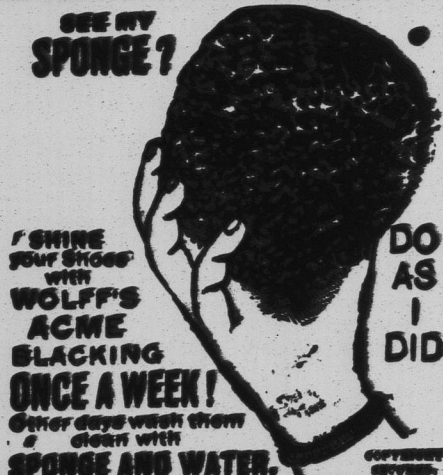


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The Canadian Post

LINDSAY, FRIDAY, OCTOBER 3, 1900.

TWO SOLDIERS.

By Capt. CHARLES KING.

Copyrighted by J. B. Lippincott Company, Philadelphia, and published through special arrangement with the American Press Association. Please permission to be with it. He knew how silent Lane had always been, and how thorough a custodian of regimental secrets he was considered. But all the same the mere fact that Lane knew all these circumstances so much to his disadvantage, and had seen all his lame and impotent excuses, had made him feel him as a possible enemy and hate him simply because he stood in awe of him.

No one, to watch Noel in society or in the presence of his brother officers, would suppose for a moment that he looked upon Lane with other than feelings of the warmest regard and comradeship. It was only in his secret thoughts, which he admitted to no soul on earth, that Noel realized what his real feelings were towards a man who had never done him a wrong, but who had treated him on all occasions, public and private, with courtesy and consideration.

For some reason or other the lieutenant felt restless and dissatisfied this morning. The atmosphere of the office was decidedly uncongenial. He was a man who rarely read anything, and to whom letter writing was a bore. To be sure, he had little of it to do, for no man in the regiment had expressed a desire to hear from him. It was a hot, sultry day; the stylish white flannel suit in which he had arrayed his handsome self was wasting its elegance on the desert air of a bare and empty room, instead of being seen in the bonidors of beauty or the billiard rooms at the club. Business was slack; no recruits were coming in, and Mr. Noel could stand it no longer. A ring from his bell summoned the sergeant to the room.

"There doesn't seem to be any likelihood of recruits coming in such a day as this, sergeant," said Mr. Noel. "I'm going up to the club for a while; if anybody should come in, send one of the men up there for me; I'll return at once." And with that he took his straw hat and light cane and strolled leisurely up the street. His was a figure that many a man—and more women—would turn to look at more than once. Tall, slim, elegant in build, always dressed in excellent taste, Gordon Noel in any community would have been pronounced a remarkably presentable man. His face, as has been said, was very fine; his eyes dark and handsome, shaded by deep, thick lashes; his hair dark and wavy; his mustache, dark and drooping, served only to enhance the brilliancy of the even white teeth that flashed underneath it in his frequent smiles and joyous laughter. One would say, in looking at Noel, that he was a man of singularly many dispositions; and so he was, and so they found him at the club, and so the longer they looked at him with jovial shouts as he entered, for, though only a fortnight had elapsed since his arrival, and four days of that time he had been absent, giving his testimony before the court-martial in New York harbor, he had nevertheless won his way into the hearts of all the young fellows around the club, and no more popular man than Gordon Noel had ever come within the doors of "The Queen City."

"What are you going to have, old man?" was the first question asked, and Noel laughingly ordered a sherry cooler, saying the day was far too hot for anything stronger.

"Who's that I just saw going into the billiard room?" he asked.

"That? That's Regy Vincent. Haven't you met him yet?" asked Noel. "Is he the brother of the Miss Vincent whom I met at the party last night?"

It's my belief that Vincent, Clark & Co. came out of it with a very pretty penny to the good.

"Well, of course, Harris, you must know more about it than I do. But you cannot be gladder than I am to hear that Vincent's status is so much better than we supposed. I'm glad on his account, I'm glad on Regy's account, and I'm particularly glad on Miss Mabel's account. And now I'm particularly chuckling over Billy Rooster's frame of mind when he hears the real truth of this matter. When he went after her to Rome last year, and everybody supposed that Vincent was worth a million, there's no doubt in the world that he did his best to win her, and that was what he was sent abroad by his father to do. But he didn't win her then, for she strenuously denied any engagement when she came back here; yet it was supposed that if he persevered his chances would be good. Why, he's not half a bad fellow, only he can't marry so long as he is in his father's employ and dependent on him, unless he marries according to his father's wishes; and the old man called him off just as soon as he found out that Vincent was on the verge of failure. Billy Rooster has lost any chance that he might have had in that quarter, for she'll never look at him again."

"Serve him right, if that be the case. Any man who hasn't sense enough to stick to a girl who is bright and pretty as Mabel Vincent, rich or poor, deserves no luck at all in this world. But that reminds me, Capt. Noel, according to rumor and what the girls say in society—and you know they generally know pretty much everything that is going on—there is something more than a mere understanding between her and your predecessor here, the recruiting officer, Capt. Lane. Did he say anything about it to you?"

"No, not a word. I think, though, that had there been anything in the story Lane would have let me know something about it, for we are very old and intimate friends. Did you say that that was Mr. Reginald Vincent who has just gone into the billiard room?"

"Yes," answered Mr. Morris, "that's he. Would you like to know him?"

"Very much indeed; and if you've nothing better to do come in and present me. Perhaps he will want to play a game of billiards, and if so I'm his man."

And so it happened that that very morning Gordon Noel was presented to Reginald Vincent, and when Regy went home to luncheon he spoke enthusiastically of his new found acquaintance, whom he pronounced to be one of the most delightful fellows he had ever met anywhere, and who was such a warm and devoted friend of Capt. Lane. "I want, if I meet him this afternoon, as I probably shall, to bring him back to dinner with me. What say you, mother—just informally."

"Don't you think it would be better to wait a day or two, and have a little dinner, and invite a few friends to meet him?" asked Mrs. Vincent. "Your father, perhaps, would like to be consulted in the matter. I've no doubt that he would like to do something to show attention to any friend of Capt. Lane. What do you think, Mabel?"

"I vote for both," replied that young woman, with much alacrity. "I have met Mr. Noel twice. 'Capt. Noel, dear,' said Regy, 'Capt. Noel.'"

"He is not a captain yet, Reginald; I happen to know from the regimental roster; I have a copy upstairs that Capt. Lane very kindly left me." And here a decided flush stole over the fair cheeks of the young lady. "I learned a good deal about the officers of the regiment from Mr. Lane—Capt. Lane—while he was here. Mr. Noel ranks second among the lieutenants of the regiment. As Capt. Lane said, he is so very near his captaincy that perhaps he accepts the title that you all give him at the club as only a trifle premature."

"Well, captain or lieutenant, it doesn't make any difference," said Regy, impulsively. "He's a mighty good fellow, and a mighty good friend of your friend Capt. Lane, and if you have no objection, mother, I'll bring him around to dinner to-morrow, and then perhaps we might go to the theatre afterward. I'm very sure that Capt. Noel will enjoy it. Fact is, he enjoys everything. Everybody in the club is perfectly delighted with him. You ought to hear him sing an Irish song or tell a French story! I'll try and get him started when he comes here. He's a wonderful mimic; and he's so full of information about their service on the frontier. Now, Lane so seldom spoke of anything of the kind; but Noel will talk for hours at a time about the wonderful country through which they have gone and fought, and all that they have been through in their campaigns. By Jove! but that fellow has seen a lot of hard service, and has been through some hairbreadth escapes!"

"Who?" inquired Mrs. Vincent; "Capt. Lane or Mr. Noel?"

"A remarkably handsome man, mother," said Mabel at once; "one of the handsomest I ever saw, and he certainly made himself very entertaining and very jolly the night we sat together at dinner at the Thorntons'."

"There's a great contrast physically between him and Lane," put in Regy. "Noel is such an elegantly built fellow—so tall and fine looking. Lane would be almost unrecognised when standing beside him, and is very much at a disadvantage when they appear together, I should judge."

A very bright and joyous party it was, seated around the home like table of the Vincents that evening, and, as Regy had predicted, Noel proved very entertaining and a most agreeable guest. While showing much deference to Mr. Vincent and attention to his good wife he nevertheless managed to have a great deal to say about the regiment and its daring and perilous service on the frontier, and threw in here and there many a pleasant word about Capt. Lane and their long and intimate acquaintance, and before dinner was over had won a warm place in Mabel Vincent's heart by the way in which he so frequently spoke of the man to whom she had pledged her troth.

And that very evening, as Frederick Lane—far out under the starlit sky of Arizona—with his heart full of longing and love for her, and thinking only of her as he rode over the desolate plain, with the lights of old Fort Graham alighting in view, and Vincent, seated by Gordon Noel's side, was looking up into his handsome face and listening to his animated story between the acts of "Twelfth Night."

CHAPTER II.



He wrote long letters to her.

Only a short distance from the Arizona border, with the blue range of the Santa Catalina shutting out the sunset skies, with sand and cactus and Spanish bayonet on every side, the old post of Fort Graham stood in the desert like a mud colored oasis. All the quarters, all the store houses, stables, corrals and barracks were built of the native adobe; and though whitewash had been liberally applied, especially about the homes of the officers, and the long Venetian blinds at their front windows had been painted the coolest of deep greens, and clear running water sparkled through the acqueducts that bordered the parade, it could not be denied that at its best Graham was an arid and forbidding station, so far as one could judge by appearances. Trees, verdure, turf were items almost unknown within a day's march of the flag staff; but in the old times when the Navajos were the terror of the wide southwest, and even the Comanches sometimes carried their raids across the Rio Bravo del Norte—the Rio Grande of today—the post had been "located" where it might afford protection to the "Forty-Niners" and to the pioneers of the prairie; the trans-continental trail led past its very gates, and many a time and oft the miner and the emigrant thanked God and the general government that the old fort was placed just where it was, for Indian pursuers drew rein when once in sight of its dingy walls; and so from year to year more than thrice a decade the flag was raised at sunrise, the post was always garrisoned, and now, with the Southern Pacific piercing the range but a short distance below, and landing stores and forage at the quartermaster's depot within four miles of the corral, it became easier to maintain a force of cavalry at Graham; and one of the troops there stationed was Lane's new command, the regiment of the late lamented Curran, "the Devil's Own."

An easy going old dragoon was Curran, and for years before his retirement it was an open secret that his first sergeant "ran the troop" to suit himself; and that the captain never permitted his subalterns to interfere. A more independent, devil-may-care, and occasionally drunken lot of troopers were rarely gathered in one such organization, and while steady and reliable men on getting their discharges at the end of their term of enlistment would refuse to "take on" again in D troop, but would go over to Capt. Breece or perhaps to a company at another station, all the scamps and rollicking mercenaries in the regiment would drift over into "D" as he welcomed by the choice spirits therein assembled. And this was the gang that Capt. Lane was now expected to bring up with a round turn and transform into dutiful soldiers. Obedient to the colonel's behest, he had stopped over a couple of days at headquarters, had had a most cordial greeting from every officer at the post, had called on all the ladies—not omitting his fair defamers—and then had hastened on to Graham and his new and trying duties.

Every day, as he was whirled farther from the home of her whom he so devotedly loved, he wrote long letters to her, filled with—only lovers know what all. And his heart leaped with joy that to-morrow in the little packet of letters awaiting him at the adjutant's office when he reached his post was a letter-billet addressed to him in her beloved hand. Until he could get his quarters in habitable condition the new troop commander was the guest of Capt. and Mrs. Nash; and he could hardly wait for the close of that amiable woman's welcoming address to reach his room and devour every word of that most precious missive. She had written—Mabel kept the very day after he left, and a sweet, womanly letter it was—so dry and half-told, yet so full of faith and wide in

him. Every one at Graham remarked on the wonderful change for the better that had come over Lane since he went east. Never had they seen him so joyous, so lithe in manner. He seemed to walk on air; his eyes beamed on every one; his face seemed "almost to have a halo round it," said Mrs. Nash, and neither she nor any woman in garrison had the faintest doubt as to the explanation of it all. Love had wrought the change, and being loved had intensified and prolonged it. Every man, every woman in garrison was his friend, and the happy fellow would gladly have taken dozens of them into his confidence and told them all about it, and talked by the hour of her.

But there were reasons, Mrs. Vincent had said, why it was most desirable that there should be no announcement of the engagement at yet. What these were she did not explain to Mabel herself, but assured her that it was her father's wish as well. Lane had rushed to the great jewelry house of Van Luo & Laing, and the diamond solitaire that flashed among the leaves of the exquisite rosebud he smilingly handed her that night was one to make any woman gasp with delight. Could anything on earth be rich enough, pure enough, fair enough to lavish on her, his peerless queen?

She had held forth her soft white hand and let him slip it on the engagement finger, and then bend the knee like knight of old and kiss it fervently. She reveled in it, rejoiced in it, but, heeding her mother's advice, stowed it away where none could see it, in the secret drawer of her desk, and Lane was perfectly satisfied. "I will tell you the reason some day," Mrs. Vincent had said to him, "but not just now, for I might be doing wrong;" and he had protested that she need never tell him. What cared he so long as Mabel's love was his, and they understood each other as they did?

And so, while people at Graham plied him with questions and insinuations and side remarks about the "girl he left behind him" in the east, he kept faithfully to the agreement, and though the whole garrison knew he wrote to her every day and took long rides alone that he might think of her, doubtless, and though every one knew that those dainty missives that came so often for Capt. Lane were written by Miss Mabel Vincent, never once did he admit the existence of an engagement—never once until long afterwards.

The first real tidings that the Graham people had of her came in a letter from headquarters. Mrs. Riggs had had such a long, charming letter from Mr. Noel that she called in several of her cronies and read it all to them; and that very evening one of the number, unable to bear the burden of so much information, shifted it from her mental shoulders by writing it all to Mrs. Nash. Perhaps the best plan will be to read the extract which referred to Lane exactly as Mr. Noel wrote it:

"By this time I presume Fred Lane is busily engaged with his new troop. I served with them in the Sioux campaign and they never gave me any trouble at all. So, too, in the Geronimo chase a while ago, when Maj. Brace picked me out to go ahead by night from Carrizo's I asked for a detachment from D troop, and the men seemed to appreciate it. I knew they would follow wherever I would lead, and would stand by me through thick and thin. If Lane starts in right I've no doubt they will do just as well for him; but I expect he is feeling mighty blue at having to rejoin just now. You know I've always been a warm friend of his, and it hurt me to see him so unwilling to go back. No one seemed to know him very well in society, and it's very queer, for this was his old home—and I was never more delightedly welcomed anywhere; the people are charming. But Lane had held him self aloof a good deal, and fellows at the club say he didn't 'run with the right set.' Then, if all accounts be true, he had had hard luck in several ways. I'm told that he lost money in a big wheat speculation, and everybody says he totally lost his heart. I tell you this in confidence because I know you are a devoted friend of his—as indeed you are of all in the dear old regiment—but he was much embarrassed when it came to turning over the funds. There was quite a heavy shortage, which he had to make up at a time when it was probably most inconvenient. As to the other loss, it isn't to be wondered at. She is a beautiful and most charming girl, and many a man, I fancy, has laid his heart at her feet. It is said, however, that Lane's loss is the heavier in this case because—well, I fear it will come to nothing. A young lady told me yesterday that there was something back of it all—that she, Miss Vincent, was deeply in love with Mr. Rooster, of New York, and had been for over a year, and they were to have been married this coming September, but that the gentleman (?) learned that her father had been nearly swamped in speculation and had not a penny to give her. My informant went to school with Miss Vincent and knows her intimately, and she says that Mr. Rooster simply threw her over a short time ago, and that it was through pique and exasperation and to hide her heartbreak from the world that Mabel Vincent began to show such pleasure in Lane's devotions. She led him on, so her lady friends say; and now Mr. Rooster has found out that

old Vincent was sharper and shrewder than any one supposed, and made instead of losing a pile, and now he is suing to be taken back, and they say that she is so much in love with the fellow that the chances are all in his favor. This is why I feel such sorrow and anxiety for Lane.

"Well, I led the German at a lovely party at the Prendergasts' last night. Miss Vincent was there, looking like a peach blossom, and we danced together a great deal. When it came time to break up I believe half the people in the rooms came to say good night to me and to tell me they had never seen so delightful a German—everything depends on the leader." I have invitations for something or other for every night for the next fortnight; and yet I so often long for the old regiment and the true friends I had to leave. It did me a world of good last night to meet old Col. Gray, of the retired list, whose home is here, but he commanded the 11th infantry in the Sioux campaign, and when he saw me he threw his arms around my neck and hugged me before the whole throng of people. Give my love to our chief, always, and believe me, dear, true friend of mine. Yours, most affectionately, "GORDON NOEL."

Condensed, edited by feminine hands, and accented here and there as suited the writer's mood, this was the letter which formed the basis of the one received by Mrs. Nash. Lane by this time was cozily ensconced in his quarters, and was giving all his time to the improvement of affairs about his troop's barracks, kitchens and stables, to drill and target practice, and to company duties generally. His days knew no relaxation from labor, from reveille until "retreat" at sunset, and then came the delicious evenings in which he could write to her, and read a chapter or two of some favorite work before going early to bed. After the first week he seldom left his house after 8 o'clock, and the garrison had therefore ample opportunity to discuss his affairs. Some color was lent to the story of his having lost money in speculation by a letter received from Cheyenne, written to the new major of the 11th infantry, who had recently joined by promotion from Fort Russell, near that thriving town. The writer said that Lane of the Eleventh cavalry had sold his property there for fifteen thousand dollars about the end of June, and he had bought it for twenty-five hundred only nine years before. He could have got eighteen thousand just as well by waiting a few days, but he wanted the money at once.

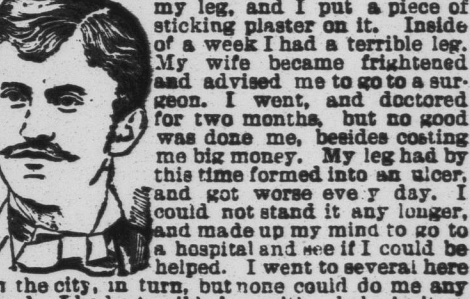
No one, of course, could ask the captain any direct questions about his affairs of either heart or pocket, but Lane was puzzled to account for some of the remarks that were made to him—the interrogatories about the methods of speculation, the tentatives as to chances of "making a good thing" in that way, and the sharp and scrutinizing glances that accompanied the queries. The sweet, sympathetic, semi-confidential manner, the inviting way in which the ladies spoke to him of his present loneliness and their hopes that soon he would bring to them a charming wife to share their exile and bless his army home—all this, too, seemed odd to him; but, as he had never been in love nor engaged before,

Continued on third page.

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