

Ten Years' Trial

The Story of a Soldier's Struggle

By Brigadier General
Charles King

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CHAPTER IV.

It was a week before Langdon was allowed to sit up, and a week and a half before he was allowed to get out of bed. Meantime there had been sport for Chicago papers at Sheridan. There usually is. To begin with, Dr. Bloodgood had pitched into his assistant for quitting the post without his knowledge or consent. Armistead replied that while it might have been without his consent it should not have been without his knowledge, as the same means had been taken of notifying the post surgeon as in the case of the commanding officer, a note sent by Armistead's servant saying that a telegram had just called him to Chicago on most urgent personal business. The train would be along in 20 minutes. There was barely time to change uniform for civilian dress and run for it. There was no time to hunt up both the post surgeon and commanding officer. The servant declared he rang four times at the doctor's and, getting no answer, concluded that the gale had denuded the sound of the bell and such effort was useless. So he crammed the note under the door and went his further way. But Bloodgood was in ill humor. In all that raging storm he had to struggle about the big post in answer to demands for medical services, and he said things in his spleen that reached the ears of Dr. Armistead before the eve of another day and led to an open breach between the senior and junior practitioners of the post. Dr. Bloodgood asked the colonel commanding if he had seen the telegram Dr. Armistead asserted had come to him from town. The colonel had not and considered Dr. Armistead's word as conclusive. Dr. Bloodgood intimated that he had reason to believe, and so had the other officers, that it wasn't the coming of a wire from town, but a man, that drove Armistead out of the post. Through clerks, orderlies and kitchen door cackle the affair got out in exaggerated shape. Then flamed the columns of Chicago's untrified press with headlines of startling proportions—"Another Scandal at the Fort! Duel Nipped in the Bud! Row in the Regiment! Further Sensations Sure to Follow! Colonel Sharpe Defies the Press! Prominent Officers Arrested!" And in 24 hours what had been a placid and fairly orderly military community was engulfed in a whirlpool of gossip and prostrated at the contemplation of its own enormities as portrayed by the papers. Sharpe was driven nearly rabid by the reporters, who dogged his every movement and besieged his quarters morn, noon and night. Bloodgood refused flat footed to be "interviewed," and Armistead shut his mouth like a clam, thereby compelling some journalists to improvise the desired statements.

It was from the inspired columns of The Palladium that the colonel first learned that the cause of the whole trouble was "the presence at the post of a man recently dismissed in disgrace from the army, but who, in defiance of law, regulations and common decency, is now concealed in the quarters of Lieutenant Nelson, a former classmate. The man in question was until his dismissal a lieutenant in the artillery, but his peccadilloes, extending over a period of years, had culminated in a cowardly assault on a brother officer at Fort Pawnee." And Sharpe sent for Nelson and demanded the facts. Nelson unerringly gave them and said his friend was prostrated still, and the doctor forbade his being disturbed or seen, which was all there was to the assertion that he was concealed. The colonel felt somehow, that Langdon's presence at the post was a thing he ought to object to, and he did. "See what an infernal boobyery it has kicked up!" said he. "Now they'll be demanding an explanation from me at Washington, and what the devil am I to say? You ought to have consulted my wishes before harboring a man in Mr. Langdon's plight."

"I did not invite poor Langdon out here, colonel," answered Nelson. "Two of our men found him fainting and exhausted in town and mercifully brought him here. I put him to bed in my quarters as a matter of course, and if that's a military offense I'll stand any punishment a court martial may inflict. As to Armistead and Langdon, beyond the fact that there is some deep feeling between them, I know nothing. There is no likelihood of their meeting, and when Langdon is strong enough to move he will need no hint from headquarters or anywhere else."

Then the colonel said something about reporters which, being interpreted, was the reverse of complimentary and not altogether just, because, like soldiers, these hapless toilers have their orders and cannot but obey. They were sent to Sheridan to get something sensational, "something to make the paper sell," and the fellow that came back empty handed—none of them did, of course—stood in danger of discharge. The colonel really wanted to know the nature of the telegram that called Dr. Armistead so suddenly to town. The senior surgeon, Lieutenant Nelson and one or two others had intimated that it was not the coming of the telegram, but Langdon, that set him going. Investigation, however, developed the fact that a telegram really had been received and delivered to Dr. Armistead. The operator could not be required to disclose the nature

of the same, it being a private dispatch, yet the colonel thought he ought to know if for no other reason than to be able to set at rest the rumors at Armistead's expense, and before he had time to think it all over and decide with wisdom, as ill luck would have it, he met Armistead in front of headquarters and beckoned him aside.

"Dr. Armistead," said he, "in justice to yourself it might be well to let me see the dispatch you received the other night. You may have heard that other motives have been assigned to your going so hurriedly to town."

"I have heard, sir," was the doctor's spirited rejoinder. "Also of the inquiries of certain of your officers of the operator, in my state we shoot men who sleep to such practices. Up here you seem to encourage them."

The colonel flushed hotly. "Have a care, Dr. Armistead. Language like that has led to the loss of more than one commission. I do not resent your words as they deserve, because I know the strain you are under and the annoyance you—all have had. I repeat that it seems due to yourself to dispel this uncertainty," and uncertainly the colonel paused.

"Then let me say here and now, Colonel Sharpe, that if you mean to show that telegram I decline. As for Mr. Langdon, after all that has been published and said, he has got to meet me the moment he is well enough."

The colonel's orderly, muffled his ears in his heavy overcoat, stood with in easy range, intently eyeing some object far out on the stormy lake, but as intently listening.

"Orderly," said the colonel impatiently. "Take these letters to Mrs. Sharpe and say I won't be home to luncheon and go and get your dinner." Then, when the soldier was well beyond earshot, the colonel turned on the feet of a Virginia. "Dr. Armistead," said he impressively, "you may judge for yourself as to the telegram, but for the present I have simply to warn you to keep your temper and away from Mr. Langdon. There's to be no meeting between you two in or around this post. Understand that, and—Good day to you, sir."

This was four days after Langdon's arrival, and by another day the Chicago papers had reached Pawnee and served as fuel to the flame of excitement already in full blast. To begin with Old Hurricane, Langdon's faithful valet and servant, had been bequeathed to the care of Rodney May and Woodrow, had been given a little room back of the main mess building and in somebody's cast off dress suit appeared as butler one evening at dinner. A Virginia education had made him familiar with every detail of such duties, and his grizzled pate and lined, pathetic face went far to equip him to look the character. To Langdon's friends among the boys it seemed most fitting that the lonely old negro mourning for his beloved master should be cared for by their number, but Langdon's friends were not too numerous now that he was some weeks gone from their midst, and Nathan, Torrance and satellites of theirs had the floor. It pleased Mr. Torrance one evening to speak brutally to the old servant and then contemptuously of his former employer, and when May and Woodrow heard of the shabby affair they hunted up Torrance and demanded the reason for his outbreak. The particulars of that encounter never got out, but a small party of cronies first cut Torrance and then "cut" loose from the club. Taking Hurricane with them, they set up housekeeping for themselves, and this new establishment was in smooth running order, very harmonious and companionable, when the Sheridan news was received, whereas there were still dissensions at "the mess." The married men had all club privileges, of course, but no seat at table. The 15 or 20 bachelors who thrice a day had been accustomed to commune together over the board had taken much comfort in Hurricane's colonial dignity of manner and commonsense knowledge of a butler's duty. They were annoyed that Torrance should have taken it upon himself to abuse a servant who was in no wise in his pay or under his authority; but, having failed to pass the vote of censure proposed by May, Woodrow and Le Duc or to take any measure whatever to insure their butler against further abuse, they had precipitated the secession of six of their choicest spirits and with the six had lost Hurricane. When it was too late, some of the main establishment thought they "ought to do something," for the six who seceded were gentlemen, and, if one might judge from language and conduct, Torrance was not. Wealth, with his lackadaisical wife, had made him arrogant, but nothing could make him popular. The membership of the officers' club included the entire commissioned list of the garrison—cavalry, artillery and staff.

"Car" of course was president, but Mrs. "Car" had her objections to his giving much time to social enjoyment within its walls, and the doughty veteran who had led a dozen dashing charges during the great war and who bore the scars of more than one sharp scrimmage with the Redskins on the frontier was no match for his better half in domestic encounter. Mrs. "Car" had convictions one of them being that a married man should eat and drink only in the presence and company of the partner of his joys and woes. This insured his getting only what was good

for him. "Car" as a consequence saw very little of the club. His vice president, an easy going old soul, exercised no control, he professing to believe that such powers were vested only in the chief. Melville but rarely set foot within its doors. When he did, however, it was marvelous to note the effect. Alteration ceased, argument tempered, voices toned down and orders for drinks diminished to next to nothing. In its earlier stages the club had been likened by a witty and observant woman to the Roaring Camp immortalized by Bret Harte, and occupants of quarters contiguous to or within hail of its limits were loud and frequent in their complaints. "Roaring Camp" was still the name by which the many garrison wits, mostly women, referred to it, and its members had so far succumbed to the force of circumstances as to fall in to the way of saying they were going to "camp" when they meant to the club. Taking it by and large, however, the Pawnee club had been a fairly harmonious organization. If its signs were not the best to be found in the army, its stories were but the worst, and as for the mess features, Pawnee's table was said to be quite the peer of that of Leavenworth or "the Point."

But the mess needed a head, the senior officer not having been provided with more than the outward and visible sign thereof. He was a veteran captain or cavalry, long with a woad; he presided with ponderous dignity at the board, but had neither weight in deliberation nor force in discipline. "The boys" overrode him completely and when discussion became fierce or heated he lost all semblance of control. The secession of so many bright, brainy juniors, all battery officers, proved a sore blow. There was an element among the cavalrymen in which Eric Langdon had excited profound sympathy, and the more these fellows saw and heard of Nathan and Torrance the less they liked them and the more they felt for Langdon. But the anti-Langdonites, if not actually in the majority, were most in evidence, for they at least had organization and energy. Conscious of the growing feeling for Langdon and against their own further obliquity on his name, they turned up day after day with some new story at his expense for the truth of which they declared some reliable person was ready to vouch, and as their hearers had no information on the subject the most they could do was to look incredulous. It was one evening late when Nathan and Torrance had been holding forth at some length and most of the cavalry crowd had slipped away to the card or billiard room that at last one of the troopers who had long feigned not to hear anything that was being said emerged from the screen of the morning paper and drawled:

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"I thought the rule was 'first come first served,'" he said in sulky surprise. "I know you did, and if that rule were universal no woman could be afforded a choice. She might be compelled to go through an entire season with the least desirable man in society. Now I like variety." "You went riding three times hand running with Mr. Langdon," complained the youth. "Did you refuse him the fourth?" "The fourth never came, but if it had I should have gone. There is great difference between an exhilarating outdoor ride and an indoor party. Besides—Mr. Langdon could teach so much." "Which I can't do, I suppose you mean," said he disconsolately. Then, with an upward glance, "Is he going to teach riding for a living, do you s'pose?"

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They were walking along the broad gravel path toward the commanding officer's at the moment. The Torrances' gate was just ahead. Three or four women, joyously chatting and laughing, were entering. They nodded, with smiling significance, toward the approaching pair, thereby augmenting Miss Grahame's annoyance. "Say I'm forgiven, Miss Grahame," pleaded Santley hurriedly, "and that you will go with me to the Thanksgiving bon. I've got to go to stables now, you know. There won't be any men at the Torrances' till after retreat. Indeed—I'm awfully sorry I vexed you," and to do Santley justice, he looked it. She turned and faced him. "Mr. Santley," she said, "I knew very few officers till our coming here. It is the first garrison I ever visited. My uncle and two of his old comrades formed my ideas of what our soldiers were and should be, and Mr. Langdon seemed to be of the same caliber, as you artillerymen say. I never heard them sneer at a man in such misfortune as had fallen to the New England cavalry regt. It is a small matter. My ideals of the army have been decidedly shaken, not by one, but by several of your associates. I thought officers were above such pettiness."

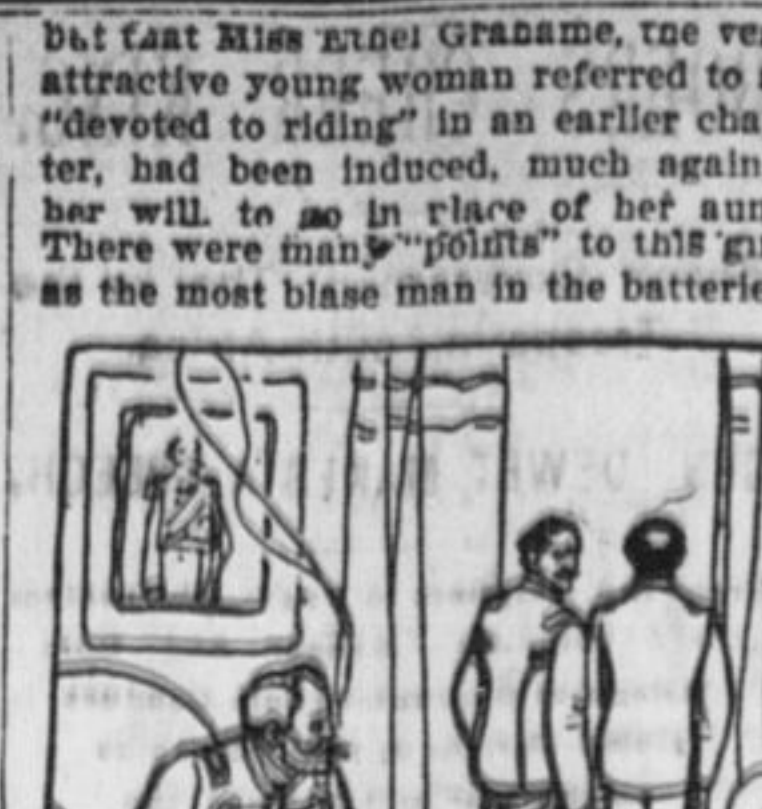
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But when Major Melville returned from stables he found his wife in deep concern. It was dark enough at that time to call for lights in many of the quarters, and the windows at the Torrances' were brilliant. Some of the women folk had already chattered home; others were still abroad, chatting in eager, subdued tones. Mrs. Melville met the major at the door and drew him into the parlour.

"Good night to you—both!" Mr. Santley had twice remarked, but later he had given it as his opinion that for a girl who hadn't a penny she was too—superior, you know. Santley had been twice abroad, had a little money and about as little sense, had cast his lot with the Nathan contingent as more congenial and productive of dinners. Yet he had spent more evenings at Melville's than anywhere else in the garrison. Melville, always courteous to him, but never communicative, could not have been the attraction, especially as the major had a way of withdrawing to his study with certain of his officers on several evenings in the week and working out problems in the war game. Santley was no student. He hated books, but he loved a pretty face, and that Ethel Grahame's was pretty beyond peradventure not more than five women at Pawnee could be brought to deny even in sacred and secret confidences. Mrs. Melville was not Santley's attraction, for she spent the early evening hours with her children as a rule and considered Santley a milkop and snob. She was, as defined by Thackeray, but milkop—that was still "not proved." Santley was a dawdler in the parlour, but no dolt upon parade. He rode, shot, sparred and danced well, and what he might do in the event of active service was yet to be determined. Now, Langdon had been Miss Grahame's escort on three occasions in saddle before his arrest and court martial, and then sharp weather set in. Miss Grahame, who had been "devoted to riding" in the early fall, seemed to lose her fondness for it when the November winds blew cold over the head bluffs along the Pawnee. It was Miss Grahame on whom the duty of entertaining Mr. Santley generally devolved, and it was the conviction in Melville's household that no better arrangement was desired by that gentleman. What the major and his wife only conjectured was that for Miss Grahame the arrangement was less charming, but she made no remonstrance. There was very much in Mr. Santley she did not fancy at all, but she would have been less than woman had she not seen that her half formed aversion was anything but reciprocated. Few women worth the winning are destitute of coquetry, however diluted, and Ethel Grahame had found pleasure and interest in spite of herself in Mr. Santley's visits, for she delighted in puzzling, perplexing, even in tormenting him. She had gone to two dances with him, to one with Woodrow or May and then refusing to go with him to a third. He asked why. "Because you ask so far ahead," was her placid reply.

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Paint Troubles

come with poor paint. You can't be free from them unless you use good paint.

The best good paint is
THE SHERWIN-WILLIAMS PAINT

It is made according to uniform formulae from pure lead, pure zinc and pure linseed oil. The proportion of ingredients is just right to produce the best wearing paint possible. Grinding and mixing most thorough.

It's a paint made to prevent trouble.

SOLD BY
J. G. EDWARDS & CO., LINDSAY, ONT.

DRS. KENNEDY & KERGAN

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