisco. It was in Pancha's name, yet not subject to Pancha's order. Why that discrimination? And it was given the purser by Escalante—brother of *the* Escalante—another brother of the accomplished sharper of Sancho's ranch. A precious trinity of blood relations were these! Small wonder Don Ramon, had opposed his girl sister's union with one of their number. Now, what on earth could that small packet contain, and was it likely that the valuables were any more valuable than those snatched from his saddle-bags the night of the assault at Gila Bend?—the watch and diamonds

of the late Captain Nevins now vanished into thin air, apparently, for not a trace of him had appeared since the night he rode away from Camp Cooke.

In genuine distress of mind, Loring had written from Yuma, as soon as the doctor would permit, to the address penned by Nevins in presence of the court, informing that vagabond officer's wife that the valuables he had been charged to place in her hands had been forcibly taken from him, after he himself had been assaulted and stricken senseless; that every effort had been made to recover them, but without success; that he deplored their loss and her many misfortunes, and begged to be informed if he could serve her in any other way. The doctors had promised him that he would be restored by a sea voyage. It would be three weeks, probably, before he could reach San Francisco, and meantime he knew from the captain's admission that she was probably in need.

"No one," wrote Loring, "is dependent upon me, and I beg your acceptance as a loan, as a temporary accommodation, or as anything you please, of the inclosed draft." (It covered nearly every dollar he happened to have to his credit in the bank at San Francisco, though he had pay accounts still collectible.) It took nearly ten days for answer to reach him, and Loring hid himself away to read it when the letter came, addressed in a hand he knew too well:

> "Naomi, my beloved sister, is prostrated by her sorrows and anxieties," it began, "and I must be her amanuensis—I who would die for her, yet who shrink from this task, well knowing, though she does not, how hard it is to write to one to whom I have given perhaps such infinite pain. Indeed, I should not have had courage to write had she not required it of me, had not your most generous offer and action demanded response. But for your aid my heartbroken sister and I would by this time have had no roof to cover our heads. These people had refused to house us longer. As soon as she is well enough to move and I can obtain the means from Eastern friends we shall sail for New Orleans, where she expects to find friends and employment, and she bids me say that within the year you shall be repaid. Meantime the thought that you, too, have been made a sufferer, all on account of that unprincipled scoundrel who has deceived and deserted her, weighs upon her spirits as it does on mine. It is not the loss of the jewels (though we would have been beyond the possibility of want had they reached her) that we mourn; it is that one whom I fear I have sorely angered, perhaps past all forgiveness, should have to suffer so much more on our account, and yet if you only knew—if I could only explain! But this

is futile. Despise me if you will, yet believe that my gratitude is beyond words.

"GERALDINE ALLYN.

"P. S.—Should you care to see—sister on your arrival we shall probably still be here."

Then there had come, not to him but to the post surgeon at Yuma, another letter just before Loring started down the Colorado. The doctor was with his patient at the moment, and the superscription caught the latter's eye. The doctor changed color and looked embarrassed as he read. Evidently he did not desire to be questioned, nor was he, at the time, for Loring had a way of thinking before he spoke, but as the doctor completed certain injunctions at parting, the engineer turned full upon him:

"Any news of Nevins in the letter you got this morning?"

The doctor flushed, looked bothered and confused, then finally fished the letter from an inner pocket.

"Read it yourself," said he, and turned away. It was from Miss Allyn. It apologized for intruding on a stranger, on his time and patience, but she knew he had been Mr. Loring's medical adviser, and she felt compelled to make certain inquiries, her sister being still unable to write for herself. The doctor was probably aware that Mr. Loring had written apprising them of the loss of certain articles of great value that had been intrusted to his care and intended for them. He had expressed the utmost sorrow and had tendered certain reimbursement (that check was for two hundred dollars, not a cent less), not a fortieth part of the value of the lost articles, probably, but now they were in receipt of a letter from Captain Nevins that must have come by private hand to San Francisco, telling them that he must go forth to seek his fortunes anew; that his wife would never hear from him until he could come with full hands; that he had sent her every penny and possession he had—enough to keep her in comfort—and if Lieutenant Loring did not promptly deliver the same to take legal steps to compel him to do so, as he, Nevins, was now convinced the officer might appropriate them to his own use, if he could find any way to cover his breach of trust, such as swearing they were stolen from him. Captain Nevins had written other things in condemnation of Mr. Loring which neither Mrs. Nevins nor herself could believe; but—it did seem strange that an officer could find no safe method of sending valuable jewels when so much depended on his fidelity.

Loring read no further. His blue eyes were blazing already and his face was white with wrath when he returned the missive to his friend, who, knowing nothing of Loring's past infatuation for the writer, wondered at sight of his emotion.

"Why, Loring," said he, "you take this shallow girl too seriously. It's the way with women all over the world. They can never wholly acquit a man of complicity when they have suffered a loss. If that package were with you on the Idaho and she was to go down in midocean and the jewelry with her, some women would say you scuttled the ship in order to rob them."

The doctor's name, it must be observed, is unrecorded, because of the extremity of his cynicism. He went back to Yuma and his duties and stowed that letter away, to be answered later on. What the writer said her sister desired most to know was whether Mr. Loring had sustained any injury that might affect his mind or memory, and the doctor sniffed indignantly at the notion while we read, yet marveled much at the effect that half-uttered accusation had on his usually calm, self-poised patient. He spoke of it to Turnbull when that veteran came hurrying in by stage and followed Loring down the murky stream, only just in time to catch the steamer, but Turnbull paid faint heed. Loring was still weak, he said, and a man of sensitive honor might well be wrathful at such insinuations.

And now as Loring clung to the rail upon the lofty deck and gazed out over the waste of tumbling waters toward the barren shores, he was thinking deeply of that letter, of the strange bent of mind that could dictate such unjustifiable suggestion—if not accusation. He was thinking, too, of Pancha and that little packet in the purser's safe, when suddenly that officer himself came popping up the narrow stairway and poked his unprotected head into the whistling wind.

"Lieutenant, come below and have a bite while we're here off Ildefonso. We'll be turning handsprings in half an hour," and Loring followed to the steward's cuddy where a smoking luncheon awaited them, and the silent soldier fell to with the appetite that follows fever. Purser and steward looked on with admiration.

"I'll prescribe a course of typhoid to the next friend of mine that contemplates a voyage like this," said the former presently. "It made you invulnerable, but was it typhoid?"

"No—some head trouble."

"Sunstruck?" queried the purser. "Hot as it is, that don't often happen in Arizona—too dry."

"Struck, but not by sun—pistol-butt, perhaps," said Loring. "Night attack of Gila Bend—robbers."

"Oh, Lord, yes! I remember. I heard about that," said the genial purser. "Got away with some money, didn't they?"

"No money, but with a valuable package," and the blue eyes were fixed intently on the purser as he spoke, while the steward uncorked another pint of Margaux. "A tin box about eight by three, containing a watch and jewels. You sometimes get such for safekeeping, do you not?"

"Got one now," was the prompt reply, as the officer smacked his lips and held out his glass for another sip of the red wine of France. "Old Escalante gave it to me at Guaymas. It's the little señorita's."

CHAPTER XII.

The afternoon and night that followed brought little comfort to the cabin passengers. Not till nearly dark did the steamer find the shelter of another island, and all the intervening hours she wallowed in the trough of the sea, with the wind abeam, and by the time the heights of Carmen Island loomed between them and the red glow of the sunset skies, Turnbull had thrice wished himself in hotter climes than even Arizona, and could only feebly damn his junior for coming down to ask if there were not something he could do for him.

"Yes, take this pistol and shoot me," moaned the sufferer. "No, of course I don't want brandy and water, nor you nor anybody. It's simply scandalous for you to be up and well. Go 'way!" And though Loring sorely needed counsel, he felt that Turnbull was in no mood for talk, and so climbed back on deck again. He had made up his mind to tell the purser the whole story and to ask him to examine the contents of the package. All the livelong night the Idaho plowed and careened through the rolling seas, gaining scant relief off Santa Catalina and San José, but when in the undimmed splendor of the morning sun she swept proudly into the placid, land-locked harbor of old La Paz, Loring was the only man among her passengers to appear on deck. Even after she dropped anchor and one or two bedraggled victims were hoisted from below and dropped over the side to be rowed ashore, none of the women of the gay Guaymas party was able to climb the stairs. The wind was gone by sundown, and the Idaho once more steering coastwise for Cape San Lucas. The night wore on and Loring was still alone when, just as the tinkle of the ship's bell told that nine o'clock had come, with a soft, warm air drifting off the land, a fragile little form issued slowly from the companionway, and the stewardess smiled invitingly on the blue-eyed officer, as though begging him to aid her feeble charge to a seat.

"I have brought the señorita up for half an hour. I made her come," said she, as she dumped the pile of shawls into a spreading chair and began preparing a nest, while Pancha, turning away at sight of Loring, sank to the end of the bench, the very seat she occupied as they put to sea from Guaymas. But now it was Loring who tendered his arm, and, calmly ignoring her evident if unspoken protest, aided in lifting her from the bench and seating her in the depths of the easy reclining chair. The stewardess, with practiced hand, carefully tucked the rugs about her, and bidding the little damsel make the most of the soft, salt air, while

she herself ran below to prepare her chocolate, would have gone at once but for Pancha's trembling, yet restraining hand. The child seemed to cling to her in desperation. Rapidly and in low tone she poured forth a torrent of pleading, and the kind-hearted woman looked about her in perplexity and distress.

"What can I do, sir?" said she to Loring, in English. "This poor little thing has eaten nothing since she came aboard. She has cried herself sick. She is as weak as a baby and must have food, yet she will not let me go."

"Stay with her until she is calmer," said Loring. "I'll get what is needed."

"But I cannot. The other ladies call for me incessantly."

A little disk of gold was slipped quickly into the disengaged hand. "Let them call awhile but don't you go," was the double answer.

It is odd to note how soon the troubled waves subside along those summer shores. The Idaho was only lazily bowing and courtesying to Old Neptune now. A long, languorous heave of the billows, as though worn out with the furious lashing of the last few days, was the only greeting of the broadening sea as the steamer rounded the southeast headland and slowly bore away for Cape San Lucas. Little Pancha's dusky head was resting wearily, yet resignedly, on the pillow, her hand still clasping that of the stewardess, as an attendant from below appeared with a little tray and some scalding hot chocolate, some tender slices of the breast of chicken, some tempting little dainties were quickly set before her. "Make her take them," whispered Loring from the shadows, and, once the effort was made and the "ice broken," the dark-eyed invalid ate almost eagerly. At three bells the stewardess was allowed to slip away for just a little more chocolate, and, glancing furtively, fearfully about her, Pancha was aware of a dim masculine form seated not ten feet away. She knew it was Loring, and yet could not move. She felt that he must presently rise and accost her, and she shrank from the meeting in dismay, yet soon began to look again, and to note that he had not changed his attitude. Apparently indifferent to her presence, he was gazing dreamily out across the slowly-heaving billows, wherein the stars were dancing. The stewardess was gone full quarter of an hour, and in all that time he never even once glanced her way, and poor Pancha found her eyes flitting toward him every little while in something almost akin to fascination. Could it be that he had—forgotten?—or that he did not recognize her? Yet she had heard how both Loring and the other, that older officer, the Colonel Turnbull, had carried her below as she slowly rallied from her fainting spell two

nights before. Surely she thought she remembered seeing recollection or recognition in the eyes of both, yet now when he had opportunity to accuse her, not one word did he attempt. She was warmed and comforted by the chocolate and the food. She enjoyed the second cup just brought her. She begged the stewardess to stay, yet only faintly protested when told she had to go. Once again Pancha was alone when the chiming tinkle, four bells, told that ten o'clock had come, and then for a moment she turned cold again and shrank within her rugs and wraps, for Loring slowly and deliberately rose and looked toward her. Now he was coming. Now he would speak. Now he would demand of her to explain her part in the wicked thing that had happened. She dreaded, yet she longed to say, for she had a story that she could eagerly tell—to him. For a moment her heart lay still, and then leaped and fluttered uncontrollably. Slowly the shadowy fellow-passenger had found his feet. Steadily he looked, as though straight at her, for nearly a minute, then as slowly and deliberately turned his back and walked away forward. When, nearly an hour later, the stewardess came to lead her below, and the purser and one of the ship's officers had both been to inquire if she felt better, and to tell her to be of good cheer, she'd be all right on the morrow and trolling for dolphin on the blue Pacific, though she saw Loring slowly pacing up and down, though twice he passed so close to her that by stretching forth her tiny foot she could have checked or tripped him, not once again did she detect so much as a glance at her.

And yet, when a little later the stewardess tucked her in her white berth, and invented messages and inquiries from her prostrated aunt and cousins in neighboring staterooms, that designing woman wove a tale about the blue-eyed, silent officer pacing the lonely deck—how anxious he was to do something for the little invalid—how eagerly he had gone and ordered for her, and superintended the preparation of that dainty little supper—how he had bidden the stewardess to stay by her and soothe her, and was so deeply interested. High and low, rich and poor, they love romance, these tender hearts, and for that reason, doubtless, no reference did Madame Flores make of the five-dollar gold-piece that had found its way to her ready palm. "And he spoke Spanish beautifully, did the Señor Teniente," said Madame Flores, whereat did Pancha's heart begin to flutter anew, for that meant that he must have heard and understood her pleadings.

And so it happened that till long after midnight the child lay wide-eyed and awake, listening to that steady, measured tread upon the upper deck. Strange and sad and eventful had been that young life thus far. What strange new thing had

Fate in store for her now?

The Idaho dropped anchor at San Lucas and put off a passenger and took on the mails—two bags with flanks as flat as the sandy strand on which the long white line of breakers beat in ceaseless, soothing melody. The broad blue ocean glistened under the sunshine of another day, and late in the afternoon one or two pallid and attenuated shapes were aided to the deck, where Pancha had been reclining ever since noon, and the captain had come and rallied her upon her big, pathetic eyes and hollow cheeks, and coaxed her to promise to play her guitar that evening, and the purser had been polite and the stewardess had brought up an appetizing lunch, and Colonel Turnbull put in an appearance toward sundown (a grewsome face was his) and all this time Mr. Loring was either briskly pacing the deck or reading in a sheltered nook back of the purser's cabin, but never once did he address her or intrude upon her meditations, and Pancha's spirits and courage—or was it innate coquetry?—began to ferment. That evening no less than five passengers appeared at table, though all five did not remain through the several courses. That evening Pancha was again tucked in her chair, and Cousin Inez was aided from her room and placed beside her, and very attentive was Mr. Traynor, the purser, though fair Inez was but languid and unresponsive still, and kept her veil about her face, and Colonel Turnbull came and poured champagne for both with lavish hand, and vowed it was specific against further assaults of the salty seas, and still Mr. Loring never spoke a word. With the sparkling sunshine of yet another day, the little maid was early on the shining deck, fresh from its matutinal ablutions, and there was Loring taking his early exercise, striding up and down, up and down, and drinking in the glorious, invigorating sea air; but even now he came no nearer, and she who feared at first to venture to her accustomed seat, lest he might take advantage of her solitude and come and ask things or say things she could not bear to hear, finally sidled along one side while he was patrolling the other, made her timid way to the stern and stood there clinging to the flagstaff, and became absorbed in the rush of the foaming, boiling waters unrolling a gradually narrowing streak of dazzling white through the blue-green waste of billows, all sparkling in the slanting sunshine. Wheeling in flapping circles overhead, skimming the crested waves, settling down and lazily floating on the heaving flood, so many dots of snow upon the sapphire, the flock of gulls sailed onward with the ship, white scavengers of the sea, and sometimes dropped so close to the rail on wide extended wing that Pancha could plainly see the eager little red beads of eyes, could almost bury her soft cheek in the thick plumage of their fleecy breasts. Away out toward the invisible coast a three-master was bowling along under full spread of canvas, and, midway

between, some huge black fish were plunging through the swelling brine. Early as it was the deck hands had cast astern the stout trolling line, and far in their wake the spinning, silvery bait came leaping and flashing from the northward slope of each succeeding wave, and Pancha, who had seen the previous day a dolphin hauled in to die in swiftly changing, brilliant hues upon the deck, tested the taut lanyard with her slender fingers, wondering whether she alone could triumph over the frantic struggles of the splendid fish, or what she would do if she found she could not. It was an hour to breakfast time. Only Loring and herself had yet appeared on deck, and she stole a peep at him. There he was tramping up and down as though he had to finish a thousand laps within a given time, and stood at least a hundred laps behind. Four days earlier the child looked with terror to the possibility of his even drawing near her. Now she was beginning to wonder if he never would again. Five days before she could have sobbed her heart out, praying not to be subjected to the possibility of his asking her a question. Now she was wondering if he did not even care to ask—if indeed she would ever have a chance to tell.

She did not know, poor little maid, that late the previous evening, after consultation between Turnbull and Loring, the latter had asked Mr. Traynor to place a packet of his within the safe, and that then and there Traynor had permitted him a peep at the valuable parcel to be delivered to Escalante's representative in San Francisco. Loring had been allowed to "heft" it in his hand, to curiously study the seals and superscription, to satisfy himself it could not be the tin case stolen from him at Sancho's, for this one was smaller, yet not to satisfy himself it did not contain the missing watch and diamonds, for it was big enough to hold them. Pancha did not know that the two officers had agreed upon a plan of action to be put in operation the moment they were within the Golden Gate. She did not dream that the thoughts of the silent officer dwelt on her and her past intently as did hers on him. She was heartsick, lonely and oppressed with anxieties, such as seldom fall to the lot of maidens of sixteen, yet her heart was beating with the hope that lives in buoyant health and youth. She had left the father whom she devotedly loved and had believed all that a father could or should be, had received his parting blessing at Hermosillo and his faltering promise to soon be with her—at Guaymas. She had been radiant with the thought of soon again springing to his arms when the Idaho stopped there on the northward trip. She had been stunned and stricken when told it was his wish she should go with her cousins to San Francisco, dwell with them there, be educated there, and without hope of again seeing him until he could come to her perhaps late in the summer. She had then been told that his life was threatened and that

hated Gringos and suspicious compatriots, both, were thirsting for his blood. She had been told that she herself was in danger of arrest for complicity in robberies at Gila Bend—she, who had overheard the plot to meet the stage, murder the passengers and rob the mails, at least that was what the woman whom she was bidden to respect as her stepmother had fearfully told her and asked if there were no way in which she could warn Blake. How was she to know, poor child, what would result? How could she help shrinking from sight of the officers she had watched with such eager interest at Sancho's, when she was later told they were seeking her father's life—told that, could they force a confession from her, nothing on earth could save him? Yet here was the gray-haired colonel devoting himself to Inez and being kind to her own trembling self. Here was the Teniente Loring who had been lovely to her, said the stewardess, until he saw her terror, her shrinking from him, and now when she longed to tell him her simple story, he would not come near her. Of the packet and its contents she knew next to nothing. Of their intention to secure it and, if need be, her arrest with it, the moment they reached the wharf at San Francisco, she could not dream. That that fated packet was destined never to reach the Golden Gate, that every plan and project, based on the safe return of the Idaho to port, was doomed to die, no one of her passengers or crew could possibly have predicted this beaming April morning as she cleft the billows on her northward way. Pancha was only wondering how and when Loring's silence would end, when within the minute the end came.

CHAPTER XIII.

The waiters were just beginning to set the tables for breakfast in the "saloon" beneath the broad skylight. The crew had ceased the morning "squilgeeing" and swabbing forward, and were busy stowing away mops, buckets and brooms. One or two passengers had crawled up the companion way and dropped into seats amidships, staring in envy, if not disapproval, at the swinging stride of the young officer whose cheeks were beginning to glow again with the flush of health, and Pancha, clinging to her perch at the stern, after following him with her eyes far up the deck until she knew he had almost reached the point where he suddenly faced about in his swift march, again resolutely turned her back upon the Idaho and all that appertained to her, and found herself for the fortieth time gazing out over the glistening wake, and for the first time with a thrill of excitement. The taut trolling line was snapping and swaying, and far astern something gleaming in the slant of the sunshine came springing into view from the crest of a wave, then diving into the depths of the next and darting to right and left beneath the heaving waters—a dolphin! a beauty! she knew in an instant, and grasping the cord she strove with all her strength to haul in. For a second or two it came readily enough, then with sudden jerk, whizzed taut again, as the game victim made a magnificent dash for liberty. Again she laid hold and, bracing her slender feet, threw her whole weight on the line and pulled away; again with only temporary success, for the dolphin only shook himself and struggled, but suddenly darting forward, he as suddenly slackened the line and Pancha, who had been pulling for dear life with set teeth and straining muscles, fell suddenly back and was spared a hard tumble only by a pair of strong, clasping arms that quickly righted, if they did not as quickly release, her, and Pancha, furiously blushing, excitedly panting, could only show her white teeth one instant as she fluttered out a faint "Gracias" and wriggled out of the gentleman's embrace, then with the instinct of her sport-loving race, grabbed again for the line and now there was seasoned muscle behind her, and the dolphin knew he had met his master. Hand over hand they pulled away, five, ten, fifteen fathoms, and the dripping cord curled upon the deck, and at last the gleaming beauty of the Pacific seas came leaping into view and swinging at the stern, and then Pancha, with sparkling eyes and eagerly flushing cheeks, ducked out of the way as Loring skillfully swung her prize aboard and sent the magnificent fellow gasping and flapping upon the deck.

And so at last the spell was broken. He had spoken slowly and with grave kindness in his modulated voice a few words of the stately and sonorous tongue she loved, and now in the fresh, sweet air of the morning, in the gladness of the ocean breeze and the heyday of life and youth, these two stood there at the taffrail of the Idaho, she so slender, dark and willowly, he almost Saxon in his blue-eyed, fair-haired, fair-skinned manliness, alone with each other and their prize. The child who had fainted at sight of him less than a week agone, was peeping shyly up at him now, and thinking how good a face was that, so fresh and fair and strong, with its smooth-shaven chin and cheeks, its round white throat, and the flawless teeth that glistened under the curling mustache whenever he opened his lips to speak, and that showed so seldom at any other time. Not until this moment had she ever seen him smile.

The fringe of her Mexican *rebosa* had caught the button of his snugly-fitting sack coat, and it needed her deft, slim fingers to release it. Then in its frantic struggles the dolphin threatened to spring back to its native element, and Loring had to head him off and thrust him to the middle of the deck again, close to the skylight of the "saloon," and there he bade her come and watch the vivid, swiftly changing, iridescent hues of the beautiful creature, and she obediently drew near and stood bending over in mingled triumph and compassion. "*Ah, que es bonito!*" she sighed, as the frantic leapings seemed to cease and the prize lay gasping at full length, exhausted by the violence of the long battle. Presently Loring called the steward to send up for the Señorita's captive, and to serve it at the Señorita's table for breakfast, and then perhaps he might have returned to his solitary walk, but the study of Spanish is never more fascinating than when rosy lips and pearly teeth are framing the courtly phrases. Whatever the cause of her agitation the night of the meeting, whatever his preconceived idea of her complicity in the scheme that robbed him of his guard at Gila Bend and laid him low in the dust of the desert, Loring found, as the result of five days observance and reflection, that his original views had given place to doubt, and doubt at last to confidence in her utter innocence. Knowing what ordeal was before him at the end of the voyage, he had studiously avoided her, but now avoidance was no longer possible. For a few moments they stood there, saying little, for he was not practiced in the speech of Spanish, and at any time his words were few, and then he asked her if she would not like to walk. When Turnbull clambered up the stairway just as the breakfast gong was banging, he was amazed to find the Engineer and Pancha, arm in arm, pacing swiftly up and down the deck in perfect step and apparently in as perfect accord, the girl's delicate face lighted up with a glow that was not all of exercise, her wonderful eyes looking frankly into

Loring's fine, thoughtful face, her free hand gesticulating eagerly as she chattered blithely, almost ceaselessly, for Loring was a flattering listener to men or women, old or young. It was a transfigured maiden that met the sisters De la Cruz as they ventured from their staterooms to the table. Even Inez, their boasted beauty, looked sallow and wan beside her radiant cousin, and the fat duenna, their aunt, gazed in mingled astonishment and disapproval at the sight. But Pancha was the heroine of the day. Pancha's hand had caught the dolphin, and the captain showered his loud congratulations, the purser handed her to her seat, and would gladly have sidled into the chair of Señor Sepulvida, who had come aboard with them at Guaymas and kept his berth until the previous evening, yet now came forth to face the gathering company at breakfast. The skipper had placed the stout señora at his own right, with Turnbull just beyond her. To Señorita Inez he had given the left-hand seat, with Loring on her other side, and Señorita Carmen just beyond him. So there was the Engineer flanked by damsels said to enjoy no little wealth and social station, yet his blue eyes ever wandered over across and further down the table where sat Pancha with a stuffy old cigar merchant between her and their party, and that scape-grace, Sepulvida, ogling on the other hand. Two, at least, of that reassembling company deserved their appetites at breakfast. But Turnbull had no zest for anything, and the women generally only feebly toyed with their forks. The colonel had found time to seize Loring by the arm and whisper to him on the stairs:

"By Jove, young man, you're playing a deep game! D'you expect to find out anything?"

"I have—already," said Loring.

"The devil you have! What?"

"She's innocent—utterly!"

And that bright morning was followed by a cloudless afternoon and a sweet, still, starlit evening, and by this time all men and all women were on deck, and the Idaho was foaming swiftly on through the summer seas, and people went below reluctantly at night, and woke to new and brighter life on the morrow; and Loring was up with the sun and drinking deep draughts of old ocean's ozone, as he paced the decks till Pancha came. And one day followed another, and Turnbull read and yawned and dozed and tried to talk to the charming señoritas, but couldn't muster enough Castilian, and Traynor chalked the decks for "horse billiards" and shuffleboard, and everybody took a hand at times, and one

evening, despite the havoc moist salt air plays with catgut, Pancha's guitar and that of the purser were brought into requisition, and Pancha was made to sing, a thing she didn't do too well as yet, and Pancha knew it without asking when she looked in Loring's eyes, and no power or persuasion could make her try again—until long, long after.

They were having now an ideal voyage, so far as wind and weather were concerned, but the Señoritas de la Cruz declared it the stupidest they'd ever known, and the officers—*los Americanos*—the least attentive or attractive of those with whom they had ever sailed. And everybody seemed to long for the sight of the green headlands of the Golden Gate and the terraced slopes of San Francisco—all save two; Pancha, to whom the ending of that voyage meant the ending of the sweetest days her life had ever known, and the beginning of a school drudgery she dreaded, and Loring, to whom the return to San Francisco meant the taking up anew of a tangled case that had become hateful to him, to whom there was the prospect of a meeting that he would gladly avoid, to whom there was coming an inevitable parting, the thought of which oppressed him strangely, and he could not yet tell why.

The marvelous green of the California bluffs spanned the horizon for miles on their starboard hand one radiant afternoon as they went below to the captain's dinner, the last before reaching port. The sunshine had been brilliant all the day, yet there came a chilly, shivering air toward two o'clock, and the first officer shrugged his shoulders and looked dubiously ahead, but gave no other sign. Gaily they drank the skipper's health and pledged the Idaho in her best champagne. Long they lingered over the table and laughter, jest and song and story enlivened the hours that came to an end at last, and Pancha stole her little hand within Loring's arm for the last starlight walk along the now familiar decks, and lo, when they issued from the brightly-lighted saloon the stars were gone, the steamer was forging ahead through a chill mist that grew thicker with every moment, and as half-speed was ordered and the mournful notes of the whistle groaned out throbbingly over the leaden sea, she swayed uneasily over a heavy ground swell that careened her deeper and deeper as the mist thickened to fog, and oilskins and sou'westers came out and dark figures went dripping about the decks, and Loring fetched his uniform cape from below and muffled in it Pancha's slender form, and for awhile they tottered up and down, then abandoned the attempt to walk, and settled in their chairs at the end of the bench, just where she had sat and clung to the white stanchion and sobbed her heart out that night in Guaymas Bay. *Ay de mi*—Pancha could have sobbed almost as hard,

though no longer in loneliness and desolation—this very night.

As early as 9.30 Señora Valdez had gone below, following her lovely nieces, and warning Pancha to come at once. It was too dark, too damp to remain there longer, but Loring begged, and the Idaho lurched and rolled sympathetically at the moment and the duenna found further argument impossible. She had to rush for her room, and later to confide her mandates as to Pancha to the stewardess, who came, peeped, and considered them ill-timed. At six bells Turnbull and a few determined, yet uncomfortable souls were consuming cognac and playing *vingt et un* in the cabin, while the lookouts were doubled on the deck and every ship's officer stood to his post. The sound of the muffled tinkle of the bell roused Pancha from the silence that had fallen on the pair.

"I must go," she murmured for perhaps the twentieth time, and yet she could not.

Once more, mournful, moaning, the deep-toned whistle poured forth its warning on the night, and before the long blast had died away, up from the depths of the dense fog bank ahead arose an echo, accentuated with sharp, staccato shrieks. Then came a sudden, startling cry at the bow; then deep down in the bowels of the ship the clang of the engine gong; then, shouts, and rushings to and fro at the hidden forecastle; and Loring started to his feet only to be hurled headlong to the deck, for, with fearful shock, some mammoth monster struck and pierced and heeled to port the stanch little coaster, and then, withdrawing from the fearful rent in her quarter, came crushing and grinding down the side, sweeping away every boat that hung at the starboard davits, ripping through the shrouds like pack-thread, and rolling and wallowing off astern amid a pandemonium of shouts for aid, and frantic screams of startled women. In one minute the great steamer had vanished as suddenly as she came, and the Idaho was settling by the bows. A signal rocket tore aloft to tell the tale of desperate peril.

"Stand by us, Santiago! Don't you see you've cut us down?" bellowed the captain through his trumpet. Again the steam-pipe roared and the mournful whistle crooned the death song. No answering signal came to cheer their hearts with hope of rescue. The great Pacific mailer was lost in the fog full half a mile away. The crew came rushing up on deck, reporting everything under water below. There was a mad dash of fear-crazed men for the boats, discipline and duty both forgotten.

Over the first officer's prostrate form they sprang at the "falls" of the sternmost —the longboat, a huge, bearded seaman in the lead. The captain, with fury in his

eye, leaped in the way, shouting blasphemy and orders to go back, and was knocked flat with a single blow. The brawny hand had seized the swaying tackle and three seamen were already scrambling into the swinging craft when a revolver cracked; the big leader threw up his hands with a yell of agony and toppled headlong upon the deck. Then a lithe figure vaulted over the longboat's gunwale. One after another three seamen came tumbling out abashed and overawed. The captain regained his feet and senses. The boat was lowered by cooler hands until it danced in safety on the waves, and one after another the women were carefully passed down to the care of him whose stern, clear-headed sense and instant action had proved their sole salvation—a landsman, Loring of the Engineers.

CHAPTER XIV.

That was a woeful night on the fog-shrouded Pacific. In less than ten minutes from the moment of the crash the Idaho's stern was lifted high, then down she dove for her final berth, untold fathoms underneath—her steadfast captain standing to his post till the last soul left the doomed and deserted wreck. It was God's mercy that limited the passenger list to a mere dozen in the first cabin and less than twenty in the second. The boat, with all the women, was pushed off from the side, the first officer taking charge. Through the fog they could dimly see the others lowered, then manned and laden. Discipline had been restored. Water and bread and blankets had been hastily passed to the longboat. The purser had found time to dive into his safe, and to load up with some, at least, of the valuable contents. There was even a faint cheer when the steamer took the final plunge. Huddled together, many of the women were weeping, all were pale with dread, but Loring and the ship's officer bade them be of good cheer. Even if they were not found by the Santiago they were but a few miles from shore. The sea, though rolling heavily, was not dangerous. They were sure of making land by morning. But there were women who could not be comforted. Their husbands or brothers were in the two smaller boats, perhaps paddling about in the darkness in vain search for the steamer that cut them down. For awhile there were answering shouts across the heaving waters. Then for half an hour the boat with the second officer, crammed with male passengers and members of the crew, kept close alongside—too close, for some of the former scrambled into the bigger craft and others tried to follow; so close that its young commander could mutter to his mate: "The captain's boat is even fuller than mine. Can't you take off half a dozen?"

But the first officer shook his head: "If the worst comes, they've got life preservers and can swim," said he. "These women would be helpless except for what we can do for 'em."

For a time they shouted in hopes of being heard aboard the Santiago, but only those who have tried it know that it is a matter of merest luck when a steamer rounding to in a fog succeeds in finding or even coming anywhere near the spot where she was in collision not ten minutes before. The Santiago's captain swore stoutly that, though badly damaged and compelled to put back to San Francisco, for three mortal hours they cruised about the scene, setting off rockets, firing

guns, sounding the whistle, listening intently with lowered boats, but never heard a sound from the wreck, never until two days after knew the fate of the vessel they had cut down. At last the first officer, fearful for his precious freight, bade his four oarsmen to pull for shore, his little pocket compass pointing the way. At dawn they heard the signals of a steamer through the dripping mist, and raised their voices in prolonged shout. An hour more and they were lifted, numb and wearied, but, oh, so thankful, to the deck of a coaster creeping up from Wilmington and Santa Barbara, and were comforted with chocolate and coffee, while for long, long hours the steamer cruised up and down, to and fro, seeking for their companions and never desisting until again the pall of night spread over the leaden sea. Late the following morning the fog rolled back before the waking breeze and the Broderick steamed hopefully on for the Golden Gate, and by nightfall was moored at her accustomed dock, there to be met by the tidings that, while the second officer managed to beach his boat in safety, the captain's overloaded craft was swamped in the breakers off Point Pinos, and that brave old Turnbull had lost his life, dragged under by drowning men. At Monterey the people thought the longboat too must have overturned, and that all the women had perished. The Santiago, nearly sinking, had only just reached port. The beach above Point Pinos was thronged with people searching in the surf for the bodies of the victims, and the captain of the Idaho was broken hearted, if not well-nigh crazed. The news of the safety of the women flew from street to street, fast as the papers could speed their extras. Loving friends came pouring down to meet and care for the survivors on the Broderick. The owners of the Idaho hastened to congratulate and commend their first officer and praise his seamanship and wisdom. The women were conveyed in carriages to the homes of friends or cared for by the company, and after a brief handclasp and parting word with Pancha, whose pathetic eyes haunted him for days, Mr. Loring took a cab and drove alone to headquarters. Evidently the story of the panic and its prompt suppression had not yet been told.

And then for at least five days the papers teemed with details of that marine disaster, and public-spirited citizens started a subscription for a presentation to the first officer, through whose heroism and determination was checked what promised to be a mad scene of disorder and dismay, such as ensued when the Arctic went down and that "stern, brave mate, Gourlay, whom the sailors were wont to obey" was not there to check the undisciplined rush to the boats. For forty-eight hours and thereafter the first officer modestly declared he had merely done his duty, sir, and no good seaman would have done less. The public dinner to be given in his honor, however, languished as a project on the later arrival of

survivors from Monterey, and then inquiries began to be made for Lieutenant Loring and new stories to appear in papers that had not already committed themselves to other versions of the affair, and then it transpired that something had gone amiss at Department Headquarters. Lieutenant Loring, after an interview with the commanding general, had hastened to Monterey in search of the captain and purser. The former he found there prostrate and actually flighty, so much so that he could give no coherent answer to questions propounded to him. In the marine hospital, suffering from a gunshot wound, was the huge sailor who had felled the commander to the deck in the rush for the remaining boats, a rush in which he was ringleader, and a piteous tale he told—that he had been shot by a passenger whom he was trying to prevent from getting into the boat they were holding for the women. The gallant little second officer had gone to his wife and children in the southern part of the State, and was not there to tell the truth. The captain was almost delirious. The first officer in San Francisco had been tacitly posing as a marine lion, and could not well be expected to volunteer information that might rob him of his laurels. The survivors among the passengers were scattered by this time, and the purser, whose testimony might be of great value, had disappeared. "Must be in 'Frisco," said the agent who had been sent down to see that every man was furnished with clothing and money at the company's expense, and sent on his way measurably comforted. "Traynor had a desperate squeak for life," said the agent. "He was in the captain's boat when she sunk and was weighed down with his money packages, belted about him underneath his coat, and was hauled ashore more dead than alive, and some of his valuables were lost—he couldn't tell how much."

And this was the man Mr. Loring most needed to see. There had come to Department Headquarters a person representing himself as the San Francisco agent of the Escalante brothers, presenting a written order for a valuable package which had been given the purser for safe keeping—had been locked by him in his safe, and which now could be found nowhere. Mr. Traynor had declared to the owners that after getting the women aboard the boat he had taken all the money from the safe and such packages as it was possible to carry, and tossed three or four to Loring as he stood balancing himself on a thwart and clinging to the fall, and that he was sure one of them was that of the Señorita Pancha, for she was at the moment clasping Loring's knees and imploring him to sit down. The boat was alternately lifting high and sinking deep as the great waves rolled by, and Traynor, while admitting haste and excitement, declared that he could almost swear that Loring received three packages and one of them must have been that now demanded by the Escalante's agent. Hence the visit of that somber

person to headquarters and his importunate appeals to Loring, who told him the whole story was absurd.

But then this agent had appealed to the general, and that officer, whose manner the day of Loring's return to duty had been marked by odd constraint, sent for the Engineer and required of him a statement as to the truth or falsity of these allegations, and when Loring, startled and indignant, answered "False, of course, sir," and demanded what further accusation there was, the chief tossed aside the paper folder he was nervously fingering, sprang up and began to pace the floor, a favorite method, said those who long had known him, of working off steam when he was much excited.

"I can't—discuss this painful matter, Mr. Loring," said he, testily. "You'll have to see Colonel Strain, the adjutant-general. This deplorable loss of Colonel Turnbull has upset everybody."

So Loring went to Colonel Strain, a man to whom he was but slightly known, and then it was developed that a young lady wearing mourning, a very lovely girl, so every one described her, had called no less than three times to inquire if Mr. Loring were not returned. Once only had the general seen her, but Strain was three times her listener, and a patient one he proved, and a most assiduous friend and sympathizer for several days, until, as it subsequently transpired, in some way matters reached the ears of Mrs. Strain. The colonel very pointedly told the engineer lieutenant that the lady claimed to have received letters proving that he was still in possession of the Nevins jewels while sojourning at Fort Yuma, had endeavored to compromise the matter by the tender of a check for two hundred dollars, which in her destitute condition her sister had felt compelled to accept until she could have legal advice, "and this," said Colonel Strain, "followed now by the claim of this Mexican agent, has created such a scandal in the general's eyes that you cannot too speedily take steps to assure him of your innocence, which of course you should have no difficulty in doing unless—unless—" and the colonel coughed dubiously.

For a moment Loring stood there like one in a daze. Good God! Geraldine Allyn his accuser! The girl who had wronged him so bitterly before! The girl whom he had sought to aid when he found her well-nigh destitute! Gradually the whole force of the situation dawned upon him. With Turnbull dead, the captain daft and Traynor telling the strange story of his (Loring's) eagerness to examine the Escalante packet early on the voyage, and now declaring that he had given it into Loring's keeping! Who in the name of Heaven was left to speak for him? Loring

had come a stranger to this distant station. He had chosen to be sent at once to duty in a desert land. He was personally as little known to his superiors here at San Francisco as though they had never met. Even as the men began about the steamship offices and on the streets and in the hotels whither the Idaho's few passengers had told the tale, to speak of Walter Loring as the man who really quelled the panic, if not a mutiny, and saved the lives of a score of helpless men and women, that officer stood accused before his comrades of the army of breach of trust, of mean embezzlement, of low-down theft and trickery, and not a man could he name to help to prove him innocent. Blake, to be sure, was at Yuma, but what could he establish save that the stage had been attacked, Loring left alone, and when the cavalry returned there lay the Engineer apparently unconscious, the empty saddle-bag beside him. Blake had seen no robbers. Blake suspected Sancho of every villainy, but could convict him of none. Traynor, the purser, whether he believed or disbelieved his own story that he had passed that packet down to Loring, could truthfully declare that Loring had displayed most mysterious and unaccountable interest in it. One talk with Pancha, it seems, had banished Loring's intention of confiding his suspicion and the whole story, in fact, to Mr. Traynor. And so there was no friend to whom he could turn. Five days after his arrival in San Francisco Loring found himself facing charges of the gravest nature, for Traynor, being sent for, told his story to the general in person, and Loring stood alone.

CHAPTER XV.

April had gone, and May and June was well-nigh half over. The old semaphore of Telegraph Hill would have worn itself out signaling sidewheel steamers had it still been in operation. The transcontinental railway was stretching out up the valley of the Platte toward the center of the continent, but Wells-Fargo, and the pony express charging a dollar a letter, were the only transcontinental rapid transit of the day. People still went to and from the distant East by way of Aspinwall and Panama, and the big boats of the Pacific mail were crowded, going or coming; and one bright June day two women in mourning were escorted aboard the Sonora and shown to their little stateroom, one a decidedly pretty girl, the other a sad-faced, careworn, delicate looking widow, ten or twelve years apparently the senior. They sailed with only one friend to see them off, an aide-de-camp of the commanding general, yet not without much curiosity on part of the younger woman as to the composition of the passenger list. Even before they were beyond the rocky scarp of Alcatraz, for few things are impossible to a pretty woman, she had been able to secure a copy and to say, with bated breath, to the languid invalid: "At least he's not going on this ship. It might be better if he were." For Miss Geraldine Allyn had not lost faith in her power to charm.

And one reason why the "he" referred to was not going on this ship was that the sisters Nevins and Allyn had "booked" their passage nearly two weeks before, it being useless to remain longer on the Pacific coast in hopes of finding the fugitive husband, for the consul at Guaymas was authorized to report the death at Hermosillo, "through wounds and exposure, of the gallant but unfortunate captain, whose mind must have given way under his accumulation of troubles." A seal ring that Nevins used to wear and some letters were all he had to leave, and these had been duly forwarded to the address of his wife, whose pathetic inquiries for further particulars elicited nothing more reliable than that Nevins was dead and buried, and that was the end of him. The quartermaster got "transportation" for them to New Orleans. A sum sufficient for their immediate needs was placed in their hands. Another sum, which did not receive immediate acknowledgment, was also sent to the disconsolate widow, and now they were going, and that was all. Going, too, was Loring, though not on that trip, shaking, so to speak, the dust of California from his feet, a silent but much-disgusted

man. For nearly five weeks he had lived a life that would have tried the endurance of the patriarch of Holy Writ and wrecked the sunny nature of a Tapley. Hounded day after day by the so-called agent of the Escalantes with insolent demands for property that was never in Loring's possession; threatened with arrest if he did not make restitution or propose an equivalent; sent practically to Coventry by officials at headquarters, to whom he was too proud or too sensitive to dilate upon his wrongs or to tell more than once the straight story of his innocence; saved from military arrest only by the "stalwart" letter written by the Yuma surgeon in response to his urgent appeals; comforted measurably by Blake's eloquent, but emphatically insubordinate, outburst at the expense of department headquarters; unable to bring to bear for nearly five weeks the mass of testimony as to character forthcoming from the superintendent and officers at West Point, and the letters of classmates and comrades who knew him and felt that the charges must be false, our Engineer passed through an ordeal the like of which few men have had to encounter. Then the unexpected happened. The captain of the Idaho slowly recovered his mind and strength, and with convalescence came keen recollection of all that had occurred. He too made full report to the owners of Loring's coolness and determination the night of the wreck, and was amazed to be told of the charges against that officer.

"Who says so? Who makes such accusations?" he demanded angrily, and was informed that his friend and shipmate, Purser Traynor, was the person; whereat the big skipper gave a long, long whistle, looked dazed again, smote his thigh with a heavy fist, and presently said, "Just you wait a little;" wherewith he took himself off. Traynor and the first officer had been very "thick" for a fortnight or so, though that dinner had never come off. Traynor and the first officer had both been promised excellent berths the moment the new steamer arrived that was to take the place of the Idaho. But the captain went cruising out beyond Sacramento, where the purser had a little nest and brood, and came back later with a tale he poured into the ears of the company, the result of which was that Traynor was informed he would be wise to seek other employment; there would be no place for him on the new Montana; and Traynor took first boat for the Columbia, and got far away from San Francisco. No specific charges had been laid at his door, said the owners, when questioned. Nothing had been proved, nothing probably would be, that they knew of; but the captain had sailed with Traynor several years, and had views of his own as to that gentleman's integrity, which when communicated to Mr. Traynor did not seem to surprise him, and remained uncontradicted.

Then came the captain to department headquarters. The British sailor has scant reverence for soldiers of his own land and less for those of any other, no matter what the rank, and this particular son of the sea was more Briton than Yankee despite the fact that he had "sailed the California trade" long years of his life and had taken out his papers in the early statehood of that wonderful land. Ever since the days of Stockton and Kearny he had fed fat the ancient grudge he bore the army and steered as clear of soldier association as was possible for a man whose ship was dependent in great measure on army patronage. Days before his unheralded coming to general headquarters the rumors of Loring's bravery and coolness the night of the wreck had been floating about the building. But the Engineer had drawn into his shell. He came and went to and from the office assigned to him, working apparently over field reports and maps, and never entered another room in the building unless sent for. It was believed that he had written urgently to the Chief of Engineers, requesting to be relieved from further duty at San Francisco. He was neither cleared nor convicted of the allegations at his expense. There seemed no way of bringing about either result in the absence or silence of witnesses. But, meantime, he had bitterly resented the apparent readiness of certain of the officials to look upon him with suspicion, and had withdrawn from all except most formal and distant association. No wonder he desired to be relieved from further service with or near them. Mrs. Nevins had insisted on removing to a cheap lodging in Sacramento as soon as able to move at all, and had taken her dependent sister with her, sorely against that young woman's wish, as she had made an impression, a decided impression upon an unmarried aide-de-camp who was reported to be wealthy, but whose attentions fell short of the matrimonial point, as the poverty of the sisters became revealed to him. There was, therefore, no longer to Loring the possible embarrassment of meeting or seeing the girl who had so wronged him, yet there was constant evidence of the seeds that she had sown. Some man, he felt sure, must have kept alive the rumors to his discredit, and the extreme constraint of manner, the avoidance, shown by this very gentleman, stamped him as in all probability the person at fault. Loring was only waiting now for proofs.

It so happened the very day the stanch old salt came searching through the building in quest of his friend that the General with two aides and others of the staff, had assembled in the office of Colonel Strain. Several of them had known and sailed with the Idaho's master and liked her captain well, despite his frequent flings at soldiers. His appearance at the doorway, therefore, was the signal for quite a cordial welcome. The General himself came forward to take him by the hand and say how sorry he was at the loss of his ship, and how he hoped soon to

see him on the decks of a bigger and better one. But the bluff captain thought as little of land generals as of lubbers of lower grade, and was not as grateful as he should perhaps have been, and was evidently looking for somebody beyond the sympathetic group, and presently said so.

"I've come to see Mr. Loring, by George! I haven't laid eyes on him since the night he backed me up in restoring order and discipline on my ship. That man ought to have been a sailor! Where'll I find him?" he concluded abruptly, staring round at the circle of somewhat embarrassed faces.

"We heard some rumor about this, captain," said the General. "Suppose you come into my office and tell me the whole story?"

"Why not right here where they can all hear?" was the instant answer. "I'm told that more'n one man has been at work trying to rob him of the credit, and as for Mr. Jennings, who was our first officer, I gave the company a piece of my mind the moment I heard it, and I've got a tongue-lashing in store for him. 'Taint the first I've had to give him, either, and it won't be the last if he ever runs foul of me again. They tell me, what's more, that Escalante's agent has had the impudence to come here a dozen times threatening Mr. Loring. Next time he comes you have him kicked out and charge it to me. That man's a thief, and so is one of the Escalantes—if not more than one. As for Loring, he's head and shoulders above any of the young fellows that have sailed with me, and when I was flattened out by the rush of that cowardly gang, he stood up to 'em like a man. That one shot of his brought 'em up with a jerk and put an end to the trouble."

He broke off short and glanced about him to note the effect of his words. It was an awkward moment. Three of the group had had their doubts as to the possibility of Loring's being culpable, but so disturbed and partially convinced had been the General and his chief-of-staff, so active had been the aide-de-camp referred to in his collection and dissemination of scandal at Loring's expense that no one felt able to say anything until the General himself had spoken. The Chief evidently felt his dignity assailed, and his commanding attitude imperiled. No further revelations ought to be allowed except such as should be filtered through him or his accredited staff officer.

"Come into my den, captain," he exclaimed, therefore. "You interest me greatly, and I want to hear all about it."

"I'll come quick enough," said the captain briefly, "after I've seen Loring. I want to shake hands with him, I say, before I do anything else. Where'll I find him?"

And with most depressing disregard of the General's greatness, the sailor would have turned his back on the entire party in order to find his injured friend, but the Chief was a strategist.

"Ah—go to Mr. Loring, captain," said he, to a ready staff officer, "and say to him that I desire he should come to my room a moment." And the aide-de-camp was off like a shot, so the seaman could only wait. The General led the way into his comfortable room and signaled to one or two to follow, and presently back came his messenger, and a moment after him, grave, composed, but freezingly formal, there at the door stood the Engineer. His eyes brightened up the instant he laid them on the Idaho's sturdy commander, but etiquette demanded that he should first address the General.

"You sent for me, sir?"

"I did, Mr. Loring. Our good friend, Captain Moreland, has been telling us of your most—er—praiseworthy conduct the night of the disaster. We all, I wish to assure you, are—er—gratified to hear of this. And now it has occurred to me that Captain Moreland might be able to throw some light on the very—unpleasant matter which we had to bring to your attention a few weeks since. Surely he must know something of these—er—people who were your accusers."

The General was seated at his big desk. He was flanked by the adjutant-general and backed by a brace of aides. Moreland, the mariner, was standing at the table and started forward as Loring entered as though to grasp his hand. The General still considered it essential to observe a certain air of formality in speaking. It was as though he had begun to believe Loring an injured man, and therefore he himself must be an aggrieved one, for surely the lieutenant should have spared the General the mortification of being placed in the wrong.

But to this tentative remark Mr. Loring made no reply. He stood calmly before the department commander, looked straight into his face, but did not open his lips.

"I say," repeated the General, in louder tone, "the captain appears to know and may be able to tell us something about the people who were your accusers."

"Possibly, sir," said Loring, finding that he was expected to say something, but with an indifference of manner most culpable in one so far inferior in rank.

"I was in hopes, Mr. Loring," said the General, evidently nettled, "that you

would appreciate the evident desire of myself and my confidential officers to see you relieved of these—er—aspersions. For that reason I urged Captain Moreland to make his statement public."

And still looking straight at the department commander, whose florid face was turning purple, Loring was silent. Perhaps after a month of accusation, real or implied, on part of the General and the "confidential officers," he found it difficult to account for the sudden manifestation of desire to acquit. He was thinking, too, of a tear-stained little letter that had come to him only a few days earlier—the last from Pancha, before the child was formally entered at the school of the good gray sisters. He was wondering if she at sixteen were really more alone in her little world than he in the broad and liberal sphere of soldier life. Then the sight of Moreland's weather-beaten face, perturbed and aggrieved, gave him a sense of sympathy that through all the weeks of his virtual ostracism had been lacking. He had other letters, too, worth far more than a dollar apiece, which was what their carriage cost him, bidding him have no fear, documents of weight were coming that would teach the authorities of the Pacific coast the error of their views and ways, but of these he did not care to speak. He chose to await the coming of the documents themselves. The silence, however, was oppressive, and the sailor spoke.

"If the only accusers this gentleman has are Escalantes, or associates of the Escalantes, you'd better beg his pardon and have done with it," said he, "and thereby put the matter in its most luckless way."

Angrily the General turned to the aide-de-camp fidgeting on his left.

"Do you know whether the Escalantes are the sole accusers, captain?" said he deliberately.

"I regret to say that they are not," was the answer. "And Mr. Loring has shown strange reluctance, to put it mildly, to meet the—others."

"I have answered, once and for all, every charge brought to my ears," said Loring, turning on the speaker, with eyes that blazed, and Moreland, who had seen him cool and composed in the face of panic, marveled now to note the intensity of his emotion, for Loring was white and trembling, though his gaze was steady as the hand that held back the terror-stricken crew that wild night on the waters.

"Perhaps you are unaware of the more recent developments—and the source of

information," said the aide uneasily.

"I am; and I demand the right to know or to meet both without delay. Captain Moreland," and here he turned on the wondering sailor, "can you be here to-morrow?"

"Certainly I can, and will," was the prompt answer.

"That wouldn't help," said the aide-de-camp, on whom all eyes were fixed again. "My informant couldn't be here."

"Very good. We'll go to your informant, then," answered Loring.

Another silence. It was not Loring now who seemed hesitant or reluctant. It was the aide.

There came a knock at the door. An orderly appeared with several telegraphic dispatches. Colonel Strain stepped forward, took them, shut the door in the orderly's face, handed them to the General, and resumed his seat. Glad of a diversion, the commander glanced at the superscription. "Here is one for you, sir," said he to the Engineer, who received it, but did not open it. He was again facing the embarrassed aide, who finally found words.

"Mr. Loring, my informant was here a whole month and said you refused to appear. Now—they are beyond recall, unless—it should come to trial."

The answer came like a flash:

"Your informant, sir—and there was but one—would never appear in the event of trial. That informant sailed three days ago on the Sonora, and you know it." Then, as a sudden thought struck him, he tore open his dispatch and read, then turned again to his faltering opponent: "So long as that informant could be confronted you kept me ignorant of any new allegations, if there were any. Now come out with your story, and by the next steamer I'll run it down."

CHAPTER XVI.

The worst of having a man of Moreland's views present on such an occasion is that the whole thing is sure to be noised abroad with scant reference to military propriety. Moreland told the owners of the steamer line, the Chamber of Commerce, the easily-gathered audience on Rush and Montgomery streets, the usual customers at Barry & Patton's, the loungers in the lobbies of the hotels, everybody who would listen—and who would not?—how that brave fellow Loring, who ought to have been a sailor, faced down that quartette of "blue-bellied lobsters" up at headquarters. The General was not a popular character. His principal claim to distinction during the great war seemed to be that of being able to criticise every other general's battles and to win none of his own. "He never went into a fight that he didn't get licked," declared the exultant Moreland, "and now he's bowled over by his youngest lieutenant." The story of that interview went over the bay like wildfire and stirred up the fellows at the Presidio and Angel Island, while the islanders of Alcatraz came bustling to town to learn the facts as retailed at the Occidental, and to hear something more about that queer, silent fellow Loring. Among the junior subalterns in the artillery were one or two who knew him at the Point, and they scouted the story of his having ever having stolen a cent's worth, or the idea of extracting anything about the matter from his lips. The latest yarn in circulation was that after the now famous interview Loring had "laid for" Captain Petty, the aide-de-camp referred to, a young Gothamite of good family who had got into the regulars early in the war and out of company duty from that time to this, and, having met the aide-de-camp, Loring had thereupon calmly pulled the gentleman's aquiline nose for him. Petty could not be found, had gone to Fort Yuma on important business for the department commander, was the explanation. The General properly refused to be interviewed by reporters of the papers and couldn't be approached by anybody else on the subject. Only two things were positively known. Lieutenant Loring had received telegraphic notification from the Chief of Engineers of his relief from duty in the department and his assignment to similar work in the Department of the Platte, and it was rumored, though it could not be confirmed, that the General had been directed by telegraph to designate a staff officer to receipt to Lieutenant Loring at once for the public property for which he was accountable, in order that the latter officer might take an early steamer for the Isthmus, as his services were urgently needed at his new station. It was an open

secret that the General considered himself aggrieved by the action of the authorities at Washington and said so. He had made no charge against Lieutenant Loring. He had merely called that gentleman's attention to the very serious allegations laid at his door, and this was true. On the other hand, people who had been permitted to know anything about the matter, notably certain senior officers of the Engineer Corps not under the General's orders, and one or two staff department officers who, unhappily for themselves, were under his orders and subject to his semi-occasional rebuke, now openly said that not one allegation against Loring came from a reliable or respectable source, and that it was an outrage to have held him even to inferential account on the statement of such a cad as Escalante's agent, who hadn't been near the office since the recovery of Captain Moreland, the insinuations of Mr. Purser Traynor, now totally vanished, and the rumored aspersions of a fair incognita, known only to Captain Petty, a man who had few associates in the "line" or outside the limited circle of the General's personal staff, and who was not too well liked even there.

And, as the revulsion of feeling set in, Petty set out for Yuma. "Where there is so damned much smoke," said he, as it later transpired, "there must be some fire," and the General had bidden him to go to Yuma, to Gila Bend, to Guaymas, to the devil, if need be, and find out all the facts. But the linesmen at Presidio and the jovial blades at Moreland's elbow were loud in their laughing statement that if Petty were looking for fire he could have found it here in abundance. Loring could have given him more than he wanted.

Then came the order in the case of Captain Nevins, dismissing that worthy from the service on charges of conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman, and awarding a year's imprisonment at such penitentiary, etc., as the reviewing authority should direct, and by the same post the official order transferring Lieutenant Loring of the Engineers to duty in the Department of the Platte, and then what did the steamship company do but issue invitations for a dinner to be given in honor of that distinguished young officer, and great was the noise thereof until it was known that the gentleman had gratefully, but firmly declined. Then the papers said "it was rumored" that the General had forbidden his acceptance, despite the fact that the General had expressed publicly his gratification that the company had at last done something in recognition of its indebtedness to the army—which was most adroit, and equally impersonal. And all the while Loring himself was having anything but an enviable time of it. A man so reticent and retiring could not but be annoyed by the persistent calls and cross-questions of all manner of people in whom he had but small personal

interest. He wished to have nothing whatever to say upon the subject, denied himself to reporters and relapsed into impenetrable reserve when importuned by brother officers whom he but slightly knew. One or two with whom he would gladly have held counsel were far removed, one at least forever, from his circle. The stalwart old inspector, Turnbull, lay sleeping his last sleep in the cemetery at Monterey. The veteran who served as president of the Nevins' court was in far Arizona, and Blake, sound of heart, if not of head, was under a cloud at Yuma. His forceful expressions concerning the imbecility of department officials led to his being confined very closely to company work and minor, yet exacting, duties at the post, all because of his abandonment of Lieutenant Loring at a critical moment, said the few defenders of the department's letter to the post commander on that subject. "All because of his too vehement defense of Loring," said everybody else.

With feverish eagerness, Loring awaited the sailing of the next steamer. Every item for which he stood accountable was then at his office, invoices and receipts made out in full. Nothing was needed but the officer designated to relieve him. The Columbia was to leave on Saturday, and up to Thursday evening no relief had appeared. Friday morning the adjutant-general received a written communication, most respectful yet urgent in terms, requesting that the officer might be designated without further delay, and as no answer was received up to noon, Loring followed it with a personal call upon the chief of staff, who said the General had the matter under advisement.

"My luggage goes aboard the Columbia to-night, sir, and I should be aboard by ten o'clock to-morrow," said Loring. Colonel Strain coughed dubiously.

"It might be impracticable to relieve you from duty so soon. The General is in communication with the War Department upon the subject, and possibly if—you —had had the courtesy to call upon the General or upon me, his chief-of-staff, and to explain your wishes, the thing might have been arranged."

Loring flushed. He saw through the motive at a glance, and could have found it easy to express his opinion in very few words. There are times when a man is so goaded that an outburst is the only natural relief, but it is none the less fatal. There might even be method in the colonel's manner, and Loring curbed, with long-practiced hand, both tongue and temper. It would have been warrantable to say that the manner of both the General and his chief-of-staff had been too repellent to to invite calls, but he knew that, whatever the merits of the case, superior officers, like inferior papers, always have the last word. He might be

only inviting reprimand. Without a word, therefore, he faced about, went straight to the telegraph office down the avenue and wired to Washington. "Steamer sails noon Saturday. Not yet relieved. What instructions?"

By that hour there would be no one in the office of the Chief of Engineers at Washington, but Loring addressed it direct to the home of the assistant, upon whose interest in the case he had reason to rely, and then returned at once to his desk. Were he not to be there it would place it in the power of a would-be oppressor to say the officer designated to receive the property had called during office hours and could not find Mr. Loring. And then, with such patience as he could command, Loring received the visitors who kept dropping in, among them the boisterous Moreland, whose Bay of Biscay voice had become almost as trying to his host as to the other occupants of the building, and during the long afternoon awaited the action of the General upon his morning's letter and that of the War Department upon his telegram.

Four o'clock came at last. Office hours were over. Neither relief nor reply had reached him. He heard the halls resounding to the footsteps of officers and clerks as they closed their doors and left the building. Bidding his assistant remain a moment he strode to the further end of the long passage. The General was at the moment issuing from his private office, conversing with two of his staff. The adjutant-general, a bundle of papers in his hand, was hastily crossing the hall toward his own office. Loring raised his hat in grave salutation to his commander, who bowed with dignified reserve in return, and moment later the Engineer was facing the colonel at his desk.

"Colonel Strain," said he, "I have much to do. Will you name the hour at which I am to meet my relief?"

"Mr. Loring," said the official tartly, "when we are ready to relieve you the order will be issued—and not before."

"Colonel Strain," answered Loring, "I shall be at my office all evening, ready to receive that order." And wheeling about he met the General at the door. An open telegram was in the latter's hand, a queer look on his flushed and angry face. Relieving his impatient clerk, Loring seated himself to answer a letter, and there fell from the package he drew from his pocket a little note, and with a sudden pang of shame and sorrow he stooped and picked it up. It was only a tiny missive, only a few sad, almost pleading, words. Did he mean to go without a word of good-by to Pancha? His heart reproached him as he remembered that

this had reached him two days before.

He was writing a note to the Lady Superior, telling her of his expectation of sailing on the morrow, and asking if he might be permitted to call to say adieu to his little friend of the shipwreck, when an orderly entered.

"Colonel Strain's compliments and desires to see the lieutenant at once." It was not customary for officers to be so summarily summoned after office hours, but Loring went. With a hand that trembled visibly, but with every effort to control his voice, the chief-of-staff held forth a telegram and said:

"The General desires to know, sir, whether you have sent any telegram to Washington which can account for this?"

Loring took and slowly read it. Divested of address and signature it read as follows:

"The Secretary of War is informed that Lieutenant Loring has not been relieved as directed. Report reason by telegraph."

Loring deliberately finished reading, and then as deliberately looked up.

"I have, sir."

"Then it is the General's order, sir," said the chief-of-staff, "that you go at once to your quarters in close arrest."

CHAPTER XVII.

There was the mischief to pay in and about department headquarters for something like twenty-four hours. Colonel Strain, as chief-of-staff, had a sleepless night of it. Mr. Loring, reticent as ever, had gone straight to his rooms, which were far from the office and not very far from the convent of the good gray sisters. He had no thought of insubordination in wiring as he did to Washington. He considered it was his paramount duty to make every effort in his power to sail by the first steamer. Letters of instruction that had reached him informed him that a new post was to be built along the Big Horn range in Wyoming, and that the moment he arrived a board of officers, of which he would serve as junior, would be sent out to select the site. There was urgent need of his services, therefore, and no time to be lost. He felt that this sudden and summary arrest was a wrong to him personally and professionally, but the lessons of obedience and discipline taught in the four long years at West Point were fresh in his mind, and whatever should be the result of his detention the responsibility now lay with the department commander. Arrived at his quarters, Loring calmly wrote a dispatch to the assistant in the office of the Chief of Engineers at Washington, saying so many words: "Placed in close arrest because of previous telegrams. Cannot sail to-morrow." This and a note to the Lady Superior at the convent saying he would be unable to come to say good-by to Pancha, and would probably be detained, he sent by his servant, bidding the man go first to the telegraph office and then to stop at headquarters for certain books, and then to deliver the note at the convent on his homeward way. Dennis was a retired dragoon who had found such employment with the officers on duty in San Francisco for several years past, and was endowed with the Irishman's almost pathetic sense of fealty to his "commander," as he insisted on speaking of his employer. Master was a word he could not tolerate because of its implication of servitude. But even while rebelling at the term, he yielded to the fact a degree of devotion to Loring's interests far exceeding that usually accorded by the body servant of tradition, and this calm, deliberate, methodical, silent young soldier was, in spite of himself and the proverb, "a hero in the eyes of his *valet de chambre*." Dennis had packed his boxes with blinking eyes and a saddened heart. "He had wurrked," he said, "for twinty gintlemin, most av thim foine men, but the looten'nt was the best av all." Dennis had his wife and brood in a little shanty near the sand lots, and could not follow Loring to the East. He would have

howled with delight to hear the order countermanded that was to take the lieutenant away, but when he heard at headquarters, from his fellow-countrymen, the janitor and the guard, that such a countermand had been issued in the shape of an arrest, he swore with wrath. A good Catholic was Dennis, and many a job had been given to him and his lusty helpmate at the gray sisters, and a warm friend had they in the lady superior, to whom he presently bore the note and the tale of his hero's unjustifiable treatment. Then went he on his way, and came in upon Loring just in time to hear the closing words of what had been probably a brief and frigid conversation between the Engineer and the General's assiduous aide-de-camp, Captain Petty. Frigid as it sounded the captain looked hot enough as he took his leave, and collided with Dennis at the door, damned him for being there; then whirled about for a parting shot. "I'll report your exact language to the General, sir," said he, with anger in his tone.

"Try to, at least," said Loring pointedly.

"I didn't come here to be insulted, sir!" said Petty fiercely.

"No, sir. You came here to insult," was the cool reply.

The aid went down the stairs with thundering heels and raging heart. Such contemptuous *sang froid* on part of an officer four years his junior in service was something unheard of, something not to be tolerated, and as Loring refused to budge from his position of calm superiority, the only thing left for Petty was to leave. So far from going to Yuma, he had progressed only to Monterey, and there spent two or three days poking about the resorts around the plaza in search of gossip that was rumored to be in circulation at Loring's expense. He found the gossipers easily enough, but had greater difficulty in reaching their authorities. It proved disheartening work, for the further he went the less he learned—each tale bearer having apparently added to the pile of his informant, as Petty should have had sense enough to know would be the case. But at last he "lit" on something tangible: The hardy giant who led the rush the night of the wreck was now well enough to be hobbling about town and breathing his tale of woe and wrong to all listening ears, and, the officers being gone and no one present to contradict, he had so frequently repeated his version of the wreck of the Idaho as to make a sinner of his memory and "credit his own lie." The burden of his latest song was that Loring had been to see him at hospital and had promised him, on condition of being guaranteed against action or prosecution because of the shooting of a wronged and inoffensive man, that he (Loring) would pay him handsomely—would send him ten dollars a week, and gave him twenty-five dollars then and

there. "But now, for more than a month," said he, "not a cent had come, and he heard that Mr. Loring was trying to get away East." The man told his story reluctantly and with some palpable "breaks" when he found he was being questioned by an officer; but Petty posted back to 'Frisco without delay, convinced that here was something with which to confront and confound that cool, supercilious snob. Then he could take a fresh start for Yuma and get more. One can always get something when the object of the story is away, and, like the seaman's story of his interview with Loring, Petty's version of the seaman's interview with him waxed as he hastened to his General, and had assumed the proportions of a magnificent scandal by the time he told it to that much ruffled brigadier. Even Strain, had he heard the account, would have riddled it—Captain Moreland's evidence was conclusive on that point—and while Loring, in pity and compassion, might have left money with the man for comfort in his convalescence, it was incredible that he should have tendered payment as a bribe for silence. Strain's exaggerated self-esteem was deeply wounded by the Engineer's evident lack of appreciation of his greatness, and he would be glad indeed to bring him to heel, and convince him he would be wise in future to do homage instead of slight. And what made Loring's indifference so exasperating was that Strain himself was forced to see that Loring was not only no fool, as he admitted, but a man of brains, courage and ability, which he would not concede aloud. Strain, sent for at eight o'clock by the department commander to listen to the aid's wrathful account of the interview with Loring, fumed and fidgetted and strove to ask some questions to make matters clear, but Petty was already on the defensive and did not mean to be questioned, and the General kept interposing. "Let him tell his tale his own way, Colonel. Let him give you the whole story, Monterey and all," and Strain, who had hoped to spend the evening with his cronies at the club and whist, was compelled to sit till long after nine and hear the details of Petty's asininity.

Stripped of unnecessary explanation, it seems that the General and Strain had decided that their dignity and prerogative had been invaded by the summary orders from Washington, which were at once a criticism of their action in not relieving Loring, and a demand for an immediate explanation as well as an implied threat that unless that report was entirely satisfactory Loring must be allowed to proceed. They had spent an hour or more in the preparation of the telegram which finally caught the wires at six o'clock, presented their view of the case, represented that if Loring left it would be under a cloud, and that he should not now be allowed to leave, because of the fact that his having resorted to forbidden and insubordinate means to procure his release was in itself a virtual

admission that he feared to stay and face the constantly recurring accusations. It was very adroitly and impressively worded, but still the General and chief-of-staff felt nervous and ill at ease. Down in their hearts both realized that nothing had been proved against Loring, and that the chances were ten to one that nothing ever could or would be. What was more, both were beginning to realize that Loring had been badly and shabbily treated. Yet this conviction only made them the more ready to listen to any story, grasp at any straw, that lent an atom of weight to the case against him. Dinner had brought no comfort to either, and Petty's preposterous story, swallowed whole by the chief while still bristling with the nervous strain of the concoction of that telegram of explanation, had further upset his digestive powers. The aide had been sent forthwith to notify Mr. Loring of the new story at his expense, and to demand his version thereof. Petty was at no time a diplomatic man, and at this time did not mean to be. Both in language and manner he contrived to make his mission as offensive as he dared, for Loring had braved him so exasperatingly on every previous occasion that, now that he had him safe in arrest, he meant to taunt—and did it, but his sneering slings broke harmless on the polished armor of the Engineer's placid disdain. The madder Petty got the cooler was Loring, and when Dennis dropped in just at the close of the interview a worse whipped man was never seen than the aid, who rattled back to his general, thinking of what he ought to have said, his wits, like his brevet to the double bar, coming to him long after the war was over.

"He treated me and the General's orders with perfect contempt," said Petty finally, and the General looked into the face of his senior staff officer hopeful that Strain would seem properly impressed. But Strain did not. It was one thing for Loring to ignore him, but quite different when that officer failed to stand and deliver at the demand of Petty. Strain treated him with scant respect himself when the General wasn't around, and had been heard to say that generals who allowed their wealthy relatives to dictate who should be their aids were foisting heavy loads upon the service. It was nearly ten o'clock; his evening was spoiled. He was crabbed, therefore, and he spoke accordingly:

"Mr. Petty—I—mean Captain Petty." (Strain, who didn't get one, said a March '67 brevet was of no earthly account, and he for one proposed to ignore them). "May I ask what were your words when you—you have given us Mr. Loring's—were communicating the General's message to him? Were they, for example, carefully chosen? Did you observe courtesy of manner, avoiding all that could irritate, or——"

"Of course I did. You never saw a man so contemptuously, insultingly cool in

your life. He just——"

But Strain held up his hand. "I should like to know just what you said. The General has told me the message you were to give. Now-w, how did you give it?"

But that was something Colonel Strain was destined not to know for many a year, if indeed, he ever heard. There came a knock at the door. A servant entered with a card. "The lady, sir, begs to see the General at once, if only for five minutes."

The General frowned as he took the card. What lady would be calling at ten o'clock at night and demanding interviews when he was so much occupied. But his face changed as he read, then glanced up at his chief-of-staff.

"This is remarkable, Strain. The lady superior of the gray sister's convent. Alone?" he asked, turning to the servant.

"No, sir. Young lady with her, sir."

"You'll have to excuse me a moment, gentlemen," said he. "I'll rejoin you here."

Strain was about to return to the subject when the butler spoke. "A messenger from headquarters is at the door, sir. Says he has a dispatch to deliver in person. Shall I send him up?"

It was the General's library, and Strain was wondering what was going on in the General's parlor. He knew of the lady superior. He knew the story of little Pancha, her brave, uncomplaining conduct the night of the wreck, and of her being placed in the convent of the gray sisters. He decided to go to the hall door himself, and was astonished to hear the sound of sobbing as he passed the parlor. Mechanically he took and receipted for the dispatch. Slowly, absently he retraced his steps, listening to the strange sounds, a pleading, choking, girlish voice, soothing words in the gentle, loving woman's sweet tones, the occasional gruff monosyllables from the General himself. Strain reached the library again in something like a dream, finding Petty stalking up and down, tugging at his slim mustache, and nervously expectant of further question, but none came. They were startled by the quick, hurried footsteps of the General, as he waddled back to join them, and burst in, red-faced, ruffled, apoplectic.

"Strain—Petty, this thing has got to be settled somehow at once! That young woman—Ugh! damn the gout! Here, Strain—Don't you go, Petty; you won't do

—Hold on! Yes, you'll have to, by Jove! There's no time to be lost. Go and say to Mr. Loring, with my compliments, I desire to see him a moment in the morning before he sails, and-d—He's—he's released from arrest—It's all—it's all—well, not all of it, but—damnation! I can't explain now. Go Petty—go! Tell him he's released—relieved, and Strain, you issue the order relieving him at once, and directing him to proceed without delay to his new station. I want to get the order out before those damned fellows at Washington can order it themselves. What's that you've got?"

"It's the order from those damned fellows at Washington," said Strain.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Once upon a time a very level-headed old soldier was commandant of cadets at West Point, and one day one of his assistants, an energetic young officer, came hastily in to say that he had just happened upon a cadet duel at Fort Clinton, had captured one of the participants and placed him under arrest, but the principals, seconds and most of those present had managed to escape. The veteran listened grimly a moment and then said:

"Were they actually fighting when you got wind of it?"

"Yes, sir," was the earnest reply. "Anybody could have heard them."

"Um," said the colonel, reflectively. "Then I think you—erred in interfering. Couldn't you have got there just a little later?"

"But the regulations prohibit fighting, sir!" said the junior, aggrieved.

"Certainly, and your course promotes it. You see they were already at it. Five minutes more would have settled the thing one way or another, and that would have been the end of it. They would have shaken hands and been good friends. Now, neither of them has had enough. Each believes he can whip the other, and those youngsters will neither be able to sleep nor study till they've fought it out. Always prevent a quarrel when you can, but once they get going, never stop a square fight, never see or hear it—until you know it's over."

In like manner a wiser head than that which dictated the telegraphic instructions to the department commander that night, would have seen that it was far better for all parties in the mix at San Francisco if Mr. Loring had been detained there long enough to have the matter investigated from start to finish, and so to "fix the responsibility." It was not of vital importance that he should sail by first steamer, but there had been friction between this particular General and the Engineers, between him and the adjutant-general, between him and the secretary of war, between him and the division commander, then temporarily absent, and a general who differs with so many eminent and astute authorities as these enumerated must occasionally err in judgment. Had Loring stayed and been accorded a complete investigation, the chances are that he and the General would have shaken hands and parted friends, for both had sterling qualities. But

orders given in compliance with orders from superiors are sometimes given only grudgingly. The General had heard in that brief interview with his late-at-night callers enough to convince him that the harshest charges laid at Loring's door belonged elsewhere. But there were things Loring had been too proud to explain. There was his insubordinate—so the General regarded it—appeal over his commander's head to the bureau in Washington. There was his defiance of his envoy and representative, Captain Petty. There were lots of little things that ruffled the dignity of the veteran autocrat, especially the somewhat peremptory tone of the dispatch from the War Department, and the General felt himself wronged by his superiors. Strain, too, suffered in his own estimate, and Petty was fuming with pent-up wrath and hate against that cool, supercilious, contemptuous upstart of an Engineer. Who in blazes was he anyhow? What was his family? What his social status? demanded Petty to himself, even though he knew that these were matters whereof our democratic military system took no thought whatever. It is the proud boast of the American Army that neither wealth nor name nor ancestry can count in the long race for the stars. In these glad days of peace and national prosperity, the officer is speedily taught that promotion is the result of only one of two things, patient waiting or political influence.

And so it resulted that when Walter Loring steamed away southward on the long run for the States, he left behind an unsettled fight, three or four aggrieved officials—aggrieved because of him or his affairs and their mismanagement of both—and one inveterate enemy. He had plenty of time to think it all over after he was fairly at sea, but none before. He and Dennis needed every moment to get his belongings aboard and his business closed. He called upon the General as directed and stood in respectful silence while that choleric warrior paced up and down the room and explained his position. He wished Mr. Loring to understand that while he felt that the young officer had behaved with disrespect, at least with disregard of his commanding general, the latter was too magnanimous to stand in his way, and had therefore determined the evening previous to release him from arrest and from further duty that he might lose no time in "joining" his new station, even went so far as to say he had found much—very much to commend in the young gentleman and his performance of duty in Arizona, and, but for the unfortunate entanglements that had resulted, would have taken pleasure in making public announcement of the fact. He could not but deprecate the conduct of Mr. Loring's friends in Washington, and might find it necessary to appeal to the President for justice. Meantime, however, he desired Mr. Loring to know that no personal consideration had actuated his conduct. He had done what he believed to be his duty, and then, like the orator, the General paused for reply.

Mr. Loring stood in civilian dress and soldier attitude, hat in hand, an attentive listener, never interposing a word or hazarding a remark. When the General stopped the lieutenant remained silent and standing. The General looked perturbed, halted and glared, as much as to say, "Why the devil don't you speak?" a thing Loring never did when he had nothing to say. The chief found it necessary to begin anew, but broke off presently. "You understand, do you not?"

"Yes, sir," said Loring.

"Then I suppose—you're very busy—have many things to do?"

"Only one, sir."

"Well, I won't detain you. I—I wish you well, Mr. Loring, and—and—*bon voyage*!" and the General strove to smile.

"Thank you, General. Anything else, sir?"

The General stood and could think of nothing. "I believe not," he replied, "unless —however, never mind, I won't detain you."

"Good-day, sir," said Loring, and marched quickly away to the room of the aide-de-camp. Petty was not there. An embarrassed lieutenant arose and smiled vaguely.

"Petty isn't about anywhere this morning. He was out late last night—I expect him every moment."

"You needn't. He won't come. Tell him I waited until 11:30." Then Loring shut the door and left. He had many an hour later in which to think over his final interview with the aide. A most unwelcome duty was that second call to Petty. He would rather be kicked than go to Loring and say he was released from arrest and free to go; perhaps he thought the kick forthcoming if he went. But Loring treated him with the same contemptuous coolness as he had earlier in the night. Nor did Loring seem either elated or surprised.

"Damn the man!" said Petty. "I'd give a month's pay to tell him something that would stir him!" Petty could easily have done that had he seen fit to mention that the General had received a visit from the Lady Superior with a young girl from the convent of the good Gray Sisters. But that was a mysterious affair that even the General had seen fit to say nothing further about, even to Loring, who was most concerned. It was a matter that gentle and gracious woman herself never

referred to when the Engineer at ten the next morning presented his card and was ushered into her presence. She was most courteous. There was peace and loving kindness ineffable in her placid face. There was infinite sympathy in her manner when she presently met and led in to him a pallid little maid, who put a long slim hand in Loring's as he smiled upon her downcast, red-rimmed eyes. Struggle as she might for composure and strength, Pancha had evidently been sorely disturbed over something through the long watches of the night. Loring's heart reproached him as he realized how selfishly he had been engrossed for weeks, how little he had thought for her, of her who must be so lonely and homesick in her new sphere. He was almost shocked now at the pallor of her face, the droop and languor of the slender figure that was so buoyant and elastic those bright days aboard ship just preceding the catastrophe. What friends and chums they had become! How famously he was getting on with his Spanish! What a charming teacher she was, with her lovely shining eyes, her laughing lips, her glistening white teeth! She seemed happy as a queen then, and now—what had come over the child?

"They are going to let me write to you, Pancha," he had told her, "and I shall write every month, but you will write to me long letters, won't you?"

"*Si*," and the dusky little head bowed lower, and Pancha was withdrawing her hand.

"You know I have no little sister," he went on.

She did. She had learned all this and much more aboard ship, and remembered every word he had told her, very much more than he remembered. She knew far more about him than did he about her, but he looked far more interested now. The good gray sister was more than good; she was very busy at something away across the room, and Loring had drawn his little friend to the window.

"How I wish I had known you there at—at the Gila, Pancha," he managed to say in slow, stumbling Spanish. "Do you know we made a great mistake, Mr. Blake and I?"

She did not wish to know. Two little hands went up imploringly, the dark head drooped lower still, the slender, girlish form was surely trembling. What ailed the child? It was time to go, yet he lingered. He felt a longing to take her hands again—clasped in each other now, and hanging listless as she leaned against the window casing. He meant to bend and kiss her good-by, just as he would have kissed a younger sister, he said to himself, not as he had kissed Geraldine Allyn.

But somehow he faltered, and that was something unusual to Walter Loring. Even at risk of being abrupt, he felt it time to go, but after the manner of weaker men, took out his watch.

"Yes, I must go, Pancha. We won't say good-by, will we? It is until to-morrow —*hasta la mañana*. You know we always come again to California. You'll be quite a woman, then, though." He who was so brief and reticent with men, found himself prattling with this child, unable to break off. At last, with sudden effort, he seized both her hands in his, where they lay limp and passive.

"*Adios*, little one! Dear little friend!" he said, bent swiftly, and his curling brown mustache was crushed one instant against the top of her dusky head. Then he hurried to the lady superior and took his leave, Pancha standing silent at the window until the door had closed behind him.

Another day, and he was looking back along the sparkling wake of the crowded steamer, thinking how beautiful the ocean seemed to him only a few weeks earlier. Another week and he was at the Isthmus, homeward bound, yet clinging with strange interest to the scenes of so much trial. Another month and he was spinning along old, familiar shores, *en route* for the distant field of new and stirring duty. Without a day's delay he was hurried on the trail of a party of officials, designated to select the site for the new post far up in the heart of the Sioux hunting grounds. For associates he found a veteran quartermaster with a keen eye for business, and an aide-de-camp of his new general commanding, and recent experiences with such combined to render him more reticent than ever. Major Burleigh confided to Captain Stone that if that was a specimen of West Point brains and brilliancy, it only confirmed his previous notions. The site for the new post was decided upon after brief but pointed argument, and a vote of two to one, the Engineer being accorded the privilege of a minority report if he saw fit to make it. Commanding their escort was a young officer whom Loring had known when as cadets they had together worn the gray, and though there had been no intimacy there was respect, and the two subalterns, Engineer and dragoon, agreed that the board might better have stayed at home and left the selection to the Indians, but Lieutenant Dean had no vote and Loring no further responsibility. He could make his remonstrance when he got to Omaha, which would probably be too late. On that homeward way he saw enough of Burleigh to convince him he was a coward, for the major collapsed under the seat of the ambulance at the first sign of the Sioux. Then there came an episode that filled Loring with sudden interest in this new, yet undesirable acquaintance. Men get to know each other better in a week in the Indian country than in a decade in town.

They had reached the little cantonment and supply station on the dry fork of the Powder, stiff and weary with their long journey by ambulance, and glad of a chance to stretch their legs and rest. The camp commander was doing his best to be hospitable. Burleigh had been shown into the major's hut, where a lot of mail was awaiting him. A bronzed subaltern had taken charge of Mr. Aide-de-camp Stone, and another of Loring. The latter had just emerged from a tub, dripping and refreshed, and was rubbing himself dry, when across the canvas screen he heard the voice of the commander hailing his host.

"Mr. Post Quartermaster," said he, "I wish every other kind of quartermaster but you was in——. That old rip Burleigh is utterly upset by some letter he's got. He's limp as a wet rag, shaking like a man with a fit. Took four fingers of my best rye to bring him around. Says he must have your best team and ambulance at once. Got to push on for Frayne."

And indeed Burleigh's face when he came forth to start for the Platte was a gruesome sight. "He looked," said the unfeeling linesman, after he'd gone, "as though he'd seen more Indians."

An hour later a soldier servant handed the major an envelope. "Picked it up under the table, sir. There's still something in it."

The major glanced curiously at the superscription.

"That's the envelope, at least," said he, handing it to Loring, "of the letter that stampeded the old man."

And Loring looked at it first with but scant interest. Then took and held and studied the writing with eyes that kindled wonderfully.

"Why, do you think you know that hand?" asked the major curiously.

Loring handed it back, hesitated a moment, nodded, but said no word.

CHAPTER XIX.

A pleasant welcome awaited Mr. Walter Loring, of the Engineers, when he opened his office and got settled down to work at his new station. Here was a commanding general who knew something of his past, whose nephew was with him at the Point, and one at least of whose aides had found reason to respect him highly, even though they had differed as to the site for the new post, and the Engineer had seemed to take far more kindly to the companionship of an unheard-of sub in the cavalry than he did to the society of two men so distinguished in the department as Major Burleigh, depot quartermaster at Gate City, and Brevet-Captain "Omaha" Stone, the aide in question. Burleigh had surprised the aide by a display of great interest in and an impatience to meet the newcomer, who had hurried out from Omaha with not a day's delay, and who overtook them at Fort Frayne, after riding by night through the mountainous region of the Medicine Bow, with only a single trooper as attendant and escort. Burleigh had been oddly inquisitive, thought Stone, and had plied the taciturn Engineer with question after question about officers whom he knew and matters he seemed to know along the Pacific slope. Mr. Loring was evidently a bit surprised, yet replied courteously, though very briefly. Burleigh did all the talking the first day's drive in the big ambulance over the rolling open prairies north of the Platte, giving Stone no chance at all. He enlivened the occasion and relieved the tedium of the journey with anecdotes of the General whose command Loring had recently left, and Strain, his chief-of-staff, and Petty —"that damned fool Petty," he called him, and Burleigh had nothing good to tell of any of them, and much that was derisive, if not detrimental, of all. Loring listened with neither assent nor dissent, as a rule, though when appealed to he said he had no opportunity to study the characteristics as described by Burleigh, as he had spent most of his short service there surveying in Arizona and saw little and knew less of the officials in San Francisco. One man of whom Burleigh spoke with regard and regret was stanch old Turnbull, whose sad death by drowning in the surf off Pinos, the quartermaster referred to several times. He seemed familiar, too, with the story of Loring's conduct the night of the collision at sea and the sinking of the Idaho, and referred to that more than once in terms of commendation. They stopped for luncheon and to bait the mules and to give the cavalry escort a brief respite, and it was after this that Burleigh, as though suddenly reminded of something, began—

"I don't know what made me think of it unless it was Stone's speaking of New Orleans a moment ago, but did you meet a long-legged fellow named Blake in Arizona? I knew the girl that drove him out there. One winter she was in New Orleans while her father was commanding the monitors moored at Algiers—Miss Torrence. Saw her afterwards in New York. She married old Granger, you know." Granger was about Burleigh's age, but Burleigh was a widower and desirous of being considered young. And Stone wondered why Loring should look disquieted if not embarrassed.

"I met Blake, yes," was, however, his prompt reply.

"How's he standing it? He was a good deal cut up at first. They were to have been married last summer. He was regularly engaged to her, and never knew she'd thrown him over until he met Granger in St. Louis."

Then Loring did a thing they both noted was unlike him. Ordinarily he listened courteously until the question was finished. This time he broke in:

"Blake is in his element doing cavalry duty. We had a lively chase together after an officer who was deserting to Mexico."

"So you did," said Burleigh, with interest. "I remember hearing of it. You were on his court, weren't you? Why! what was the fellow's name? I remember having met him in New Orleans, too, when I read the order to the court. Let's see, you were judge advocate, weren't you?"

"Yes. And his name was Nevins."

"Ah, yes. Dismissed, I believe. What ever became of him? There was a rumor that he had died."

"So the consul at Guaymas reported," was Loring's brief reply.

"Well, was it never settled? Wasn't it proved in some way? I heard a story that his wife had followed him out there. She was a damned sight better lot than he was. I met her more than once in New Orleans. She came of good family, but she was stranded down there by the war. They say she had a younger sister who bled her to death, a girl she was educating. I remember Nevins told me something about her. That fellow had some good points, do you know, Loring? He behaved first rate during the fever epidemic; nursed more'n one fellow through. He said that that sister was a beauty and selfish to the core, and he wished to God she'd marry some rich man and let them alone. Didn't you—didn't I hear that they

were out there, and that he made some dramatic scene before the court, and sent his wife his valuables, or something of that kind?"

Loring was slowly reddening. He more than half believed that Burleigh had heard the story set afloat by the gossips in San Francisco, and was trying to draw him out. His tone, therefore, was cold and his answer brief.

"They were there, but I never saw them. Pardon me, major, your rifle is slipping," and leaning forward the Engineer straightened up the endangered weapon and braced it with his foot. "A dreary landscape this," he added, glancing out at the barren stretches of rolling prairie extending to the horizon.

"Very. All like this till you get over towards the mountains, then it's fine. But, isn't it really believed out there that Nevins is dead? What became of his wife?"

"She went back to New Orleans, I was told. If Nevins isn't dead, he at least hadn't been heard of up to the time I left."

And several times again that long afternoon did Burleigh return to the charge and speak of Nevins, and more than once during the busy days that followed, but by the time they started on their return he had probably concluded that Loring really knew no more about him, and once or twice when Blake and his love affairs were mentioned Loring seemed unwilling to hear. Stone pondered over it not a little before they got to Reno on the back track, and there it was that Burleigh had demanded to be sent right on to Frayne, despite fatigue, for something had come to him in this mail that filled him with dismay, as the major commanding told them a dozen times over. Moreover, Mr. Omaha Stone became gradually convinced that Loring was in partial possession of the secret of Burleigh's stampede. Unless Stone was utterly in error, Loring had seen somewhere before the handwriting of the superscription of the envelope Burleigh had dropped in his nerveless collapse. But Stone might as well have cross-questioned the sphinx. Loring would admit nothing.

Yet it was of this very matter the Engineer was thinking one soft still evening soon after his return to department headquarters. His boxes had just arrived. He had found a fairly comfortable room away from the turbulent section of the new and bustling town, and equally distant from the domicile of Stone and his particular set. Loring never gambled and took little interest in cards. He was still "taking his rations" at the hotel, but much disliked it, and was seriously thinking of seeking board in some private family. The barracks were too far out, and the roads deep in mud, or he would have lived and "messed" out there. The few

boarding houses were crowded, and with an uncongenial lot as a rule. Private families that took two or three table boarders were very few, but some one suggested his going to see the rector of the new parish, himself a recent arrival.

The sun had gone down behind the high bluffs at the back of the straggling frontier town. The plank sidewalks were thronged in the neighborhood of the hotel with picturesque loungers as the young officer made his way westward, and soon reached the outlying, unpaved, deep-rutted cross streets. He readily found the rector, a kindly, gentle-mannered widower he proved to be, whose sister had come to keep house for him, and never before had either of them lived in a community so utterly primitive, if not uncouth. It was plain to be seen that he was a Southerner, and in the joy of a few minutes' conversation with a young man whose language and manners bespoke the gentleman, Mr. Lambert speedily made known to him that his health had suffered in New Orleans and his physicians had insisted on total change of climate, and the great Northwest was a new, untrodden field for the sons of the cross, of his sect at least. He had read with admiration of the missionary work accomplished among the savage Indians by the church of Rome, but there were heathen rather more intractable than they, said he, with a sigh. Mr. Loring was sympathetic, but already informed on that point. What he wished to learn was, did the rector know of any family among his parishioners at whose table he could find his daily bread for a reasonable consideration. Loring, as has been seen, was a man to whom the converse of his fellow-men, as found upon our frontier, was neither edifying nor improving. He preferred the society of his own thoughts. The rector, the General (Colonel Newcome, it will be remembered, always accorded the head of column to the church), the adjutant-general of the new department and one solitary subaltern of cavalry were the only men he had met since reporting at Omaha whom he found really congenial. But then it must be remembered that it was the early summer, and the troops were all afield.

The rector brought the tips of his fingers together and bowed his gray head, his characteristic attitude in reflection and repose. Yes, he knew of one, a woman widowed but a year ago, who was striving to keep her home by taking boarders, and who perhaps could find room for him at her table. Already she had given shelter to a most estimable woman, a widow like herself, a woman of many sorrows, whom he had well known during the troublous days in New Orleans, a gentlewoman, he might say, whose birth and breeding were apparent to the most casual observer, a Mrs. Fletcher, who had come to him for advice, and who, through his recommendation gladly given, had recently gone to a good position

—a lucrative position—and a home at Gate City. Loring was politely interested, but could the rector direct him to the house? He would call at once and make inquiries. The rector could, of course, but he was aging, and he loved a listener. He hated to let a hearer go. Might he ask if Mr. Loring was any connection of the General of that name so conspicuous in the service of the South in the defense of their beloved old Creole city before the hapless days of Butler, though he must concede to General Butler that his vigorous administration of municipal affairs had cleansed and quarantined the city as they had never seen it done before. The similarity of name had suggested the—

"None whatever that I know of," said Loring, finding it necessary to interpose; "and where is Mrs. Fletcher's?"

"Ah, to be sure. Mrs. Fletcher is the name of the lady who boarded there awhile, but she has gone to Gate City. Mrs. Burton it is—a worthy soul. Perhaps, indeed I think, a breath of air will do me good. I might walk around there with you."

So despite the remonstrance in his sister's eyes and Loring's respectful protest, the rector got his hat and linked his arm in that of the young athlete on his left, and led forth into the gloaming, prattling all the way. Soon they reached the cross street that led northward, parallel with the bluff line at the west, and against the twilight of the northern sky, the scattered houses, the few straggling saplings hopefully planted along the gutter, even the silhouetted figure of a long-legged dog, trotting across the road, were outlined sharp and, clear, black against a lemon horizon that shaded away imperceptibly into a faint violet. Long years after Loring could see the picture, and how, right in the midst of it, there rose slowly into view two black dots, the heads, evidently, of two pedestrians like themselves, ascending from the north, with the whole wide Missouri valley at their backs, the pathway he and his genially chatting conductor were threading from the south, with only this gentle rise between them, perhaps fifty yards away. It was interesting to the Engineer to watch the gradual development of the shadows against the sky, coming slowly into view as the fairies rise to sweet, thrilling melody, from underneath the stage in the transformation scene of the last act of the pantomime and spectacular drama beloved of our youth. Courteously inclining his ear to the monologue at his right, he kept his keen eyes fixed upon those coming figures. Slowly they rose, one that of a slender, dapper man, the other that of a slender, graceful girl, and the long arms of the former as they swung in sight were in energetic motion, in emphatic gesture. Little by little the murmur at Loring's right dulled over his senses. Little by little the slowly approaching figures sharpened and fixed themselves upon his sight, until when

the pair could not have been more than fifty feet away, the rector looked suddenly up in alarm, as Loring halted short.

"My dear young friend, how thoughtless I am! Are you not well? What is wrong?"

A big wooden house, in whose windows the lights were feebly shining, stood just a few paces back of the fence, back of the gate where now the pair was standing, in low whispered talk, eager and impetuous on part of the man, doubtful and reluctant on part of the girl. Then the former became suddenly aware that two men were standing only a short distance away, observing:

"Then, good-night," he said. "You think it over;" and, without raising his hat, turned sharply and went striding back the way they came.

Only one glance did Loring give that receding figure, but his eyes followed that of the girl, who skimmed lightly up the steps and into the house, banging the door behind her.

The rector was clinging to his arm and looking into his face with much concern when Loring pulled himself together.

"This is Mrs. Burton's," said he. "Let us enter. Surely you need a glass of wine, or—water," he added vaguely.

"Thank you, Mr. Lambert, not—there. Let us turn about."

CHAPTER XX.

Within the fortnight that followed came a climax in the life of Loring, and astrologers who could have heard would have made much of such a combination of strange influences. Having told the General that it was his desire to find a quiet place in the northwestern section of the new city, Loring had moved back to the hotel. Having told the rector he desired to obtain table board at Mrs. Burton's, it of course resulted that the worthy ecclesiastic should speak to her at first opportunity, and that she should speedily come in search of Mr. Loring to inquire why he had failed to carry out his plan, and further, to intimate that on the strength of the rector's representations she had ordered a much nicer set of china, and laid in a stock of provisions that just then were to be had at lower rates, which, except that she expected him, she could not have thought of doing. Indeed, Mrs. Burton not only called once at his office, but followed it up by a visit to his lodging, where she shed tears in the presence of the person from whom he rented his rooms, and, this still proving ineffectual, she came again to department headquarters with the manifest object of taking the General and his staff into her confidence, to the equally manifest dismay of the chief and the disgust of his adjutant-general, neither of whom could check the volume of the good lady's words of woe. Loring found his soldierly commander grinning whimsically when he dropped in to say good-morning. The General was that rare combination—a devout churchman and a stalwart fighter. Time and money had he devoted to the building up of this little church in the wilderness, and the communion service was his gift. More than once had he knelt to receive the sacred elements from the trembling hands of the worthy rector and listen to Mrs. Burton's effusive "Amen!" on his left ere she parted with the cup that was then passed to his bearded lips. At the chancel rail all good Christians knelt in common and meekly bowed their heads, but when Mrs. Burton came up to headquarters with a rail of her own, the General couldn't stand it, and said so to worthy Lambert, who remonstrated with the widow.

"Then the least he can do as a gentleman, after deceiving me so, is to help pay for them things I bought on the strength of his promise to board with me," was that pragmatical person's reply, and this view of the case the energetic lady ventilated to her six boarders, and they to the flock. There was one boarder, a temporary sojourner only, who listened and said naught. But that was only

another of her aristocratic, stuck-up ways, said they. She was "a lovely young lady," as all admitted on her first timid appearance, and the three women who sat at table with her were eager to take her into close fellowship and confidence, and the two young men, clerking in the new stores, no doubt, were as eager. But it became apparent within twenty-four hours that she held herself above, and desired to hold herself aloof from them, which led to a dissection of her personal charms on part of the women, and of her mental gifts on part of the men. Mr. Lambert had commended her to the care of Mrs. Burton. Her board was paid in advance and no questions asked. She went to church and sang softly, but in a voice so exquisitely sweet and penetrating that it tempered the strident melodies of the devout Omahannas, and caused many a head to turn. She spent the first few days at the rector's, or in her room. Then came a roomer with the rumor that she had a follower, and for two evenings she was seen with a strange young man, pacing slowly up and down the walk, but never going into town. Within ten days after Loring settled in Omaha Mrs. Burton's boarders were engrossed in just two topics—the young lady in the second-story front, and the story of the young officer who first would and then wouldn't be one of their number. No exception to this statement as to Mrs. Burton's boarders is made in the case of the damsel herself.

Loring frankly told his story as to Mrs. Burton to the General. He had merely asked Mr. Lambert if he could tell him of a place to board. Lambert had led him to Mrs. Burton's. He found it too far out and otherwise unsuitable, and had abandoned the idea. He had never seen Mrs. Burton or authorized any one to speak to her for him. The General laughed and said he understood it all, was perfectly satisfied and never thought of questioning him; and satisfied he was for several days. Then suddenly it was announced that Loring had decided not only to return to the hotel for table board, but was actually rooming there, and the landlord of whom he had rented his rooms turned up with a grievance, at least his wife did, and when a woman has a grievance, nine times out of ten the world gets the benefit of it. Mrs. Landlord came round to the chief quartermaster with her complaint.

It was a lovely summer morning. Lieutenant Loring had walked down to the office and raised his hat to the General as that genial officer was driven by behind his sturdy old team, and waving his hand cordially to the grave young gentleman who walked so erect with such measured stride, and with never a glance into the windows of the shops or bars. Loungers had no use for Loring. He never stopped to pass the time of day or suggest a toddy, and Loring had less

use for them. Ten minutes later the lieutenant found the office in commotion, clerks and orderlies hastening about with grave faces, Stone and Stanton with the General in his room; the general himself, pallid and mopping his wet forehead.

"This is horribly sudden," he said, as he thrust an open dispatch into Loring's hand. It was the brief announcement that the General commanding the department of California, the chief Loring had so recently left, had dropped dead at his desk the night before. Little as he had liked him, the Engineer was shocked and grieved.

"It may make grave changes," said the adjutant-general a little later. "It may send our kind and thoughtful chief to the Pacific coast and give us—whom?"

"It will make one, at least," said Stone impetuously. "It'll send that galoot Petty back to his regiment right here in Nebraska and give him a taste of service he will little like."

"Why do you say back, Stone? Where did Petty ever serve with it except when it was in the garrison of Washington?" asked the adjutant-general. "You know him, I believe, Loring?"

"I know him—yes."

"Think he'd pan out well in an Indian fight?"

"He might."

"You're an optimist, Loring," said Stone, who was ever seeking yet never succeeding in the effort to penetrate the armor of Loring's reserve. "I believe you think even Burleigh would fight at a pinch."

"I'm sure he would!" said Loring, as he walked thoughtfully away.

"That's the dash, dashest man I ever met," said Stone, in terms he never knowingly used in the hearing of his commander. "What he'd say *to* a man I can only guess from a letter Skinny wrote from Alcantraz after that row they had at 'Frisco. *Of* a man you can't get him to speak."

"We may have to," said the adjutant-general to himself, as he turned back to his desk and to a packet of papers and dispatches from Gate City.

It was a day of perturbation. Not ten minutes later the Engineer was called to conference with the department commander and found him closeted with his

chief of staff.

"You were not favorably impressed with Major Burleigh," said he, after a moment of silent study of the young officer's face. "Will you tell me why?"

Loring stood and colored. He had spoken no word of Burleigh, except in answer to direct question. Stone must have seen his aversion, and had possibly told of it.

"You dislike to, I see," said the General kindly. "Let me remove your scruples. Major Burleigh has been absent from his post without leave at a time when his services were urgently needed. His affairs are in a good deal of a tangle. It is believed that he has been making use of government funds. I tell you this in strict confidence. Do you know what caused his panic there at Reno and made him insist on being taken right on to Fort Frayne?"

Loring thought a moment, then "No, sir."

"Mr. Loring," said the General, "Major Burleigh has been an object of distrust for over a month. While he was away on this trip to Warrior Gap matters were brought to my attention that were of a grave nature. Investigations have been made. Major Bruce at Reno says you seemed struck by the superscription on the envelope of the letter he received there that threw him into such a panic. Would you know the handwriting, do you think?"

"Yes, General."

Silently the chief-of-staff held forth a note which Loring took and closely examined. It read "Captain Newhall begs to assure the adjutant-general, Department of the Platte, that he meant no discourtesy in failing to register. He was unaware of the rule existing at department headquarters, had come here on personal business connected with certain real estate in which he has an interest, is on two months' leave from his station New Orleans, Louisiana, and will register the moment the office opens in the morning unless he should be compelled to leave for St. Joe to-night."

Loring looked up, puzzled. The handwriting was familiar; so was a form that he had recently seen vanishing in the distance one evening a week before, and something in the voice had a familiar ring, but this name was new.

"To explain all this," said the adjutant-general, "there was a dashing-looking fellow here for two or three days drinking a good deal down about the depot on the flats and around the quartermasters' corrals. He said he was Captain Newhall,

of the Thirty-ninth Infantry, and the general finally told me to send an aide to look him up and remind him it was his duty to call at headquarters and account for his presence. Between that night and the next morning he disappeared, and at last accounts was hobnobbing with Burleigh at Gate City. You know of him, I see."

"Possibly."

"Then, General," said the chief-of-staff, with prompt decision, "the quickest way to got at the root of the matter would be to send Loring at once to Gate City."

The General thought for a moment.

"How soon could you go?"

"First train, sir."

It was then too late for the single passenger express that daily went clanking over the prairies toward Cheyenne. But that afternoon was held a long conference at department headquarters, which caused some wonderment among the officers not included, Stone especially, and there were many eyes on Loring's grave face as he finally came forth from the General's room, and without a word of explanation went straight to his own.

"Wonder what *he's* been doing," said a man from the garrison, who had happened in in search of news.

Stone shrugged his shoulders, offered no explanation, but looked volumes. An aide-de-camp should never reveal what he knows of other officers' affairs—much less that he knows nothing.

The night came on, warm and stifling almost as the day. The window of Loring's room opened on the crude wooden gallery that ran the length of the hotel, and he kept it open from the bottom for such air as could be obtained. A note lay on the mantel shelf when he returned from the office late in the afternoon. This he had taken downstairs, inclosed it, unopened, in one of the coarse hotel envelopes, addressed and sent it by a messenger to Mrs. Burton's. At ten o'clock at night, in his shirt sleeves, he was packing a valise, when at the open window, on the gallery without, there appeared suddenly a slender, graceful, girlish form; a fair face gazed appealingly, imploringly in, and a soft voice pronounced his name.

Starting up, he stepped quickly toward the apparition. One instant the lovely face

lighted with hope, joy, triumph, then changed to sudden wrath before the shade, pulled vehemently down, shut it from sight.

Even as she stood there, baffled, "a woman scorned" in the presence and hearing of another, who nevertheless stepped quickly forward to express her opinion of such heartless, soulless conduct despite the interposing shade, there came a sharp, imperative rap on Loring's door, and the summons "Wanted at headquarters at once, sir!"

And, weeping as though bereaved and forsaken, the younger woman threw herself upon the broad and sympathizing bosom of the elder.

"There, there, poor darling! Don't cry. Wait till Mr. Lambert and the General hear how he has treated you," said Mrs. Burton, "and we'll see what'll happen."

CHAPTER XXI.

The day of perturbation had been succeeded by a night of worry at department headquarters. Dispatches full of grave import were coming in from Gate City and Cheyenne. Old John Folsom, long time a trader among the Sioux, and known and trusted by the whole tribe, had given warning weeks before that serious consequences would attend the effort to build another post along the Big Horn. Red Cloud and his hosts of warriors had sworn to sweep it from the face of the earth and every man of its garrison with it. All this had been reported by the General to his superiors at Washington, and all this had been derided by the Indian Bureau. Against the judgment, against the counsel of the department commander, the work went on. A large force of laborers hired by Major Burleigh at Gate City early in the spring had been sent to Warrior Gap under strong escort, and the unseasoned timber and fresh-cut logs were being rapidly dovetailed and mortised, and long wagon trains laden with stores and supplies, purchased by Major Burleigh's agents, were pushing out across the Platte.

"Indians, indeed!" said that experienced officer disdainfully. "They do not presume to interfere!" and long since the whisper had been going the rounds that Major Burleigh's interest in the construction of that new post, involving an expense of some hundreds of thousands of dollars, was something more than official. In vain John Folsom and veteran officers of the fighting force had pointed out that Indians never do interfere when they see huge trains of provisions and supplies coming just where they want them. Orders were orders, and the building went on. John Folsom said that any day the news might come that Red Cloud and his braves had massacred every man and carried off every woman in the new cantonment. Wives and children were there, secure, as they believed, behind the stout hearts and far and fast-shooting new breechloaders, trustful, too, of the Indians whom they had often fed and welcomed at their doors in the larger and less exposed garrison.

"Two of our companies can stand off a thousand Sioux," said one gallant officer, who based his confident report on the fact that with fifty of the new breechloaders, behind a log breastwork, he had whipped a horde of mountain braves armed only with lance and bow and old "smooth-bores" or squirrel rifles.

"We came down through the whole tribe," said Burleigh, with swelling breast. "I

had only a small troop of cavalry, and Red Cloud never so much as raised a yelp. He knew who was running that outfit and didn't care to try conclusions."

It all sounded very fine among the barrooms and over the poker-table at Gate City, where Burleigh was a patron and an oracle, but in distant camps along the Platte and Powder rivers, and among troopers and linesmen nearer home there were odd glances, and nudging elbows whenever Burleigh's boastings were repeated. Even as far as department headquarters the story was being told that the mere report of "Big band of Sioux ahead" sent in by the advance guard, a report that brought Loring and Stone leaping nimbly out of the ambulance, rifle in hand and ready for business, sent Burleigh under the seat and left him there quaking.

"Get your men down from the Big Horn," was John Folsom's urgent advice to the department commander. "Get your men up there," was the order from Washington, and no wonder the General was troubled. Then in the midst of it all began to come these rumors affecting Burleigh's integrity; then the determination to send Loring to look after this new boon companion with whom Burleigh was consorting; then a dispatch from old Colonel Stevens, "Old Pecksniff," as the irreverent youngsters called him, the commander at Fort Emory on the outskirts of Gate City, telling of a tremendous storm that had swept the Laramie plains and the range of the Medicine Bow and Rattlesnake Hills, just after Lieutenant Dean had been sent forth with a small party of troopers to push through to Warrior Gap with a big sum of money, ten thousand dollars in cash, for the payment of contractors and their men at the new post, and, what was of thrilling import, there had been a deep laid scheme to head him off, ambuscade him and get that money. Hank Birdsall and his gang, forty of the worst toughs on the Western frontier, had "got the tip" from some one in the secret in Gate City, and no one outside of the post commander himself and one of Burleigh's confidential clerks, had the faintest inkling of the transaction. Nothing but that storm could have defeated their purpose. Several of the outlaws and many of their horses were drowned, and one of the gang, rescued at the last minute by the mail carrier to Frayne—rescued just in time to save his life, had gasped his confession of the plot. Birdsall and his people were now scattering over the territory, but "Old Pecksniff" felt that matters so serious demanded full report to the department commander, and this full report had reached Omaha the very night that Loring got his orders to leave.

Hastening to the office in compliance with the imperative summons, his heart beating heavily despite his calm of manner, his thoughts reverting to that well-

known face and the appealing voice at his window despite his utmost effort to forget them, Loring found the General with his chief-of-staff and Captain Stone busy over telegrams and dispatches. One of these the General handed to the Engineer. Then, as the latter read, the veteran of three wars arose from his chair, took the young soldier by the arm and led him aside, a proceding that caused Captain Stone to glance up from the telegram he was swiftly copying, and to follow with angering eyes, until suddenly aware that the adjutant-general was observing him, then his pen renewed its scratching. It was not good that a newcomer, a young lieutenant, should be preferred to him, and it was too evident that between the General and the Engineer was a bond of some kind the aid could not explain.

"Do you understand this?" asked the General, as he pointed to the letter in Loring's hand.

It was brief enough. It was written by a clerk in Burleigh's office to a fellow-clerk in that of the chief quartermaster at Omaha, and the latter had felt it his duty, he said, to inform his immediate superior, who in turn had laid it before the chief-of-staff. It read as follows:

"The old man's rattled as I never saw him before, and God only knows what's amiss. Two young lieutenants came in and thrashed him right before the whole of us, called him a liar, and all that. His friend Newhall, that pulled him through the yellow fever, he says, was there at the time drunk, and actually congratulated them, and though Burleigh raved and swore and wrote no end of dispatches to be sent to Omaha demanding court-martial for Lieutenant Dean, devil a one of them was ever really sent. Not only that, but Burleigh was threatened and abused by Newhall, and had to buy him off with a roll of greenbacks—and I saw it. Who's Newhall, anyhow, and what hold has he on Burleigh? Nursing him through yellow fever don't go. Newhall's gone, however, either over to Cheyenne or out on the Cache la Poudre. There's something rotten in Denmark, and I want to get out of this."

Loring read it carefully through twice, the General keenly studying his face the while.

"I have determined to go to Gate City myself, even though time can ill be spared, Loring," said he. "There is urgent need of my presence at Laramie. Possibly I may have to go to Frayne, and shall need you with me, but meantime this thing must be explained. Everything seems to point to Burleigh's being in some

unusual trouble. Everything indicates that this Captain Newhall, who was one of his chums in New Orleans, has some heavy hold on him, a gambling debt, perhaps, or knowledge of cotton transactions during the war. I cannot but feel that you know something of the man. Tell me, did you meet that fellow when he was here?"

Loring stood looking gravely, straight into the face of his superior. Swiftly his thoughts sped back to that soft, warm evening when he and the rector slowly ascended the gentle grade toward Mrs. Burton's homestead, and there was unfolded before his eyes that picture he was destined never to forget, the lovely tints of the clear northern sky, the broad valley of the great river, with its bounding bluffs and hillocks, hued by the dying day, the dark forms, slender and graceful both, coming nearer and nearer, until in startled recognition of one at least, he halted in dumb amaze, and therefore caught but flitting glimpse of the other as it whisked jauntily away. He had his suspicions, strong and acute, yet with nothing tangible as yet on which to base them, and if he breathed them, what would be the result? The girl whose identity he had promised not to betray "until sister Naomi could be heard from," would beyond all question be called to account. To his very door had she come within forty-eight hours of that strange evening, which the rector's prattle had made public property, begged a minute's interview without giving any name, and stepping down into the plainly furnished little western parlor, there in the dim light of a single kerosene burner, Walter Loring had come face to face with his old love—Geraldine.

Mindful of all the harm she had done him in San Francisco, rather than of what had passed before, he met her in stern silence. On his generosity, his magnanimity she threw herself. She had deceived and wronged him in ever engaging herself to him, she said, and would have gone on to say more. "That is all past and done with," he coldly interposed. "What is it now?" And then it transpired that good Mr. Lambert had been the means of securing for Naomi an excellent position, that Naomi had gone to enter on her duties and had sent for her sister to come and live at Mrs. Burton's until she could better provide for her, that Naomi was living under an assumed name, and that she prayed that no one might know their unhappy past. The interview was cut short by the curiosity of some member of the household who came in ostensibly to trim the lamp.

"It shall be as you wish until you hear from your sister," said Loring, bowing her out with punctilious civility and praying in secret that there it might end, but end it did not. Within another forty-eight hours she was there with another quest. The servant who announced her presence in the parlor below did so with a

confidential and impertinent grin. "The same lady wants to see Lieutenant Loring," and this time he was colder and sterner than before. Her evident purpose was to revert to the relations that once existed, though her plea was only for news from California. Had nothing ever been heard of the missing jewels? she asked. Their need was so great. She had most excellent prospects of an engagement in Boston if she could only have six months instruction under Signor Calabresi, but his terms were so high and she would have to live in New York, and people kept writing her that she and Naomi really ought to make some effort to recover the value of that property, and she had come, friendless as she was, to ask if he thought a suit against the steamship company would result in their getting anything. Captain Pet—a gentleman, that is, who had been most kind in San Francisco, had promised to do something, but now that the General was dead what could he do? There was no doubting the identity or intentions of that gentleman, thought Loring as he gravely replied that they would only be defeated in any such attempt. Then with swimming eyes she had bemoaned her past, her fatal errors, her greed for wealth and position that had led her to stifle her own heart throbs and deceive the one true friend she had ever known, and Loring broke short the conversation by leaving the room. Then she came again, alone, and he refused to see her. Then she came with Mrs. Burton, and the house was in a titter, and he broke up his establishment and moved back to the hotel, to the scandal of his landlord, as has been said, who made loud complaint to the powers at headquarters. Then she wrote that she was being followed and persecuted by a man she never knew before, the man who was with her the night Mr. Lambert said they met them in front of Mrs. Burton's, a dreadful man who said that he believed that she loved Lieutenant Loring and made threats against him. She implored Loring's protection, and Loring saw through the flimsy device and returned the letter unanswered, and later letters unopened, and then the woman seemed to take fire, and in turn she threatened him.

And now she had brought Mrs. Burton to witness his cruelty to her, the meek, suffering girl to whom he was pledged and plighted, who she had followed to Omaha in hopes of softening his heart and winning back his wayward love, as was the burden of her sorrowing song to that most sympathetic of women, already burning with prejudice and fancied wrong of her own. One "woman scorned" is more than enough for many a reputation. Two, in double harness, would wreck that of Saint Anthony.

All this and more had sped through Loring's mind that night and was uppermost in his thoughts as he stood there facing his patient commander. The General's

fine, clear-cut features clouded with anxiety as he noted the long silence and hesitation. Again he spoke, with grave, yet gentle reproof in his tone.

"Surely, Loring, if you know of the fellow, it is our right to know."

"I realize it, sir. But I can do better than tell a mere suspicion. Give me authority to act and I'll land that man in jail and lay his whole story on your desk."

"Then go and do it!" said the chief.

CHAPTER XXII.

Another week and all Wyoming was awake and thrilling. There had been dreadful doings on the Big Horn, and John Folsom's prophecy had come true. Enticing one detachment after another out from the stockade at Warrior Gap by show of scattered bands of braves, that head devil of the Ogallallas, Red Cloud, had gradually surrounded three companies with ten times their force of fighting men and slaughtered every soldier of the lot. There had been excitement at Gate City during a brief visit of the General and his aid inspecting the affairs of Major Burleigh, who, confined to his bed by nervous prostration, and forbidden by his doctor to see anybody, had nevertheless sent his keys and books and bank account, and to the mystification of the chief, more money was found in the big office safe at the depot quartermaster's than was necessary to cover his accountability. The General and his inspector were fairly puzzled. They personally questioned the bank cashier and the quartermaster's clerks. They ransacked that safe and pored over the books, both there and at the bank. The only queer thing discovered was that a large sum of money, five thousand dollars or so, had been withdrawn from the bank in cash one day and within the week replaced. Then the General had to turn back to Cheyenne and hasten thence to the forts along the Platte, to expedite the sending of his soldiers to the relief of the beleaguered posts along the Big Horn, the tidings of the massacre reaching Gate City and plunging Fort Emory in mourning only a few hours after his departure.

Then came still another excitement at Gate City. Major Burleigh had suddenly become endowed with new youth and energy. He who was declared by his physicians to be in a critical condition, one demanding the utmost quiet, he who could not even see the department commander, and of whom the doctor had said it might be weeks before he was again fit for duty, had sprung from his bed, dictated certain letters, wired important news to the chief quartermaster at Omaha, demanded of the railway authorities an engine and caboose to bear him over the newly-completed mountain division to Cheyenne, had taken every cent from his private safe, had entered his office at an early hour, satchel and safe key in hand, was confounded by the sight of two clerks there smoking forbidden pipes, and turning, without a word, had fled. One of these was the young man who so recently had written to a confidant in Omaha, telling of Burleigh's queer

doings and his own desire to get from underneath.

It transpired later that Burleigh went back to the bank, presented a check for the balance to his credit and demanded currency, but the cashier had become alarmed by the investigations made by the General and had temporized—said he must consult the president, and asked the major to call two hours later, whereat Burleigh had taken alarm. He was looking ghastly, said the cashier. It was apparent to every one that mentally, bodily, or both, the lately debonair and successful man of the world had "lost his grip."

And before even the swift-running engine could have landed the fugitive in Cheyenne, the truth was known. The package purporting to contain ten thousand dollars in currency for the payment of the workmen at Warrior Gap, sealed in Burleigh's office and sent at incredible risk by the hands of a young cavalry officer, with only ten troopers through the Indian lines, borne intact to the commanding officer of the new post, though its gallant guardians had run the gauntlet at the cost of the blood of more than half their number, was found when opened to hold nothing but waste paper. Then indeed was explained Burleigh's insistence. Then indeed was apparent why he had not pressed his charges against the officer who had publicly horsewhipped him. Then indeed was explained why good old John Folsom had withdrawn so large a sum in cash from his bank and how Burleigh was enabled to replace what he himself had taken. Then did it begin to dawn on people where Hank Birdsall, "The Pirate of the Plains," as he had been alliteratively described, had got the "straight tip" which enabled him to instantly enlist the services of so many outlawed men in a desperate game. Gradually as the whole scheme became evident and the truth leaked out, Gate City woke up to a pitch of pious fury against its late popular and prominent "boomer" and citizen. Gradually it dawned upon them that, in jealous hatred of the young soldier whom Folsom's lovely daughter seemed to favor, he had first sought to undermine him, then to ruin and finally to make way with, even while at the same time covering the tracks of his own criminality. It was Elinor Folsom's lover, Lieutenant Dean, who horsewhipped him for good and sufficient reasons. It was Elinor's father who bribed him with a big and sorely-needed loan to prefer no charges against the boy. It was Burleigh who almost immediately after this tremendous episode had secured the sending of Lieutenant Dean on a mission so fraught with peril that the chances were ten to one against his ever getting through alive. Who could have "posted" Birdsall but Burleigh? Who could say what the amount of his shortage really was? The key of the big safe was gone with him, and in that safe at the time of the general's visit were at least

fifteen thousand dollars. "Old Pecksniff," commanding officer at Fort Emory, had wired to department headquarters. An expert safe-opener was ordered out from Chicago, and right in the midst of all the turmoil there suddenly appeared upon the scene a blue-eyed young man, with pale features, clear-cut and strong, a light brown mustache that shaded his mouth, and, though he wore no uniform, the rumor went round that this was Lieutenant Loring of the Engineers. Infantry and cavalry, commissaries and quartermasters, doctors and sutlers, the denizens of Gate City well knew as attachments of the army, but what the mischief was an Engineer? Loring put up at Gate City's new hotel, simply registering as from Omaha, but that he bore credentials and was a man of mark, Gate City learned from the fact that Colonel Stevens himself had met him on arrival and wished to take him out to the fort, and was ill-pleased when Mr. Loring explained that his business would be best performed in town. Gate City followed the young man with eager eyes, confident that Engineer must be the army name for detective. He studied the hotel register. He curiously examined all relics of the late lamented Newhall, who disappeared before Burleigh. He questioned the clerks at the corral, reconnoitered the neighborhood, asked what were their means of defense, turned inside out a worn yet shapely boot that had been the captain's, bade man after man to describe that worthy, and finally walked away from the depot, having picked up lots of information and imparted none. He spent some time at Folsom's that evening. He drove out to the fort in the afternoon, "and what do you think he wanted?" said Old Pecksniff, whose command had been cut down to one company and the band, "wanted me to post a strong guard over the quartermaster's depot, lest that damned marauding gang of Birdsall's should gallop in some night with Burleigh's safe key and get away with the funds. I asked him if those were the General's orders and he said no. I asked him if they were anybody's orders and he said no. I asked him if it was anybody's idea but his own and he said no, and then I told him, by gad, I hadn't men enough to guard the public property here at the post. The quartermaster's depot was responsible for most of them being away, let them take care of their own."

Gate City Hotel was alive with loungers that night waiting for the Engineer. At half-past nine he had come from the quartermaster's corral, and after a few minutes had gone away with Mr. Folsom, who drove up in his carriage. He was up at the old man's now, said the impatient ones, fooling away the time with the girls when he ought to be there answering their questions and appeasing their curiosity. The talk turned on the probable whereabouts of Burleigh and his "pals." So had the mighty fallen that the lately fawning admirers now spoke of the fugitive as a criminal. He couldn't follow the Union Pacific East; everybody

knew him, and by this time officers were on the lookout for him all along the road. He had reached Cheyenne, that was known, and had driven away from there up the valley of Crow Creek with two companions. Loring himself had ascertained this in Cheyenne, but it was the sheriff who gave out the information. He was in hiding, declared the knowing ones, in some of the haunts of Birdsall's fellows east of Laramie City, a growing town of whose prowess at poker and keno Gate City was professionally aware and keenly jealous. He might hide there a day or two and then get out of the country by way of the Sweetwater along the old stage route to Salt Lake or skip southward and make for Denver. Northward he dare not go. There were the army posts along the Platte; beyond them the armed hosts of Indians, far more to be dreaded than all the sheriffs' posses on the plains. Half-past ten came and still no Loring, and the round of drinks were getting monotonous. Judge Pardee, a bibulous and oracular limb of the law, had been chosen inquisitor-general, with powers to call for all the news that was stowed away in that secretive "knowledge-box" on the shoulders of the Engineer. Gate City had resolved and "'lowed" that a man reputed to know so much should be held up and compelled to part with at least a little. Jimmy Peters, the landlord's boy, scouting out to Folsom's, came back on the run, breathless from three-quarters of a mile of panting through that rare atmosphere, to say that he had just seen a couple of officers ride away to the fort, and old man Folsom with "the Engineer feller" were coming out the front gate. They'd be along in a few minutes. So in their eagerness some of the loungers strolled out in front and gazed westward up the long, broad, hard-beaten street on which, in many a spot, the bunch grass of the prairie still lingered. It was a lovely summer night, warm, starlit, but the baby moon had early sunk to rest, and the darkness was intense. Yet the first men to come forth could have sworn they saw two horsemen, dim and shadowy, go loping across the broad thoroughfare from north to south, at the first cross street. There was nothing remarkable in horsemen being abroad at that hour; horses were tethered now in front of the hotel. What *was* strange was that they passed within a mile of Peter's bar and didn't stop for a drink. Men who are capable of that neglect of opportunity and the attendant privilege of "setting em up" for all hands, could be nothing less than objects of suspicion. Two minutes later and somebody said, "Shut up!" a frontierism for "hush," and all ears were turned expectant. No, there was no sound of brisk, springy footsteps on the elastic wooden walk. Already men had noted that quick, alert, soldierly gait of the new officer. But "shut up" was repeated when audible murmurs were made. "There's more fellows a-horseback up yonder. Who in 'ell's out to-night?" queried the citizen with the keenest ears. "Jimmy, boy, run up there and scout—I'll give you a dime."

And Jimmy, nothing loath, was off, swift and noiseless as an arrow. It was time for Loring and "old man Folsom" to be getting there if they were coming, and the boy was athrill with excitement and interest.

Bending low, as he knew the Indians went on scout, springing along the plank walk he shot like a flitting specter up the street, stooping lower and glaring to left and right at the first crossing, but seeing nobody. A noiseless run of a third of a mile brought him to a corner, where, looking southward by day, one could see the flagstaff and the big white gateway, and beyond it the main office of the quartermaster's corral. Staff and gateway were invisible now, but beyond the latter gleamed two lights, each in a separate window of that office. Jimmy knew they never worked that late. Why should the curtains be up now? Why, indeed! It was a question that interested other prowlers beside himself, for, as he paused for breath, close at hand he heard the stamp of a horse's hoof, followed by a muttered curse, and evident jerk of the bit and jab with the spurs, for the tortured creature plunged and stamped in pain.

"Keep that damned broncho quiet!" growled a voice. "You'll give the whole thing away."

"It's given away now," was the surly half whisper, in reply, "else those fellows would never be up at this hour of the night. They've mounted guard. Where'd the man go with the key?"

"Up to Folsom's back gate. Three of our fellows are shadowing him, though. He can't get away with it. He said he had to see his wife or she'd betray the whole business."

"All the same I don't like it. The old man always has a raft of fort people there. Hello, listen!"

All on a sudden there came from afar up the broad avenue the sound of scurrying hoofs. Down through the darkness, louder and louder, spurring and thundering, came three horsemen whom the shadows at the corner reined out eagerly to meet. There was no suspense. "Come on!" savagely growled a hoarse voice. "The game's up! Newhall's wife led him square into a trap. They've got him, key and all."

Then away they rode, athirst and blasphemous, and away sped Jimmy with his wondrous news, and out tumbled the loungers at Peter's bar, the judge and the sheriff last, and those who had horses mounted and galloped up to Folsom's and

those who had not trudged enviously after, and a few minutes later there was gathered at the corral a panting and eager band of men, for thither had Mr. Loring, with his grip on the collar and his pistol at his captive's ear, marched an ashen-faced, scowling, scurrilous man, a dashing-looking fellow at times, a raging rascal now, cursing his wife for a foul traitress, cursing his captor for an accomplice, saying filthy words about women in general, until choked by a twist of the collar.

Into the lighted office and the presence of two armed clerks the Engineer marched his man, the first arrivals following eagerly until the door was shut and barred. Into the hands of a sheriff did Loring personally commit his prisoner. Then calling to his aid the chief clerk, he tried the key in the lock of the safe. It worked exactly. Then he turned to the civil officer of the law.

"Guard this man well," said he. "He has escaped twice before. It is not Captain Newhall. He is a thief—whose name is Nevins."

"And you hear me, young cock of the walk," was the furious outbreak of the captive runagate, "you stole that key from me—to whom it was given to deliver to Colonel Stevens. It isn't the first time you stole either. You'll sweat for this night's work so sure as there's a God in heaven!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

Gate City had found a hero and wished to worship him, but its hero proved as intractable as he was reticent. For three days after the capture of Nevins the community was agog with rumor and excitement. To begin with, the captive "had the cheek of a brass monkey," said the sheriff, and swore stoutly that he was a wronged and injured man. So far from being a prisoner he should be on a pinnacle, rewarded by a generous and grateful government for important services rendered. Who but he had followed and found the renegade major and wrested from him full confession and the key of the safe, which in turn had been forcibly wrested from him through the malevolent jealousy of that upstart Engineer; but never, said Nevins, would he now betray Burleigh's hiding-place or impart his confession until full reparation was made for the wrongs and indignities heaped upon him. The sheriff was fairly dazed.

"Who were all the fellows you had with you," he demanded, "if they weren't some of Hank Birdsall's crowd, come there to raid the quartermaster's department depot?" Nevins' indignation was fine to see. He denied all knowledge of the presence of any such. He demanded an interview with Folsom. He utterly refused at first to accord one to his wife, as Naomi Fletcher, Folsom's housekeeper was now understood to be. That woman was in league with his enemies, he swore. That woman wrote and bade him come and then had Folsom and Loring and other armed men there to pounce upon him. Folsom came and had a few words with him, but told him bluntly that he wouldn't believe his preposterous story, and would have nothing to do with him until he withdrew the outrageous accusations against both his wife and Loring. That woman's a million times too good for you, said Folsom. Then Nevins concluded he must have a talk with Loring, and, on his message being conveyed that officer, the bearer was bidden to say that Mr. Loring refused to have anything whatever to do with him, whereat the captive ex-captain ground his teeth with rage and made the jail-yard ring with malediction. Events succeeded each other with marvelous rapidity. Folsom's visit was early the morning after the capture, and by noon he was bowling along on a seventy-mile ride to the ranch in the Laramie valley, hurried thither by the news that Birdsall's gang had run off many of his son's best horses and that Hal Folsom himself was missing. Loring galloped by the side of the ambulance several miles, conferring with the old frontiersman all the way, then

turned back to resume his work at the depot. Eagerly he wired dispatches to the General, which were forwarded from Cheyenne to the Platte, telling of his important capture, smiling quietly as he wrote. Had he not promised to produce the mysterious Newhall himself? Admirable service, indeed, had the young Engineer rendered. The testimony of Folsom, Loring, Jimmy Peters and one or two wakeful citizens all proved that there must have been a dozen of Birdsall's gang in town that night. There could be only one explanation, for a price was on the head of every man. They had come with "Newhall" and the key straight from some distant lair in the Black Hills of Wyoming, the big-shouldered range that stretches from the Laramie near its junction with the Platte southward to Colorado. They were bent on a sudden rush upon the corral in the dead of night, the forcing of the gate and the office door, then, with "Newhall" to unlock the safe, they would be up and away like the wind, with money enough to keep them all in clover—and whisky—until the last dollar was gambled or guzzled. Loring's suspicions had proved exactly correct. Loring's precautions in having the office brightly lighted and a show of armed men about had held the would-be robbers at bay during the early hours of the night, and then his prompt action in hurling himself on the mysterious stranger who came stealthily in at Folsom's back gate, had finally and totally blocked the game.

But, just in proportion as Loring turned out to be right, old Pecksniff turned out to be wrong, for he had refused a guard for the depot, and therefore was it now Pecksniff's bounden duty to himself to pooh-pooh the precautions of the Engineer and belittle the danger. Not for a moment would he admit that armed desperadoes had come at Nevins' back. As for the key in his possession, with all respect to the statements of Mr. Loring, the story of the unfortunate captain was just as plausible, and that key should have been delivered to him, the commander at Fort Emory, instead of being taken possession of by the Engineer. True, Nevins had been dismissed in disgrace, and in a question of veracity between the two men there was little doubt that Loring's would prevail. But a very peppery, fidgety, unhappy old man was Colonel Stevens for many days, prating about this independence of action of stripling officers right under his nose. But the worst came on the day when the little troop of cavalry at Fort Emory was still further depleted by the detachment of a sergeant, two corporals and eight troopers, ordered to report with pack-mule and ten-days' rations to Lieutenant Loring, of the Engineers, and Colonel Stevens had not been consulted again. The senior colonel in the department, he had seen his command cut down, company by company, until only a bare squad, said he, remained to guard the most important post in Wyoming. (Which it wasn't by any means, but he had been led to think

so.) And now young whipper-snappers just out of West Point were running away with his men right under his nose!

But Loring's orders came to him direct from Omaha. He had need of every precaution. He was now going on a mission that demanded the utmost secrecy, and the colonel could no more conceal a movement than a sieve could hold water.

Quitting the quartermaster's depot one summer night at twelve, the little detachment rode silently out across the southward prairie, swung round to the east when the dim lights of town were a mile behind, took the trot over the hard, bounding turf, and at dawn were heading straight for the breaks of the Laramie. Halting for rest and coffee when the sun was an hour high, they again pushed on until noon, when they unsaddled in a grove of leafy cottonwoods in a little fork of the Medicine Bow, watered the weary horses and gave them a hearty feed and themselves as hearty a dinner, and then picketing and hoppling their steeds, who were glad enough to roll and sprawl in the sand, all hands managed to get some hours of sound sleep before the sun was sinking to the edge of the Sweetwater Range. Then came the careful grooming of their mounts, then a dip in the cool waters, then smoking tins of soldier coffee and sizzling slips of bacon. Then again the saddle and the silent trail, with the moon looking down from the zenith on their warlike array. Heavily armed was every man, each, even the lieutenant, with carbine and brace of Colts, and on they rode through the still, soft night air, chatting in low tones, no man knowing but every one believing that the taciturn, blue-eyed young officer in the lead was heading them for a lair of the Birdsall gang. It was too far south just then for Sioux.

Another morn and they had crossed, during the dark hours, the broad plains of the Laramie and were winding up among the hills. Another rest and, spurring from the rear, there overtook them a bronzed, weather-beaten frontiersman whom Mr. Loring greeted without show of surprise, and when again they moved on it was he who rode at the lieutenant's left, up, up a winding trail among the frowning heights, until just as every man was wondering when on earth they could hope for a bite, the noiseless signal halt was given, while the leaders dismounted and peered over a shoulder of bluff ahead, held brief consultation, then down the ravine to the left rode the stranger, and back to his men came Loring, his eyes kindling.

"There is a camp half a mile ahead where I have to make an arrest," said he quietly. "Keep close at my heels. We'll have to gallop when we get in view. Draw

pistol. Don't fire unless they do. They probably won't."

And they didn't. Half a dozen startled men, gambling about a blanket; two or three sleeping off a drunk, and one hunted, haunted wretch nervously pacing up and down among the pines, were no match for the dash of a dozen blue jackets coming thundering into view. There was no thought of fight. Those who could catch their horses threw themselves astride bareback and shot for the heart of the hills; two or three scrambled off afoot and were quickly run down, one a heavily-built, haggard, hollow-eyed man shook from head to foot as the lieutenant reined up his panting and excited horse and coolly said:

"You are my prisoner, Burleigh."

Nor was there attempt at rescue. Mounting his four captives on their horses, their feet lashed to the stirrups, their hands bound, all the abandoned arms, ammunition and provisions destroyed and the camp burned, Loring led promptly away up the range toward the north until clear of the timber, then down the westward slope toward the Laramie valley once more, searching for a secure place to bivouac. Far to the north the grand old peak loomed against the blue gray of the Wyoming skies. Off to their left front, uplifting a shaggy crest from its surrounding hills, a bold butte towered full twenty miles away, and toward that jagged landmark Loring saw his sergeant peering time and again, with hand-shaded eyes.

"What do you see?" he presently asked.

"Smoke, sir, I think. Will the lieutenant look with his glass?"

Silently Loring unslung his binocular and gazed. His eyes were keen, but untrained. "Take it yourself, sergeant," he said; and the veteran trooper reined out to one side and peered long and steadily, then came trotting up to the head of the column, doubt and suppressed excitement mingling on his weather-beaten face.

"I couldn't be sure, sir, but it looked for a minute like smoke."

"And that means——"

"Indian signals, sir. That's Eagle Butte, only a couple of miles from Hal Folsom's ranch."

Loring pondered. It was long since, in any force, the Sioux had ventured south of

the Platte; but now, after their victory at Warrior Gap and the tremendous reinforcement they had received from all the turbulent tribes, what was to prevent? John Folsom himself had told him it might be expected any moment. John Folsom himself had gone to that very spot, consumed with anxiety about the safety of his son, but confident of the safety of himself and those he loved when once he could reach the ranch. "No Sioux," said he, "would raise hand to harm me."

But Loring's men and horses both were sorely wearied now, and at sundown the little command reached a sheltered nook where grass, wood, and water were abundant. Here restfully, yet anxiously they bivouacked until three in the morning, and then once more, refreshed but alert and cautious, watchful of their prisoners and watchful of the signs ahead, on they sped for Folsom's ranch. The dawn broke beautifully clear. The trail led down into the romantic valley of the Laramie at the bend where it begins its rush through the range. Then, turning westward as they reached the foot of a steep and commanding height, Loring signaled to his sergeant and the troopers spurred up alongside. There before them lay the broad and beautiful valley just lighting up with the rosy hues of the glad young day. There to the northward, black-bearded with its growth of pine, the rays of the rising sun just glinting on the topmost crags, towered Eagle Butte, a plume of smoke-puffs, even at the moment beginning to soar slowly aloft. There, not a mile away straight ahead was the steep ridge that, hiding Folsom's from view, stretched down from the northward foothills to the very bank of the lapping Laramie. There south of the stream, the gradual slope of the black range, studded here and there with bowlders that seemed to have rolled down from the precipitous cliffs under which they were now moving, two seasoned old dragoons three hundred yards out to the front, covering the cautious advance. All the broad sweep of rolling landscape far to the west just lighting up in the slant of the summer sunshine. Not a living thing in sight save their own little band, yet beyond that ridge, only two miles away, lay the ranch. All seemingly peaceful and secure, yet, over that jagged watch tower to the north the war signals of the Sioux were flaunting, and every hand seemed to seek the small of the gun stock. Even two of the prisoners plead for "a show in the fight," if there was to be one, and not five minutes later it came. Borne on the still, breathless air there rose throbbing from the west the spiteful crack, crack of rifles, the distant clamor of taunting jeer and yell. Back from the front came one of the troopers at mad gallop, his eyes popping almost from his head. "My God! lieutenant, Folsom's ranch is afire and the valley's thick with Sioux!"

Even then, when every carbine seemed to leap from its socket, men remembered the groan of despair that rose from Burleigh's lips.

"Look after the prisoners, corporal. Sergeant Carey, you and the first six come with me!" cried Loring. A gallop of less than a minute brought them almost abreast of the ridge. Black and billowing a cloud of smoke was rising, lashed from beneath by angry tongues of red flame.

"It isn't the house, thank God!" cried the sergeant. "It's the haystacks. But—look at the Indians!"

Look, well they might! All about the corrals they were darting. All of a sudden there blazed from the ridge line across the stream the fire of a dozen rifles. All around them the spiteful bullets bit the turf. One horse madly reared and plunged, his rider cursing heartily. Wildly the more excitable troopers returned an aimless shot from the saddle, while others gazed eagerly to the officer for orders. It was his first meeting with the Sioux. It had been his hope to gain that threatened ranch by dawn and join its garrison, but where was that hope now? Down along the banks of the Laramie, lashing their bounding ponies, brandishing their weapons and yelling like mad, a band of Sioux, full forty strong, came charging at them, splashing through the shallows and scattering out across their front in the well-known battle tactics. Not an instant was there to be lost!

"Jump for those rocks, men!" rang Loring's order. "Cut loose your prisoners, corporal. They must fight for their lives."

But oh, what chance had so few against so many! Springing from saddle, turning loose their startled, snorting horses, that go tearing away down the valley, the old hands have jumped for the rocks, and kneeling and taking deliberate aim, opened fire on the foremost of the foe. A gaudy warrior goes down in the flood, and a yell goes up to heaven. Another good shot slays a feather-decked pony and sends his rider sprawling, and wisely the others veer away to right and left and scurry to more distant range. But up the slopes to the south still others dart. From three sides now the Indian bullets are hissing in. In less than four minutes of sharp, stinging fight, gallant Sergeant Carey is stretched on the turf, with a shattered elbow, Corporal Burke and two troopers are shot dead, Loring, with white, set face and a scorching seam along the left cheek, seizes a dropped carbine and thrusts it into Burleigh's shaking hands. "Up with you, man!" he cries. "It's your scalp you're fighting for. Here, take a drink of this," and his filled canteen is

glued to Burleigh's ashen lips. A long pull, a gasp, and hardly knowing what he does, the recreant officer kneels at the nearmost rock, aims at a painted savage leaping to the aid of a fallen brother, and the chance shot, for a marvel, finds its mark, and with a howl the warrior drops upon the bank.

"Well done, Burleigh!" shouts Loring. "Fire again!"

Hope, or whiskey, or lingering spark of manhood has fired the major's eye and nerved his hand. With something like a sob, one of Birdsall's captured crew rolls over to where the young commander is coolly loading and firing—and despite their heavy loss the stout defense has had its effect, and the yelling braves are keeping at wider range.

"I'm done for, lieutenant," he moans. "For God's sake lie flat behind me," and he feebly points to the slope behind their left rear, where half a dozen Sioux, dismounted, are skipping to the shelter of the rocks. Another minute and their bullets are hissing at the backs of the besieged. Another minute and Burleigh topples over on the sward, the life blood pouring from his side, and Loring sees that half his fighting force is gone, even as everything begins to swim before his eyes, and the hand that strives to sweep away the blur before his sight, leaves his pallid face smeared with blood. There is a sound of coming thunder in his ears, the blare of distant trumpet, the warning yell of wary Indians, the rousing cheer of charging horse, and the earth seems turning round and rolling up to meet him as he droops, fainting at his post, the battle won.

Well and gallantly done, was the universal verdict of the frontier on Walter Loring's maiden fight. Brave, cool and resolute in face of desperate peril he had proved, and many a sympathizing soldier hovered about the hospital tent, where day after day he lay in the delirium of fever that followed his wounds. Yet will it be believed that, when at last convalescence came and the doctors were compelled to raise the blockade, the news was broken to him that so soon as he should be declared strong enough there was still another ordeal ahead. The gallant General he had served so well had indeed been ordered elsewhere, as was prophesied at Omaha. "A new king came who knew not Joseph." The senior colonel was assigned to temporary command of the department, and he, old Pecksniff, listened to the tales of Nevins, and of that new arrival from California, Petty, reinforced by Heaven alone knows what allegations from the lambs of Lambert's flock.

"They found some damned trumpery jewelry in a flat tin case in a trunk you left

with your traps at Omaha," was the indignant outburst of Lieutenant Dean, who had led the rush of the cavalry to the rescue of Folsom's ranch and Loring's exhausted party, "and some idiot has preferred charges on the strength of them."

CHAPTER XXIV.

That Loring court was the talk of the West for many a month. Long before its meeting the wrathful division commander had sent Colonel Stevens back to the obscurity of Fort Emory, welcomed the new brigadier and bade him, if a possible thing, quash the proceedings, but now it was Loring who was obdurate. "This matter has been a scandal for months," said he. "It must be settled now once and for all."

But, oh, what complications had not been brought about by Pecksniff's spell of brief authority! Never before intrusted with a higher command than that of a regiment, to the head of which he had risen by reason of long years of unimpaired bodily health and skillful avoidance of all danger, the old colonel had lost no time in moving, bag and baggage, to Omaha, in having Nevins transported thither, in opening wide his ears to his story of the heinous wrongs inflicted on him by that Arizona court, through the malignity of its judge advocate, of that judge advocate's heartless treachery to two helpless women, one of whom was Nevins' wife, the other the officer's own deserted and broken-hearted betrothed. Then came Petty, ordered to join his company in the field and eager as ever to seek some loophole of escape. Reporting to pay his homage to the temporary commander at headquarters he soon got an inkling of what was going on, and all at once there flashed upon him the magnificence of his opportunity. Here he could at one and the same time feed fat his ancient grudge against Loring and make himself indispensable to the aging commander of the department—perhaps even secure another staff billet, certainly, at least, succeed in being kept there on duty and away from the perils of the field until after the court, and meantime, what would friends be worth if they could not move the powers at Washington.

Day after day he was closeted with old Stevens, adding fuel to the flame of that ingenuous veteran's suspicions, but it is doubtful if even Petty dreamed of the depth of Nevins' scoundrelism. Burleigh, whom the ex-captain had "bled" and blackmailed, had passed beyond the bar of human arraignment, "dying like a gentleman" even while captive in the hands of the authorities; and so did Nevins impress his uncontradicted tale of loyal service to the State on the old weakling in command, that Stevens had declared that there was no evidence on which to hold him, had ordered his release from custody on parole, unless the civil

authorities desired to prosecute him for "personating an officer," and had written to the division commander, praising Nevins' conduct, and urging that the sentence of imprisonment be set aside.

And then, he never could tell just who brought this about—whether it was Mrs. Burton or Miss Allyn with their tears and tribulations; whether it was Nevins, with his bold accusations, or Petty, with his insidious tales, but between them all the old colonel was induced to send his adjutant and acting aid to examine certain baggage of Loring's stored at the hotel. Never having given up his room when hurrying off to Gate City; expecting to be back within a week and merely to pay room rent when absent, as was the arrangement of the day, Loring had left his trunks and desks securely locked. Two officers and the protesting hotel clerk were present at the opening. The locksmith, even, seemed to hate his job; the adjutant had never a meaner one, but Petty was eager. Fresh from an interview with Geraldine, he was the directing spirit. It was his hand that extracted from deep down under the packed clothing in the trunk, a small tin box, wrapped in a silk handkerchief. Within the box, when opened, were certain letters in a woman's hand—Geraldine Allyn's—letters written to Loring in the days of their brief engagement, letters long since returned to her under his hand and seal, and with them, in closely-folded wraps of tissue paper, inclosed in stout envelope, a valuable solitaire and as valuable a ring. The regimental adjutant it was who opened the box and who made these discoveries. Half an hour later they were identified by Nevins, in the presence of old Pecksniff, as the diamonds intrusted to Loring's care in Arizona, and Nevins professed to be disappointed because the watch, too, was not found with them.

Not until late July did Loring learn of the action taken in his enforced absence, and of the resulting developments. Not a word would he vouchsafe in explanation, when old Pecksniff, wilting under the criticisms of his superiors, sent his adjutant to "invite remarks." "The court has been ordered," said Loring, with coolness described as contemptuous, "I'll make my remarks there." But long before that court could meet, the colonel, as has been said, went back to his post. The new commander arrived, and ordered Nevins to an Iowa prison to serve out the year awarded him; sent Captain Petty summarily to Laramie, and bade Mrs. Burton go about her business when that lachrymose person came to urge that he should do something "to make Lieutenant Loring settle." She had lost her lovely boarder, too, for no sooner had "Mrs. Fletcher" heard of the new accusations against Loring than she appeared at Omaha, and whisked her sister away, no one at Omaha knew where, but indignant old John Folsom could

perhaps have told. He cut Pecksniff dead when that officer returned to Emory, and refused to go near the fort. He threw open his doors and his heart to Loring when the convalescing Engineer was brought in from the ranch. The new General actually came, ostensibly to inspect the post, but spent twelve hours at Folsom's by Loring's side to the one devoted to Stevens, and everybody felt that there was a storm brewing that would break when finally the witnesses for the defense arrived and the Loring court could meet.

But who would have dreamed there could be such dramatic scene before a military tribunal?

It came with the third day of the trial. The court had been carefully selected by old Pecksniff, whose adjutant had obediently signed the charges drawn up under the chief's directions. There were only nine officers in the array—"no others being available without manifest injury to the service"—read the formula of the day. Five were officers of Stevens' regiment, one a cavalry major, the others of the pay, commissary and quartermaster's departments. None had known Loring. Everybody expected him to object to some at least, but he objected to none. The judge advocate was a vigilant official who made the most of his opportunity, but his witnesses for the prosecution were, with one exception, weak; the exception was Nevins. He swore stoutly that he had given the valuables in Arizona to Loring, and from that day had never seen them until they were found secreted in Loring's trunk, and, to the amaze of the court, Loring declined to cross-examine. Petty was a failure. He wanted to swear to a thousand things that other people had told him, for of himself he knew nothing, and though the defense never interposed, the court did. It was all hearsay, and he was finally excused. Mrs. Burton appeared, but like Mrs. Cluppins of blessed memory, had more to say of her domestic and personal affairs than the allegations against the accused. Miss Allyn, said the judge advocate, in embarrassment, was to have appeared on the afternoon of the second day, but did not, nor could he find her. She was a most important witness, so he had been assured by—various persons, but at the last moment she had apparently deserted the cause of the prosecution. A civil court would have had power to drag an unwilling witness before it and compel his or her testimony; a military court has neither, so long as the desired person is not in the military service, which Miss Allyn and some sixty million others at that time could not be said to be. A sensation was "sprung" on the court at this juncture by the defense. It magnanimously informed the court that John Folsom, of Gate City, knew where that witness was in hiding, and that she could be reached through him, whereupon the judge advocate seemed to lose his eagerness.

Something was wrong with the prosecution anyway. It had begun with truculent confidence. It was unnerved by the serene composure of the accused, and his refusal to object to anything, to cross-examine, to avail himself of any one of the privileges accorded the defense. This could have only one interpretation, and Nevins, twitching with nervous dread, was worrying the judge advocate with perpetual questions as to the witnesses for the defense. When were they to be produced? Who were they? And the judge advocate did not know. Very unfairly had he been treated, said he, for the list of witnesses for the defense not only had not been furnished him, but he had never been "consulted." Two or three "stuck-up" Engineers had come out from St. Louis and Detroit, and Loring and they had been actually hobnobbing with the department commander. But the mere fact that the meeting of the court was delayed until the end of September proved that they must be coming from the Pacific coast, at which announcement Petty looked perturbed and Nevins twitched from head to foot. He didn't suppose, he said, the United States would stand the expense of fetching witnesses way from California, transportation and *per diem* would cost more than the whole business was worth.—and the judge advocate was wishing himself well out of it when, on a sunny Friday morning, the third day of the court, the president rapped for order and the big roomful of spectators was hushed to respectful silence. The defense had made its first request, that the principal witness for the prosecution, Nevins, should be present, and there he sat, nervous and fidgety, as Loring was serene.

In halting and embarrassed fashion, very unlike the fluent ease with which he opened the case, the judge advocate announced that, owing to the impossibility of compelling the testimony of witnesses on whom he had relied, he was obliged to announce that the prosecution would here rest. The defense, of course, he said, vaguely, would wish to be heard, though he had not been honored with any conference or even a list of the witnesses. Then he looked inquiringly at Loring, and every neck in the thronged apartment, the biggest room at headquarters, was "craned" as Loring quietly handed him a slip of paper.

The judge advocate read, looked puzzled, glanced up, and cleared his throat.

"You mean you want these summoned?"

"No, they're here, in my office."

The judge advocate turned to the orderly of the court, a soldier standing in full dress uniform at the door. The hallway, even, was blocked with lookers-on. The windows to the south were occupied by curious citizens, gazing in from the

wooden gallery. Those to the north, thrown wide open to let in the air, were clear, and looked out over a confused muddle of shingled roofs and stove-pipe chimneys. Hardly a whisper passed from lip to lip as the orderly bustled away. Members of the court fidgeted with their sash tassels, or made pretense of writing. Nevins, the sheriff's officer, in close attendance, sat staring at the doorway, his face ashen, and beginning to bead with sweat. Presently the people in the hall gave way right and left, and all eyes save those of Loring were intent upon the entrance. He sat coolly looking at the man whom six months before he had convicted in Arizona. There was a stir in the courtroom. Half the people rose to their feet and stared, for slowly entering upon the arm of a tall, slim, long legged lieutenant of infantry, a stranger to every man in the court, came a slender, shrinking little maid, whose heavy eyelashes swept her cheeks, whose dark, shapely head hung bashfully. Behind them, in the garb of some religious order, unknown to all save one or two in the crowded room, came a gentle-faced woman, leaning on the arm of a field officer of the Engineers, at sight of whom the president sprang from his chair, intending to bow, but the silence was suddenly broken by the quick, stern order, "Look out for your prisoner!" followed by a rush, a crashing of overturned chairs, as court and spectators, too, started to their feet—a general scurry to the northward windows, shouts of "Halt!" "Head him off!" "Stop him!" in the midst of which a light, supple form was seen to poise one instant on the sill, then go leaping into space. "He's killed!" "He's not!" "He's up again!" "He's off!" were the cries, and with drawn revolver the deputy sheriff fought his way through the throng at the door and with a dozen men at his heels, darted down the hallway in vain pursuit of Nevins, now out of sight among the shanties half a block away.

Of all that followed before the court when at last it came to order, there is little need to tell. The judge advocate would have been glad to drop the case then and there, but now the defense had the floor and kept it, though not a word of evidence was needed. The first witness sworn was Lieutenant Blake, who told of the trick by which he and his men, Loring's guards, had been lured from the camp at Sancho's ranch, and of their finding Loring senseless, bleeding and robbed on their return. The next was little Pancha, and Loring sat with his hand shading his blue eyes as the pallid maid, with piteously quivering lips at times, with brave effort to force back her tears, in English only a little better than that in which she had poured out her fears to Blake that eventful night at Gila Bend—sometimes, indeed, having to speak in Spanish with the gray sister sworn as her interpreter—told the plaintive story of her knowledge of and connection with Sancho's wicked band. Her dear father and her stepmother were ruled by Sancho.

She had seen Nevins there often, "him who had fled through the window." She gathered enough from what she heard about the ranch to realize that they were planning to rob the officer, "this officer," before he could get away with the diamonds. Nevins had ridden in with six men, bad men, that very night, and she heard him planning with Sancho and her father, and she had tried to warn the officers, and "this gentleman" (Blake this time) had come, and before she could tell him she was followed and discovered. But then her stepmother had later whispered awful things to her—how they were going to rob the stage and kill the passengers, and bade her take her guitar and try to call the officer again, and tell him to take his soldiers and go to the rescue, and this she had done eagerly, and then when they were away her mother seized her and drew her into the room and shut her there, but she heard horsemen rush into the camp, and a minute later Nevins, jeering and laughing in the bar, and that very night they took her away—she and her father and the stepmother, and Nevins was with them. They went by Tucson to Hermosillo and to Guaymas, and her mother told her she must never breathe what she knew—it would ruin her father, whom she loved, yes, dearly, and whom she would not believe had anything to do with it. And at Hermosillo Nevins had the watch, the diamond ring, the diamond stud, these very ones, she was sure, as the valuable "exhibits" were displayed. But at San Francisco when the lady superior told her of the accusations against "this gentleman" (even now her eyes would not look into Loring's) and of all his trouble, she forgot her father's peril, forgot everything but that Lieutenant Loring, who had been so good and kind and brave, was wrongfully accused, and she told all to the lady superior and went with her and repeated it to the General, the General who had died. And when at last she finished her trembling, tearful story, Loring rose before them all, went over and took her hand and bowed low over it, as though he would have kissed it, and said, "Thank you, señorita." And the judge advocate declined to cross-examine. What was the use? But the defense insisted on other witnesses—a local locksmith who had sold Nevins keys that would open any trunk, a hotel porter who swore that the blinds to Loring's room had been forcibly opened from without, a bell boy who had seen Nevins on the gallery at that window three nights before the search of the luggage was made. And the court waxed impatient and said it had had more than enough. Every man of the array came up to and shook Loring by the hand before they let him leave the courtroom, and Blake hunted high and low through Omaha until he found poor Petty and relieved his mind of his impressions, and finally the order announcing the honorable acquittal of Lieutenant Loring, on every charge and specification, was read to every command in the department fast as the mails could carry it.

Brought to by a bullet in the leg, George Nevins was recaptured down the Missouri three days later, and sent for his wife that she might come and nurse him. Though everybody said no, she went and did her best, and if nursing could have saved a reprobate life he might still have remained an ornament to society such as that in which he shone. But Naomi wore a widow's veil when late in October she returned to Folsom's roof; the good old trader had stood her friend through all.

There were some joyous weddings in the Department of the Platte the summer that followed, Loring gravely figuring as best man when Dean, of the cavalry, was married to Elinor Folsom, and smiling with equal gravity when he read of the nuptials of Brevet Captain Petty and the gifted and beautiful Miss Allyn. He had reverted to his original idea, that of waiting in patience until he had accumulated a nest egg and had acquired higher rank than a lieutenancy in the Engineers; and so he might have done if it took him a dozen years had not orders carried him once more to the Pacific coast, after the completion of the Union Pacific railway.

Regularly every month he had written to Pancha, noting with surprise and pleasure how rapidly she learned. Gladly he went to see her at the gray sisters the day after his arrival. He had meant to laughingly remind her of his good-by words: "You know we always come back to California," but he forgot them when she came into the room. He took her hands, drew her underneath the chandelier and looked at her, and only said:

"Why, Pancha!"

Loring never did say much, and it was a beautiful, dark-eyed girl who uplifted those eyes to his and smiled in welcome, saying as little as he. She was a graduate now. She was teaching the younger girls—until—until it was decided when she should return to Guaymas—to the home of Uncle Ramon, who had been good to her always, but especially since her poor father's death. She did go back to Guaymas, by and by, but not until Uncle Ramon had come twice, at long intervals, to San Francisco to see her and the good lady Superior, and to confer with a very earnest, clear-eyed, dignified man at headquarters. There came a new Idaho on the line to Guaymas, and a newer, bigger, better steamer still a year or two later, and bluff old Captain Moreland was given the command of the best of the fleet, and on the first trip out from 'Frisco welcomed with open arms two subalterns of the army, one of the Engineers, the other a recent transfer to the cavalry, both old and cherished friends.

"We won't have you with us on the back trip, Blake, old boy," he said, as he wrung their hands when he saw them go ashore at Guaymas, "but I can tell you right here and now there won't be anything on this ship too good for Mrs. Loring —of the Engineers."

"It is a pretty name! I'm glad its mine now," said Pancha, one starlit night on the blue Pacific, as they neared the lights of the Golden Gate.

"It was a wounded name, Pancha, wounded worse than I," he answered reverently, "until you came and healed and saved it."

THE END.

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