

Ray's Recruit

BY
CAPTAIN CHARLES KING, U. S. A.

AUTHOR OF "THE COLONEL'S DAUGHTER," "FROM THE RANKS," ETC.

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(Continued.)

But the boy bolted, and then Darcy saw that she was gazing up at him through a briny depth of tears. Even in his surprise, even in the thrill of joy which he heard this fond confession, he recaptured himself, as it were, in the nick of time.

"Under the circumstances, that's something I didn't expect to hear," said Darcy.

"Under other circumstances, you wouldn't have heard it," said Amy. "It's a bit rough on Smythe, isn't it?"

"It in nowise concerns him. As for Rokeby, he must take me just as I am." "Oh," said Gray, looking fairly at her at last, and beginning to tug at the band she still held in her two, "it's to be an international affair, is it? And I am addressing the future Countess of Lancaster?"

"Listen to reason, Darcy," said Miss Langdon, regaining dignity and self-possession at sight of the hunger in his eyes. "I have no money. I have every ambition, every longing, every desire that only position and money can gratify. I like you better than any man I ever knew, yet I wouldn't marry you, because you hadn't enough to offer, and I never so fully felt that I could and would marry you as now—when I can't. Even Mr. Smythe, with \$500,000, could not buy. I am going to a higher bidder—the highest I could find. So far as I'm concerned, that settles my fate, but it's yours I care about, Darcy. You've been a dawdler and do nothing all your life. What will you do now?"

"Be true to my friends—and their estimate of me, probably. You wouldn't have me to disappoint them, would you?"

"What on earth do you mean? Speak sensibly, Darcy. I've never been worth your trust when you gave it. Now I'm honest with you. What will you do?"

"What they all prophesied—nothing."

"Darcy, you have brains and energy. You have—persistence enough to win anything—that's worth having," she concluded, lamely.

There was a subdued sound of sniffing on the balcony without. Over the moonlit Alpine sea the water was gazing toward the shores of France and wondering if many mothers had such trials as daughters at whose farthings dangled half the eligibles in society. Smythe's mother, it seems, had taken up the pen to second the plaintive baa of her golden calf and was dealing trenchant blows at her old enemy, the mother of the belle of the season.

"Mother will be in here in a moment, Darcy. You must be frank with me, and Rokeby may be up any moment. You will stay here until you've had time to look about you?"

"I've had plenty of time today. Everything's settled. Tell Rokeby I'm sorry I shan't be able to take him bear and elk hunting, as I promised."

"Do you mean you're going soon—tomorrow?"

"No," said Gray, rising. "I'm going tonight."

One instant the beautiful face beside him wore an expression of utter woe, of genuine sympathy and sorrow, then decked itself with winning and conventional smiles, for the salon door, opening at the moment, revealed young hopeful, the brother, tugging at the band of the other hopeful, monocled. Knickers and evening dress confronted each other at the threshold. Rejected Yank, accepted Briton, met as do modern mortal rivals without sign of rancor.

"Er—ah—what's up, Gray?"

"Nothing. I'm down."

By the midnight express he left via Bern for Basel. He could not face the throng of inquisitive sympathizers on the morrow. He meant to skip unnoticed, but he had been too genuinely popular, and there are men and many of them, Briton or Boston, who will go out of their way to say good words to a fellow in distress. Three of them trailed Gray to the station and ran him to earth on the train and said impetuous things about being his banker, and made other offers impossible to take seriously. The only thing he could take was a drink with all three, until they tumbled off at the conductor's shrill summons, and through the night, under the glitter of the lamps, something came gleaming and spinning, and he caught Rokeby's handsome flask and Rokeby's parting words:

"Take a drink for me once in awhile, will you, old boy? Au revoir."

CHAPTER I
The major was sprawled on the broad of his back under the shade of a spreading cottonwood, a slouch hat, battered and weather stained, pulled well down over his fine, dark brown eyes, their heavy brows concealed by its jagged brim, their long, thick, curling lashes

downward sweeping toward the bronzed sun tanned cheeks. The bristling beard and curling black mustache concealed the lines of the mouth and jaws, rendering speculation as to the major's characteristics mere guesswork, which wouldn't be the case, said Captain Trotter, a physiognomist of the first order in his own estimation, if the major's face were, as usual with him in garrison, freshly and cleanly shaved except as to the upper lip. Open at the throat, the major's dark blue flannel shirt rolled easily back, revealing a black waste of hairy stubble down to the prominent "Adam's apple," below which the fair skin showed almost as white as a child's and well nigh as soft. A devotee to cold water was the major, even in his cups, and that, too, in days when the traditions of the great war still held sway in the cavalry and the cocktail was the rule, not the exception, at morning stable call. Not that he preached the doctrine of total abstinence or looked upon himself as a model of virtue in any way. "Whisky never did me any good," was his modest explanation. "I never seemed to need it or to care for it. I never saw any fun in getting full, and

the only time I ever did, it made me sick for a week—a thing that never happened to me before or since. If you like it, Ray, or if it agrees with you, Blake, why, go ahead. So long as you don't get full and neglect your business, it's none of mine." Time was in the regimental past, as the major very well knew and the minors sometimes said, when Ray occasionally "got full" and when Blake seemed to think it worth while with him—until the day afterward at least. But Blake and Ray had found reason to part company with their old familiar friend, that intimacy having led, as often do others, to later estrangement; that familiarity having bred contempt; that warmth, as Tom Hood would have said, having produced a coldness.

"Singed cats" was what the unrecruited of the subalterns called these erstwhile jovial blades, but never where



There he lay, with a copy of "Les Misérables," either "cat" could bear, as each was known to be unpleasantly ready to back

his views, both officers had so far mended their ways in this respect that neither would slip into the seductive bowl, yet each was entirely willing that the rest of the commissioned list should be free agents in the matter, with the possible exceptions of Brady, who never drank that he didn't make an ass of himself, and Rawson, who never drank that he didn't make trouble for somebody else.

And about these five men—the major, whose name is spelled M-a-i-n-w-a-r-i-n-g and always pronounced "Mainwaring," and Ray and Blake, who have often appeared in these chronicles of bygone frontier days, and Brady and Rawson, who have never yet so appeared and who never will again so far as these five men and one other yet to appear hangs most of this story—these six men and just two women.

Place aux dames, though this bivouac on the Boxelder was no place for them whatever, and neither woman was there at the time, and only one of them was known to any one of the men referred to. One of the women was Mrs. Mainwaring, and the other, a spinster, was Kate Leroy.

It was a hot day, a dusty day, and the command could prove it without the use of a word as it unsaddled in the grove and men and horses made for the nearest water. They had marched since early morn and covered 20 miles when the trumpets rang the signal for the final halt. They had been winding for hours in long column of twos down the sandy bottom of a vanished creek, and the sight of this oasis in the desert, the clump of cottonwoods with its outlying stragglers farther down stream, was indeed a grateful one. It told of the presence of living water, and the regiment, said Trooper Kelly, "was as dury as the chaplain's temperance sermon the night before Patrick's day in the morning."

Mainwaring's four troops, being first on the ground, pre-empted what grass there was before breaking for the spring. Trooper law reserved to the horses of the owner all space within lariat length of the firmly driven picket pin, and went to the man that "jumped the chain." In like manner had the major's "striker" pre-empted the biggest cottonwood for his master's roof tree, and there, dusted shaken and smoothly spread, were the major's blankets when, fresh from his dip in the stream, that sturdy, keen-eyed, compactly built soldier came back for his rest.

And there he lay, the picture of trooper content, beguiling the moment until dinner should be ready, and trying hard not to go to sleep meantime with a copy of "Les Misérables," hauled from the depth of his capacious saddlebags. Having had little schooling to speak of, Mainwaring was an assiduous reader of fiction, and prided himself on the fact.

Presently, without lifting his eyes from the page or glancing toward the party interrogated, who was sprawling in similar fashion under an adjacent

tree, the major popped the following question:

"Blake, what's savvy ke pew?"

And Blake, without lifting his eyes from the written pages of the missive in his left hand, responded, after the manner of soldier folk, "Dumfno."

The major's brows contracted in a scowl. Suspiciously he glanced at his long legged comrade. "Thought you spoke French," said he.

To which Blake blandly responded, with modest and not inexcusable hesitancy:

"Well—er—not always. Isn't it—possibly savvy ke pew?"

"Well, save ke pew, then," responded Mainwaring, with disdainful emphasis on the convenient monosyllable.

"What's that?" "That," said Blake, "is what the girls say when Brady tries to dance—jump for your lives and—Brady take the hindmost. It's polite French for 'the jig is up.'"

Captain Ray, stretched at ease upon a costly Navajo blanket of which he was inordinately proud, reached out with his moccasined foot and indented the canvas re-enforcement of his comrade's field riding breeches. "Quit it, Blake," he muttered.

But the major needed no man to protect his interests. He might not know French, but he knew Blake and liked him—ordinarily.

"I more than half thought you didn't know, Legs," he said, with a raven. "Legs" was a regimental pet name for the longest and lankiest of the commissioned list. "You West Pointers have nearly all had two years' schooling in that tongue, and another year in Spanish, and I'm blessed if ever a one of you could speak either. I'd have a heap more respect for you if you'd come out like a man and say you didn't know, like Ray, for instance. There's no nonsense about him."

Here Blake kicked backward, in delighted return of his comrade's broad hint. "Well, major," he hastened to say, "my translation was a trifle free perhaps, but the phrase is a clumsy one to turn into English. Ray will agree with me as to the translation. The main trouble with his French is the accent. It's a combination of blue grass and Apache."

"Well, he has the good sense to keep it to himself then," answered Mainwaring, still a trifle silky. "I'd pattern after him if I were you."

"Faith and so I would, major mine, did not my innocent associates so often take me for a lexicon. But now you ought to speak French like a native. Mrs. Mainwaring does. You couldn't have a better teacher, and Stannard says all a man needs to learn anything in this world are brains and time. You've got lots of—time."

"What's that about Stannard?" interrupted the major sharply, and Blake's diversion had told, as he meant that it should. If there was one man in the army of whom Mainwaring was jealous, it was Stannard. He, like Stannard, had been a capital troop commander for years. He had attained at last the rank of major, vice Barry, promoted, only a year or so after Stannard; had served just as well as had Stannard; had as fine a war record, and an honored and honorable name; had a charming wife, health and competence, yet mourned in secret—even at times made audible moan—over the fact that among the officers and men of the regiment what Stannard said, thought, did, was never to be questioned. Stannard was authority on all points of soldiering; Stannard was the expert engineer, builder, draftsman, topographer and all round military "sharp;" while he, Mainwaring, whose troop had been a model, whose battalion was now really in finer shape than Stannard's, and who had abundant means and spent where Stannard saved, was looked upon in the cavalry as a good soldier, a fine officer, despite his curly mannerisms, and yet because he hadn't enjoyed Stannard's advantages and a college or even high school training he must submit to perennial playing of second fiddle. It set him against Stannard, and it led eventually to trouble.

"If you'd only be wise, Leonard," his brighter better half had said to him, "you wouldn't ask questions of Blake. Look it up in the encyclopedia, or even ask—"

"Why, hang it, Laura," interrupted the major, "half my years are spent in saddle out in the field. You and the encyclopedia are a month's march away. I can't help wanting to know what things mean."

"Then ask Captain Truscott or Captain Freeman." She knew too much to wound him by suggesting Stannard. "Blake's propensity to burlesque everything is irresistible unless you happen to be alone with him." And Mainwaring would promise, and despite his promise would fall, for, as he frankly admitted, he couldn't help wanting to know, you know, and, as it never occurred to him that he could mispronounce any word, foreign or domestic, poor Mainwaring was eternally putting his foot in it. He and Tommy Hollis were Blake's entire delight, and neither man could resent his witticisms, even when they verged on the personal, for Blake, like Ray, was a regimental idol because of deeds that won a tribute out-riding the Victoria cross or congressional medal of honor. Mainwaring swore by both as soldiers, and Hollis truly worshiped Blake. But Tommy was away on other duty just now, and the shafts of the long legged captain's ridicule fell most improperly on his sluggish witted chief.

(To Be Continued.)

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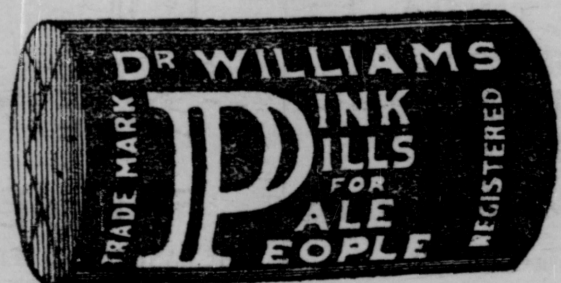
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