

Betty at Fort Blizzard eBook

Betty at Fort Blizzard by Molly Elliot Seawell

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FROM PEN DRAWINGS

The Black Mare Suddenly Threw Her Head Down and Her Heels Up

“Miss Anita is in there with Mr. Broussard, an’ He got
on His Courtin’ Breeches, an’ They’s Just as Quiet as
a Couple of Sleepin’ Babies”

“Never Mind, Dear, Darling Daddy, I Love You Just the Same”

Mrs. McGillicuddy Sat Majestically Upright in the Buggy,
While the Sergeant Bestrode the Peaceful and Amiable Dot

“Neither You nor Your Child Shall Suffer for the Present”

Kettle Dropped the Reins, and Grasping Corporal
Around the Neck Hung on Desperately

“Don’t Call Your Father ‘the Poor old Chap,’” Said
Mrs. Fortescue Positively

BETTY AT FORT BLIZZARD

CHAPTER I

“Miss Betty” In A new role

Colonel John Hope Fortescue, commanding the fine new cavalry post of Fort Blizzard, in the far Northwest, sat in his comfortable office and gazed through the big window at the plaza with its tall flagstaff, from which the splendid regimental flag floated in the crystal cold air of December. Afar off was a broad plateau for drills, an aviation field, and beyond all, a still, snow-bound world, walled in by jagged peaks of ice. It seemed to Colonel Fortescue, who was an idealist and at the same time a crack cavalry officer, that the great flag on the giant flagstaff dominated the frozen world around it, and its stars were a part of the firmament. When the sun rose and the flag was run up, then indeed it was sunrise. And when the sun descended in majesty, so the flag descended in glory.

As the last pale gleam of splendor touched the flag, the sunset gun cracked out suddenly. Colonel Fortescue and his right-hand man for twenty years, Sergeant Patrick McGillicuddy, rose to their feet and stood at “attention,” as the flag fell slowly. Then it was reverently furled, and the color sergeant, with the guard, started toward the



Colonel's quarters, all whom they passed making way for them and saluting the furled colors.

Colonel Fortescue continued to look out of the window, while Sergeant McGillicuddy, getting some belated mail together, passed out of the office entrance of the fine new commandant's quarters. Two horsewomen—Mrs. Fortescue, she who had been Betty Beverley, and her seventeen-year-old Anita—followed by a trooper as escort, were coming through the main entrance. Colonel Fortescue's eyes softened as he watched his wife and daughter, Mrs. Fortescue as slim as when she was Betty Beverley of old in Virginia, and riding as lightly and gracefully as a bird on the wing.



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There were two other watchers besides the Colonel. These two stood at the drawing-room window. One was tall and black and kind-eyed, with the unquenchable kindness of the colored race. His official name was Solomon Ezekiel Pickup, but ever since Mrs. Fortescue, as Betty Beverley, had taken him, a little waif, forlorn and homeless and friendless, he had been simply Kettle, being as black as a kettle. He had watched and adored the baby days of "Marse Beverley," the straight young stripling now training to be a soldier at West Point, and Anita, the violet-eyed daughter, the adored of her father's heart, but Kettle had not come into his own until the two-year-old baby, John Hope Fortescue II, had arrived in a world which did not expect him, but welcomed him the more rapturously on that account. The new baby had taken everybody by surprise, and immediately acquired the name of the After-Clap. He coolly approved of his father and mother, and thought Anita an entertaining person when she got down on the floor to play with him. Naturally he was indifferent to his twenty-year-old brother, whom he had never seen, but Kettle—his own Kettle—was the beloved of the After-Clap's heart. Next to Kettle in his affections was Mrs. McGillicuddy, the six-foot-two wife of Sergeant McGillicuddy, who had eight children, of assorted sizes, and still found time to do a great deal for the After-Clap.

Mrs. Fortescue, riding briskly across the plaza, and seeing Kettle, so black, holding in his arms the laughing baby, so white, smiled and waved her hand at them. Then, catching sight of the Commanding Officer, standing at the window of his office, she smiled at him. But Colonel Fortescue was not smiling; on the contrary, he was frowning as his eyes fell upon Mrs. Fortescue's mount, Birdseye, a light built black mare, with a shifty eye and a propensity to make free with her hind feet. More than once Colonel Fortescue had reminded Mrs. Fortescue that it was somewhat beneath the dignity of a Commanding Officer's wife to ride a kicking horse. But Mrs. Fortescue had a sneaking affection for Birdseye and much preferred her to Pretty Maid, the brown mare Anita rode, and who was considered as demure as Anita, and Anita was very demure, and very, very pretty. At least, so thought Lieutenant Victor Broussard, watching her out of the tail of his eye, as he passed some distance away. It was not so far away, however, that Anita could not see the handsome turn of his close-cropped black head, and his eyes full of laughter and courage and impudence. As some things go by contraries, the glimpse of Broussard made Anita dismount quickly from Pretty Maid and flit within doors to avoid the sight of him. Once indoors, Anita ran where she could catch a last look of Broussard's young figure, his cavalry cape thrown back, before he turned the corner and was gone.

Colonel Fortescue, at the office window, returned a salute, without a smile, to Mrs. Fortescue's greeting from afar. His teeth came together with a snap.

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“It’s the last time,” he said aloud—meaning that Mrs. Fortescue would have to submit to his judgment in horses and let Birdseye alone.

What happened next turned the Colonel’s resolution to adamant. A trooper was leading Pretty Maid away and another trooper was about to do the same for Birdseye when the black mare suddenly threw her head down and her heels up. Mrs. Fortescue kept her seat, while the mare, backing, and kicking as she backed, knocked over a couple of the passing color guard, and only by adroitness the color sergeant saved the flag from being dropped to the ground. Meanwhile, the two troopers, falling backward, collided with the chaplain, a small, meek man, as brave as a lion, who stopped to look and was ignominiously bowled over. Sergeant McGillicuddy, just coming out of the office entrance, made a dash forward and grabbed Birdseye by the bridle. The mare, still unable to unseat Mrs. Fortescue or to break away from the wiry little Sergeant, yet managed to scatter all the official mail in the Sergeant’s hand on the snow. Kettle, who could not have remained away from “Miss Betty” under such circumstances to save his life, dropped the baby on the drawing-room floor and rushed out. This the After-Clap resented, shrieking wildly.

[Illustration: The black mare suddenly threw her head down and her heels up.]

The combination of the kicking mare, the fallen troopers, the prostrate chaplain, and the screaming baby at once determined Colonel Fortescue to remain in his office; what he had to say to Mrs. Fortescue would not sound well in public. Unlike Kettle, Colonel Fortescue had no fear whatever for Mrs. Fortescue, and watched calmly from the window as Sergeant McGillicuddy brought Birdseye to her four feet. Mrs. Fortescue sprang to the ground and apologized gracefully to the chaplain, assuring him that Birdseye was the best disposed horse in the world, except when she was in a temper and her temper was merely bashfulness and stage fright.

“Whatever it is,” answered Chaplain Brown, smiling while he rubbed a bruised shin, “it hurts. It hurts pretty badly, too.”

Next, Mrs. Fortescue apologized profusely to the troopers who had been knocked down by the bashful Birdseye. After their kind, they preferred a kicker to a non-kicker, and accepted, with delighted grins, Mrs. Fortescue’s sweet words. But it was another thing when Mrs. Fortescue had to face a frowning husband.

Mrs. Fortescue tripped into the Colonel’s office, and going up to Colonel Fortescue gave him two soft kisses and a lovely smile, and this is what she got in return, in the Colonel’s parade-ground voice:

“I supposed I had made myself perfectly clear, Elizabeth, in regard to your riding that kicking mare.”



“But, darling,” replied Mrs. Fortescue, “I thought you wouldn’t mind. And please don’t call me Elizabeth. It breaks my heart.”

“I must ask—in fact, insist—that you shall not ride that mare again,” answered the Colonel sternly, without taking any notice of Mrs. Fortescue’s breaking heart.



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“And her name is Birdseye,” plaintively responded Mrs. Fortescue. “Don’t you remember, the first horse you ever put me on was your first Birdseye.”

Mrs. Fortescue accompanied this information with a little pinch of the Colonel’s ear. The Colonel remained coldly unresponsive; he had steeled his heart; the kisses and the pinch were hard to resist, but hardest of all the look of wide-eyed innocence in the dark eyes uplifted to his. Mrs. Fortescue would never see forty again, and her rich hair had a wide streak of silver running from her right temple; but she was the same Betty Beverley of twenty years before. The Betty Beverleys of this world are dowered with immortal youth and change but little, even under strange stars.

Mrs. Fortescue had never in her life been at the end of her resources for placating men. She withdrew her arms from about her husband’s neck, and running lightly into the drawing-room took the After-Clap from Kettle’s arms, and, throwing him pick-a-back on her shoulders, tripped with her beautiful man-child into the Colonel’s office. Mrs. Fortescue and the baby were the only persons who ever took liberties with Colonel Fortescue.

The baby, charmed with his father’s uniform, seized a shoulder strap with one hand and grabbed the Colonel’s carefully trimmed mustache with the other, and lifted a pair of laughing eyes, wonderfully like his mother’s, into his father’s face. Mrs. Fortescue, at first as demure as any C. O.’s wife in the world, suddenly smiled the radiant smile that began with her eyes and ended with her lips. The woman’s cunning was too much for the man’s strength. Colonel Fortescue put his arm around his wife, as she laid the baby’s rose-leaf face against his father’s bronzed cheek. Husband and wife looked into each other’s eyes and smiled. With this baby their lost youth was restored to them. Once more the Colonel was a slim young lieutenant, and Mrs. Fortescue was holding in her arms another dark-eyed, rose-leafed baby, now a young soldier in the gray uniform of a military cadet. They, themselves, could scarcely realize the flitting of the years. This new baby was a glorious surprise in their later married life. The baby’s little hand had led them backward to the splendid sunrise of their married happiness.

“It is because I love you so that I can’t—I won’t let you ride that black devil, Betty dear,” said the Colonel.

“How ridiculous!” replied Mrs. Fortescue. “You know I can ride as well as you can—can’t I, After-Clap?”

“Goo-goo-goo-goo!” replied the baby, positively.

“And I never could understand why you should take the trouble to get angry with me,” Mrs. Fortescue kept on, “when you can’t stay angry with me to save your life.”

Colonel Fortescue made a last stand.



“But if I didn’t get angry with you sometimes, Betty——”

“‘Betty’ sounds cheerful,” interrupted Mrs. Fortescue, and then there was peace between them.

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Mrs. Fortescue and the Colonel went up-stairs to dress for dinner, and Kettle, on watch in the hall, took charge of the After-Clap, who commanded to be taken back into the office. Kettle, as always, promptly obeyed, and putting the baby on Sergeant McGillicuddy's desk, allowed the After-Clap to wreck everything in sight.

It had not been originally designed that Kettle should be the After-Clap's nurse. The colored mammy who had nursed Beverley and Anita with tender devotions having gone to her well-earned rest, Mrs. Fortescue had determined to be very modern with the After-Clap. A smart young trained nurse, in a ravishing cap, was his first nurse. But the baby showed such marked preference for Kettle, and Kettle dogging the baby by day and night and thrusting superfluous services and advice upon the nurse, she decided she would not stand being "bossed by a nigger," and took a train for the East. Then, Mrs. Fortescue determined to return to first principles and imported from Virginia, at great cost and trouble, a colored mammy, most capable and experienced. But the complications with Kettle grew more acute, and the mammy, in a blaze of indignation, took even stronger ground than the trained nurse, and declared she "warn't goin' to be bossed by no black nigger." When she had shaken the snow of Fort Blizzard from her feet, there was nothing left but to hand the baby over to Kettle and Mrs. McGillicuddy, as coadjutor. After tending her own brood and keeping a sharp eye on Anna Maria McGillicuddy, her eldest daughter, who had reached the stage of beaux, and cooking the best meals for the Sergeant that any sergeant could ask, Mrs. McGillicuddy still had time to lend a helping hand with the After-Clap.

Kettle and Mrs. McGillicuddy had been good friends ever since the time, nineteen years before, when she had become the little Sergeant's two-hundred-pound bride. But in the twenty years, during which Kettle had never left "Miss Betty" and Sergeant McGillicuddy had been Colonel Fortescue's factotum, there had been a continual guerilla warfare between Kettle and the Sergeant. The Sergeant alluded scornfully to Kettle as "the naygur," while with Kettle the Sergeant was always "ole McGillicuddy." Mrs. McGillicuddy was invariably on Kettle's side, and one blast upon her bugle horn was worth ten thousand men in what Kettle called his "collusions," with the Sergeant. Sergeant McGillicuddy had performed prodigies of valor in fights with Indians; he had been mentioned in general order, along with Colonel Fortescue, and was commonly reputed to fear neither the devil nor the doctor. But he was under iron discipline with Mrs. McGillicuddy, and Kettle, like everybody else, knew it.

While the After-Clap was disporting himself with the articles on the Sergeant's desk, under the full glare of the electric light, a shadow passed the window. The next minute Sergeant McGillicuddy entered, the lion in him aroused by the sight of the liberties taken with his desk.



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“I say, you naygur,” snorted the Sergeant wrathfully, “you take that baby off my desk and out of this office. The C. O.’s office ain’t no day nursery.”

“You go to grass,” replied Kettle boldly.

The reason for Kettle’s boldness was in sight. Mrs. McGillicuddy’s majestic figure was seen approaching from the region back of the dining-room, and she had heard the Sergeant’s remark about the C. O.’s office being a day nursery.

“And it’s you, Patrick McGillicuddy,” cried Mrs. McGillicuddy, sailing into the office, “the father of eight children, complaining of this sweet blessed lamb.”

“D’ ye mean the naygur?” asked McGillicuddy.

Mrs. McGillicuddy, scorning to reply, seized the baby, and with Kettle following marched out. It was not really judicious for the After-Clap to be taken into the C. O.’s office.

The Sergeant began meekly to straighten up his desk, and Colonel Fortescue, coming in later to glance over the evening newspaper, found McGillicuddy gazing meditatively at the Articles of War, lying in a volume on the table.

The Sergeant was not the modern educated non-com, with an eye to a commission, but an old-timer, unlearned in books, but an expert in handling men and horses.

“What is it, Sergeant?” asked the C. O.

“Just this, sir,” replied the Sergeant respectfully, “I was thinkin’ a man ought to be mighty keerful when he picks out a wife.”

“Certainly,” replied the Colonel, gravely, who had exercised no forethought at all, after once falling under the spell of Betty Beverley’s laughing eyes.

“When I got married I didn’t act rash at all, sir, because I’m by nature a timid man,” continued the Sergeant, who was a valiant man, and free. “I went to a palmist and paid him a dollar for my horrorscope. I told him I wanted a little woman, about my size, who would follow me around like a poodle dog. The palmist, he said, sir, he seen a little woman in my hand as would follow me around like a poodle dog. Then I went to a reg’lar fortune teller, and she told me the same thing, for a dollar. And I went to a mind reader, the seventh daughter of a seventh daughter, and she promised me the little woman, too. I bought a dream book and there was the same little woman again, sir. Within a fortnight after all this I met Araminta Morrarity, as is now Missis Patrick McGillicuddy, and she is six-foot-two-and-three-quarters inches in height, and tipped the scale then at a hundred and ninety-six pounds—and I’m the lightest man in the regiment. Missis McGillicuddy has been a good wife, sir—I ain’t sayin’ a word about that, sir.”



“I should think not,” replied Colonel Fortescue, to whom the Sergeant’s married life was known intimately for nineteen years, “Mrs. McGillicuddy keeps all the soldiers’ wives satisfied and is a boon to the regiment.”

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“That’s so, sir,” the Sergeant agreed, “and the chaplain, he compliments her on the way she marches them eight children and me to the chapel every Sunday, rain or shine, me havin’ the right of the line, Missis McGillicuddy herself bein’ the rear guard, the line properly dressed, no stragglers, everything done soldier-like. But Missis McGillicuddy don’t follow me around like a poodle dog, as the palmist, and the mind reader, and the dream book said she would. She’s hell-bent—excuse me sir—on havin’ her own way all the time.”

Just then a vision flitted past the door. It was Anita, dressed for dinner, in a filmy gown of pale blue and white, the colors of the Blessed Damozel. A light came into Colonel Fortescue’s eyes as they rested on this darling of his heart. The Sergeant had a pretty daughter, Anna Maria by name, who was just Anita’s age and of whom the Sergeant was extravagantly fond. The two fathers, the Colonel and the Sergeant, exchanged intelligent glances. Often, in their twenty years of daily association, they talked together about things of which they never spoke to any other man.

“Anna Maria is a fine girl,” said the Colonel.

“Yes, sir,” answered the Sergeant, “if she’d just get over the fancy she has for Briggs, the artillery corporal. That man is bound to be killed by a wheel runnin’ over him. You know, sir, if there is anything on earth that skeers me stiff it is a horse hitched to any kind of a vehicle. I don’t mind ridin’ ’em because then the horse’s heels is behind me. But in a vehicle the horse’s heels is in front of me, and it makes me nervous. I have told Anna Mariar that she shan’t so much as look at Briggs unless he exchanges into the cavalry, so the horse’s heels will be behind him, and not in front of him.”

The entrance bell rang, and Kettle went to the front door. Colonel Fortescue could neither hear nor see the visitor, but the step and the sound of a military cloak thrown on a chair indicated the arrival of a junior lieutenant. Colonel Fortescue looked annoyed. The junior officer running after Anita bothered him even more than Briggs, the artillery corporal, bothered Sergeant McGillicuddy. Anita was but a child—only seventeen; the Colonel had proclaimed this when he brought Anita to the post. Colonel Fortescue did all that a father and a Colonel could do to keep the junior lieutenants away from Anita, but no method has yet been found to keep junior officers away from pretty girls.

There were still twenty minutes before dinner, and the scoundrel, as Colonel Fortescue classified all the juniors who, like himself, adored Anita, seemed determined to stay until the musical gong sounded, and later, if he were asked. This particular scoundrel, Broussard, was the one to whom the Colonel most objected of all the slim, good-looking scoundrels who wore shoulder straps, for Broussard had too much money to spend, and spent it wildly, so the Colonel



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thought; he, himself, had something handsome besides his pay, but he had also a sensible father who held him down. Broussard had too many motors, too many horses, too many dogs, too many clothes, too many fighting chickens, and, above all, was too intimate with a certain soldier, a gentleman-ranker who was disapproved, both of officer and man. A gentleman-ranker is a man serving in the rank who might be an officer. This one, Lawrence by name, was a bad lot altogether. The Colonel could add quite a respectable number of demerits to Broussard's credit. And to make matters worse, Broussard was a dashing fellow, the best rider in his troop, and had a way with him that made Anita's eyes soften and her tea-rose cheeks brighten when he came within her presence.

Meanwhile, Broussard was walking up the long and handsome drawing-room toward the little glass room at the end, which had been fitted up for Anita's birds, her doves and her canaries.

Anita, leaning backward in the cushioned window seat, held to her breast a fluttering white dove. She did not see Broussard until he was quite in the little room, and had closed the glass door after him. As Anita gave Broussard her hand, a great wave of delicate color flooded her face. This quickened the beating of Broussard's heart—Anita did not blush like that for everybody. She had a gentle aloofness generally toward men which was a baffling mystery to her mother.

Broussard, being frankly in love with Anita, lost all his importance and presumption in her sweet presence, and was as gentle and modest as the white dove that Anita still held to her breast. As he longed to sit near her and ask her poignant questions, Broussard sat a long way off and talked common-places, chiefly about birds, of which he showed a surprising knowledge, gleaned that afternoon from the encyclopaedia, in anticipation of his visit. Also, Broussard had, very artfully, secured a traitor in the enemy's camp because it was well understood at Fort Blizzard that Colonel Fortescue was the enemy of every subaltern at the post who dared to raise his sacrilegious eyes to the Colonel's daughter.

This traitor was Kettle, into whose hand Broussard never failed to place a quarter whenever they met, and at the same time to wink gravely. Kettle knew the meaning both of the quarter and the wink.

Across the hall Kettle was arranging the dinner table, it being Mrs. McGillicuddy's duty to put the After-Clap to bed. The dining-room door was ajar, and Kettle kept an eye open to Broussard's advantage.

Presently, Mrs. Fortescue came down-stairs, dressed for dinner in a gown of a jocund yellow, which Colonel Fortescue liked. As she passed the open door of the handsome



dining-room, Kettle beckoned to her mysteriously. Mrs. Fortescue walked into the room and Kettle closed the door after her.

“Miss Betty,” whispered Kettle earnestly, “doan’ you go into that there apiary,” by which Kettle meant the aviary. “Miss Anita is in there with Mr. Broussard, an’ he got on his courtin’ breeches, an’ they’s jest as quiet as a couple of sleepin’ babies.”

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[Illustration: “Miss Anita is in there with Mr. Broussard, an’ he got on his courtin’ breeches, an’ they’s jest as quiet as a couple of sleepin’ babies.”]

A look of annoyance came to Mrs. Fortescue’s expressive eyes. The Colonel had imbued her with disapproval of the man of too many motors and horses and dogs and clothes and fighting chickens.

Mrs. Fortescue waved Kettle away and marched into the hall, where she met Colonel Fortescue coming out of his office.

“It’s Broussard,” she whispered to the Colonel.

Together they entered the long drawing-room. Broussard and Anita were leaning forward; Anita’s face was still deeply flushed. Her beloved white dove fluttered, unnoticed, about her white-shod feet. When the glass door opened and Colonel and Mrs. Fortescue entered the little glass room, both Anita and Broussard started violently—a sign of captive love.

Mrs. Fortescue was gracious, merely because she could not help it, and the Colonel treated Broussard with the elaborate courtesy which a Colonel shows to a subaltern and which makes the subaltern look and feel the size of the head of a pin. Naturally, Broussard hastened his leave-taking and received no invitation to remain, except from Anita’s eyes, shy and long-lashed.

When the Colonel and Mrs. Fortescue and Anita were sitting at the softly-shaded round table in the dining-room, Anita’s chair was close to her father’s—the two were never far apart when they could be close together. Mrs. Fortescue wore around her white throat a locket with a miniature in it of her boy soldier. He was to her what Anita was to the Colonel, but being a stout-hearted woman she had sent her son away to be a soldier and had worn a smile at parting. There was a strain of the Spartan mother in this smiling daughter, wife, and mother of soldiers.

“Did you have a pleasant visit from Mr. Broussard?” asked Colonel Fortescue.

“Very pleasant, daddy dear. He knows so much about birds.”

“I think,” replied the Colonel, darkly, “Mr. Broussard’s knowledge comes chiefly from the study of fighting chickens.”

“I hear he has cockfights on Sunday, in the cellar of his quarters,” said Mrs. Fortescue, willing to give Broussard a slashing cut under the fifth rib.

“Cocking mains, my dear,” corrected the Colonel, and then kept on, earnestly, to Anita.



“You can scarcely imagine the horrors of a cockpit. The poor gamecocks, with cruel spurs upon their feet, tearing each other to pieces, and blood and feathers all over the place.”

“You seem wonderfully familiar with cockpits,” remarked Mrs. Fortescue. “It seems to me, when we went to our first post after we were married, that you were sometimes missing on Sunday morning, and used to tell me afterward about the grand time you had, and the superior fighting qualities of the Savoys over the Bantams.”

The Colonel scowled.

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“I don’t recall the circumstances, Elizabeth,” he said.

“But I do, John,” tartly responded Mrs. Fortescue.

Anita knew that when it was Jack and Betty the skies were serene, and when it became John and Elizabeth there were clouds upon the horizon.

At this point Kettle, who was serving dinner, felt that his duty as Broussard’s ally was to speak.

“Miss Betty,” said he with solemn emphasis, “Mr. Broussard doan’ keep them chickens in his cellar fur to fight; he keeps ’em to lay aigs fur his breakfus’.”

“That’s queer,” said the Colonel, “all of Mr. Broussard’s chickens are cock chickens.”

This would have abashed a less ardent partisan, but it only stimulated Kettle.

“Come to think of it, Miss Betty,” Kettle continued stoutly, “them chickens is cock chickens, but Mr. Broussard, he keep ’em for fryin’ chickens and bri’lers; he eats a cock chicken ev’ry mornin’ fur his breakfus’, day in and day out.”

“Oh, Kettle!” said Anita, in a tone of soft reproach. She disliked the notion of a cockpit, but she was a lover of abstract truth, which Kettle was not.

“Well, Miss Anita,” Kettle began argumentatively, “the truth is, Mr. Broussard, he jes’ keep them chickens to’ ’commodate the chaplain. The chaplain, he’s a gre’t cockfighter, an’ he say, ’Mr. Broussard, the Kun’l is mighty strict, an’ kinder queer in his head, an’ he ain’t no dead game sport like me an’ you, so if you will oblige me, Mr. Broussard, jes’ keep my fightin’ chickens in your cellar, an’ if the Kun’l say anything to you, tell him them chickens is yourn. You wouldn’t mind a little thing like that, would you, Mr. Broussard?’ That’s what I hee’rd the chaplain say.”

“Kettle!” shouted the Colonel, and Mrs. Fortescue remarked candidly:

“You are a big story-teller, Kettle, there isn’t a word of truth in all you have been telling.”

“That’s so, Miss Betty,” announced Kettle, brazenly. “Truth is, Mr. Broussard ain’t got no chickens at all in his cellar, he keeps ducks, Miss Betty, ’cause the water rises in the cellar all the time.”

Kettle’s active help did not end with wholesale lying as a means of helping Broussard. Within a week every time the After-Clap caught sight of Broussard he would shout for “Bruvver.” This, Kettle carefully explained, was the baby’s way of saying Broussard, but it brought a good many quarters from Broussard’s pocket into Kettle’s palm.



CHAPTER II

A PRETTY MAID AND A GAMECHICK

The December days sped on, and Christmas was nearing. As the great, splendid fort was a shut-in place, the people in it made great preparations for Christmas, if only to forget that they were shut in. The Christmas Eve exhibition drill and music ride was to be the principal event of the season, and, wonder of wonders, Anita was to ride with Broussard at the music ride. This was not accomplished without pleadings and even tears from Anita. Mrs. Fortescue took no part in this affair between the Colonel and the adored of his heart; Anita and the Colonel had always settled their problems between themselves solely. Sergeant McGillicuddy had something to do with wringing from the Colonel his consent that Anita should ride with Broussard.



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“Accordin’ to my way of thinkin’, Mr. Broussard is the best rider of all the young officers, sir,” said McGillicuddy to the Colonel, in the seclusion of the office. “Miss Anita, she’d look mighty pretty ridin’ with him, and Pretty Maid is as quiet as a lamb, sir, under the saddle. I wouldn’t answer for her in shafts, sir. Lord! There’s nothin’ too devilish for a horse to do in shafts, or hitched to a pole. Missis McGillicuddy can’t see it in this light, judgin’ from the Christmas gift she’s preparin’ to give me.”

“What is it, McGillicuddy?” asked the Colonel.

“It’s a buggy, sir,” answered the Sergeant despondently. “When I wanted to enlist in the aviation corps that woman, sir, forbid it; she said to me, ‘Patrick McGillicuddy, I never did believe one word about your bein’ afraid av horses in wheeled vehicles.’ An’ ivery time I go up in a flyin’ machine, just for the fun av it, Missis McGillicuddy, she says to me ‘Patrick, if they was to lop off the f from that flyin’ machine, it would fit you to a t, bedad!’ And that’s the way she talks to me when I spent seven dollars and fifty cents in gettin’ prognostications that I was goin’ to marry a woman as would follow me around like a poodle dog!”

“Women have a good many burrs in their convolutions,” said the Colonel, lighting a cigar and handing a handful to the Sergeant.

“They has, sir,” replied McGillicuddy, accepting the cigars with doleful gratitude, “and Missis McGillicuddy threatens to take me out in that buggy on Christmas day. Well, sir, I’ve made my will and settled up my account at the post trader’s, and the aviation officer has promised to tak’ me on a fly Christmas Eve morning. It may be the last fly I’ll take until I get wings, for I hardly expects, sir, to escape the dangers of that buggy.”

In talking with Mrs. Fortescue about the music ride Colonel Fortescue dwelt upon the superiority of a quiet horse like Pretty Maid over a constitutional kicker like Birdseye.

“It’s the quiet ones, horses and women, that need watching,” replied Mrs. Fortescue, who had never been accused of being a quiet one.

For two weeks before Christmas the exhibition drill and music ride was the great subject of attention at Fort Blizzard. The most interesting part of the show was the music ride, in which the girls of the post were to ride, each girl having her attendant cavalier. When it was known that Anita was to ride with Broussard all the other sublieutenants who had hoped to sit in Broussard’s saddle promptly provided themselves with other charming young ladies of the post. Next to Anita, the best rider was Sally Harlow, the daughter of her who had been Sally Carteret. Mrs. Harlow followed the example of Mrs. Fortescue, whose bridesmaid she had been, and had married within a year the dashing young officer with whom she “stood up” at Mrs. Fortescue’s wedding. Mrs. Harlow, like Mrs. Fortescue, showed a marked inability to grow old and was as gay and drank the wine of life as joyously as did her daughter, Sally the Second.

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For a fortnight before Christmas the practice rides took place every afternoon in the great riding hall, in which four troops of cavalry could manoeuvre.

As the daughter of the C. O., Anita, with Broussard, was to lead the girl riders and their cavaliers. Broussard called punctually at the Colonel's quarters for Anita, on the red December afternoons, when the air was like champagne and Broussard felt as if his veins ran wine instead of blood. The After-Clap, under Kettle's secret instructions, became valuable ally of Broussard's. Kettle managed that the baby's afternoon ride in his wicker carriage should coincide with Broussard's arrival. The dark-eyed baby, in his little white fur coat and cap and white fur blanket, looked like a snowdrop by the side of Kettle, who, except his shiny teeth, was so black it seemed as if he had been coated with shoe polish. The After-Clap always hailed Broussard with a vigorous shout of "Bruvver! Bruvver!" and Kettle invariably explained:

"He's a-tryin' to say 'Mr. Boosard.'"

At this Broussard would laugh and agree with Kettle that the After-Clap was the knowingest baby in the world, and Anita would blush beautifully. Colonel Fortescue's heart sank when he saw Broussard and Anita walking off together; Broussard so trim and soldierly in his riding uniform and Anita so amazingly pretty in her blue habit and cap, cunningly imitating the cavalry uniform, a fetching dress adopted by all the young ladies who were to take part in the music ride.

The drill and ride were to begin at eight o'clock on Christmas Eve, and afterward there was to be a big ball, for at Fort Blizzard the young girls and young officers ended everything with a ball, where they could "chase the glowing hours with flying feet."

A great silver moon and a mighty host of palpitating stars put the electric lights to shame on Christmas Eve. When Broussard called for Anita, a little before eight, she was waiting, already dressed in the pretty imitation of an officer's uniform—a costume that would make even a plain girl enchanting, and how much more so the violet-eyed Anita? Mrs. Fortescue, in a beautiful ball gown, looked quite as handsome as her daughter. The regimental tailor had been busy all day letting out Colonel Fortescue's full dress uniform and the Colonel fondly hoped that a couple of inches he had gained in girth were concealed by the tailor's art. But Mrs. Fortescue's quick eye discerned it.

"I declare, Jack," she cried, showing off her own figure, as slim as a girl's, "I shall have to put you on a diet of lemon juice and slate pencils if you keep on getting stout!"

At which the Colonel glowered darkly and Anita, putting her arms about his neck, whispered:

"Never mind, dear, darling daddy, I love you just the same."



[Illustration: “Never mind, dear, darling daddy, I love you just the same.”]

Mrs. Fortescue, who would have been affable to the Evil One himself, smiled at Broussard. The Colonel was polite but not effusive, having developed a rooted dislike to junior unmarried officers as soon as he found out that Anita had to grow up, like other human beings.



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Broussard felt himself in Paradise when he was walking with Anita along the moonlit plaza toward the riding hall. Outside, troopers were leading the restless horses up and down. Pretty Maid did not belie her name, and was the best behaved, as she was the handsomest, of all the mounts of the young ladies. Broussard's Gamechick, a perfectly trained cavalry charger, with an eye and ear of beautiful intelligence, had not his superior among the horses. Sergeant McGillicuddy, who was the best man with horses at Fort Blizzard, was sauntering about, looking at the horses approvingly and saying to all who cared to hear:

"As good a lot of nags as ever I see, and every blarsted one of 'em has got four legs. It's mighty seldom nowadays, you see a four-legged horse; most of 'em has only three legs and some of 'em ain't got as much as two and a half."

The riders, all wearing the same uniform as Broussard and Anita, appeared by twos and fours; bright-eyed young officers and merry girls. Their part was not to come for an hour, but they declared the night was too lovely to go into the waiting-room, and they strolled about and talked horses and dancing and balls and all the happy things that fall out "when youth and pleasure meet."

In the midst of the chatter of the riders and stamping and champing of the blanketed horses, as they were led up and down, Kettle suddenly appeared carrying in his arms a white bundle, which turned out to be the After-Clap. He should have been asleep in his crib for hours, but instead he was wide awake, laughing and crowing and evidently meant, with Kettle's assistance, to make a night of it.

"What do you mean, Kettle, by bringing the baby out this time of night?" asked the surprised Anita.

"I got him all wropped up warm," answered Kettle, apologetically, pointing to the After-Clap's white fur coat and cap. "But that chile knowed there wuz a hoss show on—it's mighty little he doan' know, and after the Kun'l and Miss Betty lef', he begin' to cry for 'Horsey! Horsey!' an I jes' had to take him up an' dress him an' bring him here. An' that's Gord's truth, Miss Anita," a phrase Kettle habitually used when making doubtful statements.

The baby was so obviously happy in this breach of all nursery discipline that Anita had not the heart to send him home. Anita was a soft-hearted creature. Sergeant McGillicuddy, however, explained disgustedly to the waiting troopers and horses how the After-Clap was permitted to begin his career of dissipation.

"I'll bet you a million of monkeys," the Sergeant proclaimed, "as Missis McGillicuddy wasn't on hand when that there baby begun to yell 'Horsey! Horsey!' if he ever did it at all. With eight children av her own and Anna Mariar's beau, Missis McGillicuddy must



sometimes stop at home. Lord help the naygur if Missis McGillicuddy should favor this evint with her prisince!"

The sympathies of the soldiers were entirely with the After-Clap, who loved soldiers, knowing them to be his true friends, and was never happier than with his big, kind, blue-coated playmates, the troopers, with their rattling sabres and clanking spurs.



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Sergeant McGillicuddy, being himself under Mrs. McGillicuddy's iron rule, did not approve of Kettle's breach of discipline and hatched a scheme to catch him. With a countenance as inscrutable as the Sphinx, he stepped to the telephone booth, shut the door carefully, and held a short conversation over the wire with Mrs. McGillicuddy. When the Sergeant came out of the telephone booth his face was not inscrutable but expressed pure human joy and triumph.

"It's Missis McGillicuddy as 'll do for ye," said the Sergeant with a grin, going up to Kettle, holding the delighted After-Clap in his arms.

"Go 'long, man," answered Kettle, "Mrs. McGillicuddy ain't my boss. She's yourn."

This language, uttered toward a man with chevrons and three stripes on his sleeve, naturally incensed the Sergeant. He had learned, however, in twenty years of warfare with Kettle, that it was very hard to get him punished.

"The naygur never has found out that orders is orders," remarked the Sergeant to the lookers on. "But Missis McGillicuddy can wallop him with one hand tied behind her back, and she'll do it, too, when she finds out about the kiddie bein' out this time of night."

This was no idle threat. Fifteen minutes later, when Kettle and the After-Clap were at the height of their enjoyment, Mrs. McGillicuddy, with only a shawl over her head, in the keen December night, was seen stalking across the plaza and toward the group of men and horses outside the drill ball; the riders had trooped into the waiting-room for coffee and sandwiches before the ride began. The troopers, who knew and admired Mrs. McGillicuddy, made way for her respectfully as she swooped down on Kettle, to his complete surprise.

"Solomon!" shouted Mrs. McGillicuddy.

Whenever Mrs. McGillicuddy used Kettle's baptismal name it meant the same thing as when Colonel Fortescue called Mrs. Fortescue "Elizabeth,"—there was trouble brewing.

"And it's you," continued Mrs. McGillicuddy, in a voice like a bassoon in a rage, "as the Colonel and Mrs. Fortescue trusted their innocent lamb, and when they are peacefully watchin' the show you take this pore baby out of his warm bed and brings him out here to catch his death of cold, and Patrick McGillicuddy, you'll laugh on the wrong side of your face when I get you home, and the Colonel shall know this, if my name is Araminta McGillicuddy."

With that Mrs. McGillicuddy tore the After-Clap from Kettle's arms. Like Kettle and McGillicuddy and the admiring crowd of troopers, the baby knew enough to maintain silence when Mrs. McGillicuddy had the floor.



“Right 'bout face and march,” screamed Mrs. McGillicuddy to Kettle, who meekly obeyed her, “and McGillicuddy 'll hear from me when he comes home to-night!”

Mrs. McGillicuddy then, with Kettle walking in advance, his head hanging down, followed with the After-Clap and took the way to the C. O.'s quarters, where the baby, much to his disappointment, was again laid in his crib and Kettle was promised terrors to come like those of the Day of Judgment.



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McGillicuddy, standing in the moonlight among the riderless horses and grinning troopers, forestalled criticism by handing out a card on which a legend was inscribed in large letters.

“Boys,” said the Sergeant, solemnly, “there’s my rule for all married men in the service and out av it. It’s the Golden Rule of married life, boys, and it ought to be added to the Articles of War and the Regulations. Here it is, boys, ‘Doant munkey with the buzz saw.’”

Meanwhile, within the vast riding hall the splendid pageant was taking place. The lofty roof was hung with flags of all nations entwined with ropes and wreaths of Christmas greens and crimson and gold electric lights. In the middle of the roof, dark and high, hung a great silken flag of the United States, with the electric lights so arranged as to throw a halo of glory upon it. The galleries were full of officers and ladies in brilliant ball costumes for the ball that was to follow. Under the galleries the soldiers and their families were massed. Over the wide entrance door was the musicians’ gallery, where the regimental band, and Neroda, their leader, a handsome Italian, with their gleaming instruments, made a great splash of vivid color against the sombre wall. Opposite the entrance was the Commanding Officer’s box, beautifully draped with flags and wreaths of holly. In the box sat the Colonel and Mrs. Fortescue, both looking wonderfully young and handsome. The Colonel caught sight of the chaplain peering in at a window below; the chaplain knew a horse from an automobile, and loved horses too much for the good of his soul, so he thought. In a moment a messenger came with the Colonel’s compliments and the request for the chaplain’s company, and the chaplain obeyed with alacrity and a joy almost unholy.

Above the murmur of conversation and laughter the band dominated, playing soft Italian music. Suddenly and silently, as if in a dream, the great entrance doors drew apart, the band changed into a great military fanfare, and a splendid troop of cavalry charged in, the lithe young troopers and the sleek horses with muscles of steel under their satin skins, horse and man moving as one. After a dash around the hall, they proceeded to show what troopers and horses could do. The soldiers rode bareback and upside down, got on and off the horses in ways incredible, made pyramids of troopers, the horses galloping at full speed, stopped like machines, dismounted, the horses lay down and the troopers, at full length, pounded out deadly imaginary volleys into unseen enemies.

When this was over and the troopers had trotted out amid thunders of applause, the great doors again slid open as if by magic and a battery of light artillery rushed in, the band thundering out “For He Is a Son of a Gun.” The drivers, with four horses to each gun, sat like statues, as did the three artillerymen, erect, with folded arms, as straight and still as men of steel, and their backs to the horses, as the guns sped around the hall and turned and twisted marvellously, never a wheel touching, but always within three

inches of disaster. Loud applause greeted the wonderful spectacle of gunners, horses and gun carriages inspired by an almost superhuman intelligence.



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When the battery had passed out and the doors were closed there was a short pause. The next and last event was the music ride by the officers and girls, the prettiest sight in the world. Middle-aged matrons and gray-mustached officers smiled in anticipation of seeing their rosebud daughters, on beautiful horses, admired and applauded of all.

In the C. O.'s box, Mrs. Fortescue, opening her fan, leaned over and smiled into the Colonel's face.

"She'll do it," whispered the Colonel confidently, meaning that Anita would do her act more gracefully and brilliantly than any girl who ever rode a horse.

The band once more struck up, the great doors drew wide apart, this time with a clang, and the procession of youth and beauty and valor dashed upon the tanbark. The officers were resplendent, while the girls, in their daring imitation of the uniform and with cavalry caps upon their pretty heads, looked like young Amazons riding to war. Broussard and Anita, who led the cavalcade, were the best riders where all were good. Pretty Maid and Gamechick seemed on the best of terms and their stride fitted perfectly.

The procession circled around the hall at a canter, and as Anita and Broussard, leading the procession, reached a point in front of the C. O.'s box, they both saluted, Anita raising her little gauntleted hand to her cavalry cap. Colonel Fortescue stood up and returned the salute as the riders passed, two by two. Next began the scene of beautiful horsemanship, pure and simple, winding up with the Virginia reel, done by the riders on horseback, as the band played the old reel, "Billy in the Low Grounds."

Then came the last feature of all; the ride formed again, and, suddenly quickening their pace to a full gallop, started upon the circuit of the hall. They swept around the circle at a sharp gallop, the clanking spurs and rattling sabres keeping time to the roar of the music. Anita was riding like a bird on the wing and Pretty Maid, who had behaved with her usual grace and decorum, opening and shutting her stride like a machine. Just as she got in front of the C. O.'s box the mare suddenly lost her head. She hesitated, bringing her four feet together in a way that would have thrown over her head a rider less expert than Anita. Behind her the line of riders was thrown into slight confusion with the unexpected halt.

The movements of animals are so much quicker than those of men that the eye can scarcely follow them. One instant Anita was in her saddle; the next Pretty Maid stopped, crouched, gave a wild spring, fell prone on her knees, and rolled over, struggling violently. Anita, half thrown and half slipped from her saddle, was on the tanbark, directly in front of Gamechick.

She straightened out her slim figure full length, and closed her eyes. Broussard's horse was then not six feet away from her and coming on as if the trumpeters were sounding the charge.



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A great groan rose from the floor and the galleries; the band played on wildly, losing its perfect tempo and each musician playing for himself, but still playing as a band should play on in terrible crises. The line of riders was sharply checked, the perfectly trained horses coming to a dead stop within ten seconds. In the C. O.'s box the chaplain was on his feet, his hands clasped in silent supplication; Mrs. Fortescue, braver than a brave soldier, put her arm about her husband's neck, as Colonel Fortescue swayed about in his seat like a drunken man. Amid the blare of the band and the riders and chargers almost upon the struggling horse and motionless girl, lying on the tanbark, Broussard, coolly, as if he were on the parade ground, lifted Gamechick by the bridle, gave him a touch of the spur, and the next moment cleared both mare and girl, with twenty inches between Gamechick's iron-shod hind hoofs and Anita's beautiful blonde head.

[Illustration: Broussard, lifted Gamechick by the bridle and the next moment cleared both mare and girl.]

It had all passed in twenty seconds by the clock, but to those who watched it seemed a long hour of agony. The moment the leap was made, Anita sprang to her feet and Broussard was on the tanbark. Wild cheering almost drowned the crash of the band; some of the women were weeping and others laughing hysterically, the men cheering like madmen. Broussard smilingly picked up Anita's cavalry cap, which had fallen on the tanbark, brushed it and put it on Anita's pretty head; some words, unheard by others, passed between them. The mare then lay perfectly quiet. Broussard, amid the roar of cheers and shouts and furious handclapping and music, got the mare on her feet. She stood trembling, frightened and ashamed; Anita patted her neck gently and rubbed her nose reassuringly. Then Broussard, taking the girl's slender waist between his hands, swung her into her saddle, himself mounted, and, the riders falling in behind, it was as if Tragedy had not showed her awful visage for one fearful moment.

All the cheering and clapping and weeping and laughing and shouting that had gone before were nothing to what followed after, while the band played "For He Is a Jolly Good Fellow," and everybody who could sing, or thought he could sing, joined in the refrain. Colonel Fortescue, whiter than death, sat straight up in his place. Mrs. Fortescue whispered in his ear:

"Be brave,—brave as you were in battle."

Colonel Fortescue had been in battle, but the screaming shells and crash of machine guns brought with them no such wild and shivering terror as when he saw Gamechick's forefeet in the air over Anita, lying on the tanbark.



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The procession passed once more around the hall, Anita's face flushed and smiling, Broussard outwardly calm, but the red blood showing under his dark skin. When they reached the entrance doors and were about to ride out Sergeant McGillicuddy stopped Broussard with a word. The audience, watching and smiling, knew what would happen and all eyes were fixed on the C. O.'s box. In a minute Broussard, with his cavalry cap in his hand, was seen mounting the stairs; Colonel Fortescue rose and clasped Broussard's hand, while Mrs. Fortescue frankly kissed him on both cheeks. The band broke loose again and so did the people. Although Fort Blizzard was a great fort it was so far away in the frozen northwest that those within its walls constituted one vast family. Anita was known to all of them, officers and ladies, troopers and troopers' wives and children, and the company washerwomen, and the regimental blacksmiths; they felt as if Broussard had saved the life of a child of their own.

Colonel Fortescue was a soldier and recovered himself and walked bravely with Mrs. Fortescue in the moonlight to their quarters, Broussard and Anita riding ahead as if nothing had happened, when everything had happened. At the door Broussard left Anita; both had to dress for the ball.

In the office, his City of Refuge, Colonel Fortescue sat in his chair and trembled like a leaf. Mrs. Fortescue, with tender words and soft caresses, comforted him.

"Stay with me, dear wife," he said, "I tell you as truly as if I were this moment facing a firing squad that I never knew what fear was until this night, and yet I thought I knew it and could feel my heart quivering as I cheered my men to the charge. Betty, I love our child too much, too much!"

"No," said Mrs. Fortescue, kissing his cheek, "you don't love her half as much as you love me. Suppose I had been there in our child's place."

The Colonel put his arm over his face.

"Don't, Betty—I can't bear it," he cried.

"But you must bear it; you must go to the ball in twenty minutes."

The Colonel, with bewildered eyes, looked at her as if to ask what were balls, and where?

Mrs. Fortescue said no more. Presently they heard Anita's light step on the stairs. She flitted into the office and looked, in her ball gown of shimmering white, as pure and sweet as one of her white doves.

"I'm ready for the ball, dad," she said, smiling and kissing the Colonel and her mother, "I am a soldier's daughter, and I can't let a little thing keep me from my duty—which is, to go to the ball."



Colonel Fortescue caught her in his arms.

“What a spirit!” he cried brokenly, “You have the making of ten soldiers in you, my daughter, my little daughter!”

Mrs. Fortescue rose and drew her beautiful evening cloak around her. Colonel Fortescue noticed for the first time how pale she was, but there was a smile on her lips and the fine light of courage in her eye; it was partly from her that Anita inherited her brave spirit.



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Colonel Fortescue rose, too; he could not be less brave than his wife and daughter. Anita kissed him tenderly; a soft-hearted deserter always takes an affectionate leave of his comrades when he is about to desert.

At the ball Colonel and Mrs. Fortescue were composed, smiling, graceful; Anita was less shy, more laughing than usual. When Broussard entered the ball-room he was greeted with a great roar of applause, and when he danced the first dance with Anita once more there was applause and something in the eyes of the smiling, handclapping crowd that brought the ever-ready color into Anita's delicately lovely face. It was a beautiful ball, as all military balls are, and lasted late. When the C. O. and Mrs. Fortescue and Anita got home it was Christmas morning, and the stars that led the Magi to the crib at Bethlehem were shining gloriously in the blue-black sky.

At daybreak began the hullabaloo which attends Christmas morning in a house where there is an adored child, and only one. The After-Clap, with the preternatural knowledge claimed for him by Kettle, knew that it was Christmas morning and a day of riot and license for him.

At an early hour he began to storm the earth and stun the air. There was a Christmas tree for him and for the eight McGillicuddies, and the day was so full that Mrs. Fortescue found it hard to get time in which to give Kettle the necessary wiggling for taking the baby from his bed and carrying him out of doors at eight o'clock in the evening because he waked up and said "Horsey." In vain Kettle pleaded "fo' Gord—" always a forerunner of a tarradiddle—that he "didn't have no notion on the blessed yearth as Miss Betty would mind," and also wept copiously when Mrs. Fortescue frankly told him that he was a tarradiddler, and made, for the hundredth time, a very awful threat to Kettle.

"But I can tell you this much," she said, with great severity, "that if you keep on doing everything the baby tells you to do, I will buy you a ticket back to Virginia and send you home. Do you understand me?"

At this, a smile rivalling a rainbow suddenly overspread Kettle's face and his mouth came open like an alligator's.

"Lord, yes, I understand you, Miss Betty," Kettle replied, with a chuckle. "I knows when you is bullyraggin' me an' say you is goin' to sen' me back to Virginia, you is jes' jokin'. You done tole me that too oftin, Miss Betty, an' you ain't never give me no ticket yet, an' 'tain't nothin' but a sign you is comin' roun', Miss Betty."

Kettle's grin was so seductive and his reasoning so correct that Mrs. Fortescue suddenly laughed, too; there was no way short of putting Kettle in handcuffs and leg-irons to keep him from obeying the After-Clap, whose orders were *orders* to Kettle.



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In the afternoon Colonel Fortescue, sitting in his office, from which not even Christmas Day exempted him, saw, a long way off, down by the non-coms' quarters, a pitiful sight. Mrs. McGillicuddy had carried out her menace to put a buggy in the Sergeant's Christmas stocking. The buggy was at the Sergeant's door, and in it sat Mrs. McGillicuddy, elaborately dressed, a picture hat and feathers on her carefully frizzed hair and her voluminous draperies nearly swamping the little Sergeant cowering in the corner of the buggy. To it was hitched the milkman's mare, which was about as big as a large rabbit and owned up to twenty-three years of age and the name of Dot. The equipage passed out of sight but in an hour was seen returning. Mrs. McGillicuddy sat majestically upright in the buggy, while the Sergeant bestrode the peaceful and amiable Dot.

[Illustration: Mrs. McGillicuddy sat majestically upright in the buggy while the Sergeant bestrode the peaceful and amiable Dot.]

Presently the Sergeant, looking much wilted and depressed, entered the Colonel's office.

"Did you enjoy your drive in the new buggy, Sergeant?" asked the Colonel.

"No, sir," replied the Sergeant, earnestly, "this has been a awful Christmas day to me. I didn't think as Missis McGillicuddy would play me such a low trick as to give me the buggy and then make me ride in it. She said as the milkman told her he had owned the mare fir thirteen years, and she wasn't young when he bought her; but I reminded her as thirteen was a unlucky number. But Missis McGillicuddy acted heartless and give orders as I was to mount that buggy. I pleadid with her, sir, not to risk my life, for the sake of the eight children, even if she didn't have no love or affection for me. I reminded her as she'd stand a divil of a chanst of gettin' married again, havin' all them eight children. I told her the aviation orficer had promised to take me flyin' with him tomorrow mornin', and if I lost my life in a wheeled vehicle there'd be no more flyin' fir me because I don't look to be a angel immediate I get into the next world. All she says to me was, like she was a Sergeant Major and I was a recruity, 'You get into this buggy, Patrick McGillicuddy.' So, as orders is orders, sir, I got in, and I stayed in until my fears of that horse's hind feet right under nay nose got the better of my duty to Missis McGillicuddy, as my superior orficer. I begun to feel hollow inside, like a man feels when he's ordered into action and the artillery is ploughing up the ground with shells. Then, sir, I mutinied. I jumped out of that damned buggy—excuse me, sir—and I got on the back of the mare and felt jist as safe as if I was riding old Corporal, the horse we gives the recruits to ride. I've escaped the dangers of that buggy and there won't be no vacancy in my grade yet awhile from ridin' in wheeled vehicles. An I'm goin' flyin' tomorrow in a nice safe aeroplane that's got a man hitched to it and not a horse. This ain't been no merry Christmas to me, sir. And if Missis McGillicuddy holds a reg'lar court of inquiry on me, as she does seven nights in the week, I'm a' goin' to stand on my

rights and swear by the Jumpin' Moses I'll never set foot again in that damned, infernal, hellish buggy, sir,—excuse me, sir.”



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CHAPTER III

THE HEART OF A MAID

When the wild and throbbing excitement of the evening was over, the fear, the horror, the joy, the triumph, the exulting exhilaration, Broussard, smoking his last cigar at one o'clock in the morning, felt a little ashamed of himself. After all, Anita was little more than a child, being but seventeen, and it was hardly fair to her that he should try to chain her young feet and blindfold her young eyes before she had seen the great moving picture of the world. Broussard did not in the least remember what he said to Anita when he was putting her cap on her head, nor even the words in which she had replied; he only knew that they were burning words that came from the heart and spoke through the eyes as well as the tongue. But a man was not always master of himself. Broussard had a good many plausible excuses to urge for himself, and was always a good barker for Victor Broussard, and Anita was so charming, she had so much more sense than the average seventeen-year-old fledgling, she was so obviously more developed mentally and emotionally for her age, she had grown up in an atmosphere of tenderness and happiness, for everybody knew that the Colonel and Mrs. Fortescue were still like lovers, after twenty years of married life. Broussard fell into a delicious reverie that lasted until he heard the clang of the changing sentries at two o'clock in the morning.

The Christmas gaieties went on for a fortnight, including another big ball given by the officers. Colonel Fortescue brought upon himself many maledictions from the junior officers by the way in which he regulated these balls. The Colonel was neither bashful nor backward with his young officers, and he liked them to dance, bearing in mind the saying of a great commander that a part of every soldier's equipment is gaiety of heart; but he was grimly particular about the kind of dancing that took place at Fort Blizzard. Before every ball, Colonel Fortescue's aide, Conway, a serious young lieutenant, delivered the Colonel's orders that there was to be no tangoing or turkey-trotting or chicken-reeling or "Here Comes My Daddy" business in that ball-room. Moreover, Neroda, the bandmaster, had orders if any of these dances, abhorred of the Colonel's heart, were started the music was to stop immediately. Colonel Fortescue himself, by way of setting an example, would do a sedate waltz with some matron of the post, or select a rosebud girl for a solemn set of lancers quadrilles. Mrs. Fortescue still held the palm as the prettiest waltzer at the post, none the less gay for being dignified. However, the young people, except Anita, revenged themselves on the C. O. by doing, in their own drawing-rooms, all the prohibited dances. With Anita, nothing could have induced her to do anything forbidden by the beloved of her heart—a trait not without its dangers.

Broussard was treated as a hero by everybody at the post and enjoyed it extremely, in spite of his deprecation of all praise and declaring that Gamechick was the real hero.

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Among the festivities was a big dinner given at the C. O.'s fine quarters to the officers of high rank at the fort, and as a special compliment Broussard was invited, the only bachelor officer except the serious Conway, Colonel Fortescue's aide, who classified Anita with the After-Clap in point of age.

Broussard had met Anita and danced with her many times that fortnight but, with native good taste, he avoided thrusting himself upon her. She was so calm, so well poised, that Broussard concluded she had forgotten all about the words spoken under the influence of the near presence of love and death. In truth, Anita had forgotten nothing, but had suddenly become a woman in those few days. Always Broussard had wakened her girlish admiration by his charm of manner, his sly impudence, his way of singing love songs; and her eyes followed him, while she turned away from him. But she knew exactly what Broussard had said to her while they stood on the tanbark and she blushed to herself at the answer that came involuntarily to her lips. She knew no more of actual love-making than the After-Clap, but she was an inveterate reader of poetry and romance, and had not studied the poets and romancists for nothing. Perhaps Broussard would say more to her—at that thought a lovely light came into Anita's innocent eyes. Perhaps he had forgotten everything. Then Anita's eyes were troubled. The pride of maidenhood was born, as it should be, with love, and Anita no longer ran to the window to see Broussard, but when he was present he filled the room; when he spoke she heard no other voice than his.

Colonel Fortescue had a theory which came amazingly true in his own daughter. It was, that in high altitudes, with mountain ranges and vast frozen rivers shutting out the rest of the world, the emotions become preternaturally acute; that human beings grew more tragic or more comic, according to their bent, and were closer to primeval men and women than they knew. So it was at Fort Blizzard, standing grimly watchful over the world of snow and ice and holding within its limits all the struggle and striving and love, and laughter and dancing, and the weeping and working and resting, and the hazards and the triumphs of human life. On the aviation plain men daily played a fearful game with destiny, the stakes being human lives, while the young officers, when not flying toward the sun, were dancing every evening with the dainty girls, in little muslin frocks that made them look like white butterflies.

Broussard, owing to a slight defect of vision, was not in the aviation corps, but, like Sergeant McGillicuddy, he would fly whenever he had an invitation from Lawrence, the gentleman-ranker with whom Broussard was seen too often to please Colonel Fortescue. Lawrence had a pale, fragile, handsome wife, like himself, of another class than the honest soldiers and their buxom wives, and there was a little boy, Ronald, who looked like a young prince—a beautiful boy,



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much noticed by all who knew him. The soldiers forgot their grudge against Lawrence for what they called his “uppish airs,” and the soldiers’ wives forewent their objections to Mrs. Lawrence and her aloofness from them, when the boy, Ronald, appeared. The officers, and their wives, too, had a kind word for the little fellow, so handsome and well-mannered, and especially was he a favorite with Broussard. It was, indeed, more than friendly favor toward the child; Broussard was conscious of a strong affection for the boy, about whom there was something mysteriously appealing to Broussard, an expression in the frank young eyes, a soft beauty in the boy’s smile, that reminded Broussard of something loved and lost, but he knew not what it was nor whence it came. Anita, although knowing nothing of the gentleman-ranker and his wife and the handsome boy except that, obviously, they were unlike their neighbors and fellows in the married men’s quarters, yet always observed them with curiosity. Their unlikeness to their station in life was of itself a mystery, and consequently of interest. Mrs. Fortescue, the soul of kindness to the soldiers’ wives and children, could make nothing of Mrs. Lawrence, who withdrew into herself at Mrs. Fortescue’s approach, and Mrs. Fortescue, seeing that Mrs. Lawrence wished to hold aloof, respected her wishes, and from sheer pity left her alone. Mrs. McGillicuddy was not so considerate, and told thrilling tales of rebuffs administered by Mrs. Lawrence to corporals’ wives, and even sergeants’ wives who were willing to notice her and get snubbed for their good intentions.

“Mr. Broussard is the only man Mrs. Lawrence gives a decent word to,” said Mrs. McGillicuddy in Anita’s hearing, “When she meets him anywhere, walkin’ about, she stops and smiles and talks to him as if she was the Colonel’s lady—that she does, the minx! And she pretending to be so meek and mild and not looking at any man, except that good-for-nothing, handsome husband of hers! Just watch her, stoppin’ in the post trader’s to talk with Mr. Broussard, she so haughty-like, and carryin’ her own bundles home, like she was doin’ herself a favor!”

This sank deep into Anita’s mind, as did every word referring to Broussard. But she could make nothing of it; and Mrs. Lawrence, the soldier’s wife, became at once an object of interest, of mystery, almost of jealousy, to Anita. The little boy she noticed, as did all who saw him, and like everybody else, she was won by him.

The morning of the great dinner at the Fortescues’, Neroda, the Italian band-master, came to give Anita her violin lesson. Mrs. Fortescue, listening and delighted with Anita’s progress, came in to the drawing-room as Neroda was shouting bravos in rapture over the way his best pupil caught the soul of music in her delicate hands and made it prisoner.

“Good-morning, Mr. Neroda,” said Mrs. Fortescue in her pretty and affable manner—Mrs. Fortescue would have been affable with an ogre—“I must ask you to come this

evening and play my daughter's accompaniments. We are having a large dinner and I should like Anita to play for us after dinner."



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“Certainly, madam,” answered Neroda, who, like everybody else, was anxious to do Mrs. Fortescue’s smiling bidding, “I am proud of the signorina’s playing.”

“Mr. Broussard is coming to the dinner,” continued Mrs. Fortescue after a moment. “He sings so charmingly. It would be delightful to have him sing and Anita to play a violin obligato.”

“Admirable! Admirable!” cried Neroda, “Mr. Broussard has a superb voice—much too good for an amateur.”

Mrs. Fortescue laughed; Broussard’s beautiful voice was one of the Colonel’s grave objections to him. Anita remained silent, but Mrs. Fortescue noticed the happy smile on her lips, as she picked a little air upon the strings; she longed to show off her accomplishments before Broussard and to accompany his singing seemed a little incursion into Paradise.

It was arranged that Neroda should come at half-past nine and have the violin tuned. Anita, dropping the violin, found a book of songs, some of which she had heard Broussard sing.

“Come,” she cried eagerly, “I must play these obligatos over. You will sing the songs.”

Neroda sat down once more to the piano and played and sang in a queer, cracked voice, the songs, while Anita, her soul in her eyes and all her heart and strength in her bow arm, played the violin part. She did it beautifully, and Mrs. Fortescue kissed the girl’s glowing cheek when the music was through. Kettle, who was himself a fiddler, at that moment poked his head in at the door. He had a fellow artist’s jealousy of Neroda but he was forced by his artistic conscience to say:

“Lord, Miss ’Nita, you cert’ny kin make a fiddle talk!”

It was noon before the lesson was over and Neroda left. Anita, exultant in the thought of playing to Broussard’s singing, could not remain indoors, but putting on her long, dark fur coat and her pretty fur cap, which accentuated her delicate beauty, went out for a walk alone.

Beyond the limits of the great post, was a long, straight promenade, bordered with stately young fir trees, and as it led to nowhere, was in general a solitary place. It was here that Anita loved to walk alone. The only objection to the place was that it gave upon the aviation field—a place abhorred by all the women at the fort, from the Colonel’s lady down to the company laundresses. Anita always turned her face away from the aviation field when she was walking under the pine trees.

The short way to the walk led by the big red brick barracks of the married soldiers. Anita knew many of these soldiers’ wives, honest and hard-working women, doing their



duty as if they were themselves soldiers. As Anita passed along many of them, standing in their doorways or carrying laundry baskets along the street, gave her a kindly greeting. In one doorway stood Mrs. Lawrence, tall, young, darkly beautiful, and looking as if she might have been a C. O.'s daughter instead of being a private



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soldier's wife. Mrs. Lawrence was so at odds with her surroundings that Anita, unconsciously, looked questioningly at her. She stood, shading her eyes from the glare of the snow and the sun, gazing anxiously toward the aviation field. It was a flying day, and the hearts of the women at Fort Blizzard had no rest or peace on those days. Anita could not but see that Mrs. Lawrence's hands, browned and hardened with work, were small and delicately formed, and, that the poise of the head, the fine contours, were not those of a woman bred to toil.

It was not quite time for the ascent and the officers were not yet on the field, although there were a dozen or two soldiers and civilian employes standing about the sheds in the middle of the plain, and working with the huge machines, dragged from their shelter. Afar off, the voices of the soldiers, singing a service song, were borne upon the crystal clear air.

They were trolling out the song as if there were no more risks in aviation than in tennis.

We don't know what we're here for,
We don't know why we're sent,
But we've brought a few unlimbered guns
By way of com-pli-ment.

Anita walked quickly out of the entrance, keeping her eyes well away from the flying field. It was a good half mile along the fir tree walk, and Anita made it twice. The music was throbbing still in her veins and the thought of playing to Broussard's singing had in it an intoxication for her innocent heart. She heard the whirring and clapping of the great aircraft above her head as they flitted across the face of the sun, but Anita would not look; she hated aircraft and wished they had never been invented. But she was forced to look when she heard cries and shouts, as one of the great machines began to reel about wildly in the air, when it was only twenty feet from the earth, and then came down, with a crash, upon the snow. She saw Broussard standing on the ground, he was in uniform, with his heavy cavalry overcoat around him, and he was working with the men to drag the aviator from the machine. They got him out, and putting him on a stretcher, began to run with their burden toward the hospital. Anita turned her eyes away. She did not see Mrs. Lawrence run out of the entrance toward the field, her head bare in the icy cold, and no cloak around her delicate shoulders. Broussard turned to meet her, and taking off his cavalry overcoat, put it around the shivering woman, and half led and half carried her as they followed the stretcher. Then Anita knew it was Lawrence who was hurt.

Within the entrance there was an excited group of soldiers' wives. Some said that Lawrence was only slightly hurt; others that every bone in his body was broken. The chaplain, passing along, reassured them.



“Nothing but a few bruises and scratches,” he said. “I asked the surgeon if I was needed and he told me there was nothing doing in my line; I am going to the hospital though, to see the man’s wife—it is Mrs. Lawrence. Good afternoon, Anita. Now don’t let this trifling accident break your little heart. It’s nothing, I tell you.”

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Anita passed on, her face pale in spite of the chaplain's words. The picture of Broussard folding his cape around Mrs. Lawrence's shoulders was strangely photographed upon her mind. She wished she had not seen it.

Whenever there was an accident, however small, on the aviation field the whole post was anxious and quivering. Colonel Fortescue and Anita were both silent and preoccupied at luncheon, and Mrs. Fortescue, who never lost her brave cheerfulness, tried to interest them in the dinner that was to be given that evening, and Anita's music, but without much success.

"I declare, Jack," cried Mrs. Fortescue, "if I only knew the aviation days in advance I would never arrange a dinner on one of those days. You are as solemn as a mute at a funeral, and Anita always looks like a ghost when she has been out to the aviation field. For my part, I do not allow myself to see the aviation field nor even to think about it."

"But you say a great many prayers on aviation days," replied Colonel Fortescue, smiling.

Mrs. Fortescue admitted this, but reminded her husband that she believed in keeping a stiff spirit.

"The man Lawrence is not much hurt," said Colonel Fortescue. "He wanted to be taken to his quarters where his wife could nurse him, and the surgeon allowed it, after dressing his cuts and bruises."

Anita still looked so grave that Colonel Fortescue said to her:

"How about a ride this afternoon, Anita? We can get back in time for you to dress for the dinner."

"Do go, Anita," urged Mrs. Fortescue plaintively, "it is such a relief to have your father out of the house when I am arranging for a dinner of twenty-four."

It was one of the great treats of Anita's simple life to ride with her father and the proposition brought a smile, at last, into her serious face.

"At four, then," said the Colonel, rising to return to the headquarters building, while Anita ran to get his cap, and Mrs. Fortescue fastened his military cape around him, and his gloves were brought by the After-Clap, who had been drilled in this duty. The Colonel was well coddled, and liked it.

Anita practised on her violin nearly the whole afternoon, and, not satisfied with that, sent a message to Neroda asking him to come at six o'clock, when she would have returned from her ride, and rehearse with her once more the obligatos she was to play to Broussard's singing.



Anita's spirits rose as she rode by her father's side in the biting cold of the wintry afternoon. They both loved these rides together and the long talks they had then. The time was, when Colonel Fortescue felt that he knew every thought in Anita's mind, but not so any longer. He began to speak of Broussard, to try and search Anita's mind on that subject, but Anita remained absolutely silent. The Colonel's heart sank; Anita was certainly growing up, and had secrets of her own.



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It was quite dark when the Colonel and Anita cantered through the lower entrance, the short way to the C. O.'s house. One door alone was open in the long row of red brick barracks. The electric light in the passageway fell full upon the figures of Broussard and Mrs. Lawrence as the woman impulsively put her hand on Broussard's shoulder; he gently removed it and walked quickly out of the door. Under the glare of a street lamp he came face to face with Colonel Fortescue.

An officer visiting the wife of a private soldier is not a thing to be excused by a strict Colonel, and Colonel Fortescue was very strict, and had Argus eyes in the bargain.

Broussard saluted the Colonel and bowed to Anita and passed on. The Colonel returned the salute but Anita was too startled to acknowledge the bow. When they reached the Commandant's house and Colonel Fortescue swung Anita from her saddle she walked into the house slowly, her eyes fixed on the ground. At the door the After-Clap met her with a shout, but instead of a romp with his grown-up playmate, he received only an absent-minded kiss. Almost at the same moment Neroda walked into the hall.

"Here I am, Signorina," he said, "ready for the practice. Mr. Broussard sings too well for you to do less than play divinely."

Anita, taking off her gloves and veil, went, unsmilingly, into the drawing-room, Neroda following her, and putting up the top of the grand piano.

It was Neroda's rule that Anita should tune her own violin. Usually she did it with beautiful accuracy, but on this evening it was utterly inharmonious. As she drew her bow across the strings Neroda jumped as if he were shot.

"Great God! Signorina," he shouted, "every string is swearing at the G-string! The spirit of music will not come to you to-night unless you tune your violin better."

Anita stopped and laid down her bow, and once more holding the violin to her ear, began tuning it. That time the tuning was so bad that she handed the violin to Neroda.

"You must tune it for me, Maestro," she said, with a wan smile. "The spirit of music seems far away to-night."

Neroda, in a minute, handed her back the instrument in perfect tune. Anita, testing the strings, her bow wandered into the soft heart-moving music of Mascagni's Intermezzo. Neroda said nothing, but watched his favorite pupil. Usually she took up her violin with a calm confidence, like a young Amazon taking up her well-strung bow for battle, because the violin must be subdued; it must be made to obey; it must feel the master hand before it will speak. But to-night the master hand failed Anita, and she played fitfully and sadly and could do nothing as Neroda directed her.

“Shall we give up the rehearsal?” asked Neroda presently, seeing that Anita was not concentrated and that her bow arm showed strange weakness.

“No,” replied Anita, with a new courage in her violet eyes, “Let us rehearse for the whole hour.”

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If Neroda had been puzzled at Anita's inability he was now surprised at her strength. She stood up to her full height and the bow was firm in her grasp. Neroda was a hard master, but Anita succeeded in pleasing him. Even Kettle, who had an artistic rivalry with Neroda, passing the drawing-room door, cried:

"Lord, Miss 'Nita, you kin play the fiddle mos' as well as I kin."

As Mrs. Fortescue was putting the last touches to her toilette before the long mirror in her own room, Colonel Fortescue came in, dressed to go down-stairs. The Colonel's mind had been working on the problems of Broussard's visit to Mrs. Lawrence, and the look he had noticed for some time past in Anita's eyes when Broussard was present, or even when his name was mentioned.

"I am afraid, Betty," said the Colonel, "that Anita thinks too much and too often of Broussard. And in spite of that trick of horsemanship there are some things a trifle unsatisfactory about him."

"Really, Jack," answered Mrs. Fortescue, "you take Anita's moods far too seriously. The girl will have her little affairs as other girls have theirs. It's like measles and chicken-pox and other infantile diseases."

"Not for Anita," said Colonel Fortescue, "that child has in her tragic possibilities. Her heart is brittle, depend upon it."

"So are all hearts," replied Mrs. Fortescue, "but you are so ridiculously sentimental and lackadaisical about Anita!"

"She is my one ewe lamb," said the Colonel.

Then they went down-stairs together, and the next minute Anita appeared, wearing a gown of white and silver, with a delicious little train, which she managed as well as a seventeen-year-old could manage a train.

In a minute or two the guests began arriving. They were handsome, middle-aged officers and dignified matrons. Broussard was the only young man present, which was understood as a special compliment to him, and Anita was the only young girl in the company.

Broussard greeted the Colonel as coolly as if that unlucky meeting just outside of Lawrence's quarters had not occurred two hours before. And Broussard was a captivating, fellow—this the Colonel admitted to himself, with an inward groan, watching Broussard's graceful figure, his dashing manner, all these externals that dazzle women. The Colonel also saw the color that flooded Anita's face when she took Broussard's arm to lead her in to dinner. At the table, though, Broussard found Anita strangely unlike the Anita he had been steadily falling in love with since he first saw her, three months



before, when Colonel Fortescue took command at Fort Blizzard. She was no longer the dreamy, mysterious child, who knew all the stories of the poets, whose affections were all passions, but a self-possessed young lady, who read things in the newspapers about the European war and knew something about aviation records, although she hated aviation.



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Broussard, with rage and chagrin in his heart, remembered that Anita had probably seen him standing in the passage-way of Lawrence's quarters, with Mrs. Lawrence's shapely hand on his shoulder. He remained calm and smiling, nevertheless, and exerted to the utmost his power to please. But Anita remained calm and smiling, and maddeningly aloof. Broussard, inwardly cursing himself, made up his mind to have it out with the Colonel the next day about the Lawrence affair.

When dinner was over and the men had come in from the smoking-room, Mrs. Fortescue asked Broussard if he would sing; Neroda was already there to play his accompaniments and Anita, would play the violin obligato.

Broussard was not loth to show his accomplishments and he had a very good will to try the magic of his voice upon Anita, gracious, and obstinate and smiling.

The guests, in a circle in the drawing-room, watched and listened to the group at the piano—Neroda, short and swarthy, with a rancorous voice; Anita, in her blonde beauty, looking like another St. Cecilia, and Broussard, dark and handsome, like Faust, the tempter.

With deep intent Broussard selected the most passionate of all his passionate songs. It asked the old, old question, "I love thee; dost thou love me?" Neroda struck into the accompaniment and Broussard's voice, a tenor, with the strength and feeling of a baritone, took up the song, while the music of Anita's violin delicately threaded the harmonies, ever following and responding to Broussard's voice. All of Anita's coldness vanished at the first strain of the music; Broussard's voice penetrated her heart and inspired her hand. When the song was over and she laid her violin down on the piano she was once more the palpitating, shy enthusiast, the half-child, half-woman who had captivated Broussard at the first glance.

During the interludes between the songs it was plain they forgot all except each other. They turned over songs and read the titles to each other, Broussard sometimes singing, under his breath, the words. Then, when he sang them in full voice he infused all the verve, the passion, the feeling he knew so well how to command, and played upon Anita's heart-strings with the hand of a master, as Anita played upon the strings of her violin. The men and women, listening and charmed, smiled at each other; evidently a love affair was on foot such as everybody had expected since the night of the music ride. Colonel Fortescue alone was grave, leaning back in his chair with sombre eyes fixed on Broussard. He saw in Broussard a wild young officer who needed a stern warning about a soldier's handsome wife; and, while watching him, Colonel Fortescue was phrasing the very words in which he meant to call Broussard to account the next day, for the Colonel was not a man to postpone a disagreeable duty. It would be a very disagreeable duty; the poignant memory of Anita lying on the tanbark and Broussard having the skill to save her, still haunted Colonel Fortescue's thoughts and came to him in troubled dreams. And Anita—undoubtedly Broussard had impressed her imagination,

and she was a creature of such strong fibre that she must love and suffer more than most human beings the Colonel knew, well enough.



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At last, the singing was over and the listeners came out of a waking dream and complimented Anita and Broussard, and the pleasant chatter of a drawing-room once more began. Presently there were leave-takings. Broussard gave Anita's hand a sharp pressure, but she looked at him calmly, all her coldness resumed. Out in the winter night Broussard cursed himself for falling in love with a child, who was an embodied caprice and did not know her own mind—one hour thrilling him with her gladness and her low voice and her violin, and the next, looking at him as if he were a stock or a stone. But she was so precociously charming! And that unlucky meeting with her and with the Colonel in front of Lawrence's door, with Mrs. Lawrence putting her hand on his shoulder. Broussard meant to go to the Colonel the very next day and explain the whole business. The resolve enabled Broussard to sleep in peace that night.

It was noon the next day before Broussard had a chance to ask for an interview with Colonel Fortescue. Meanwhile, the Colonel had been finding out things. He looked up the records of Broussard and Lawrence and found that they were both natives of the same little town in Louisiana. That might account for their intimacy, although Lawrence was fifteen years Broussard's senior.

Just as the Colonel's orderly was crossing the hall of the headquarters building he came face to face with Broussard, headed straight for Colonel Fortescue's office. The orderly had a message from the Colonel for Mr. Broussard; the Colonel desired to see Mr. Broussard for a few minutes.

Broussard, like the Colonel, was not the man to shirk an unpleasant five minutes, so he made straight for the Colonel's private office. In spite of his courageous advance, Broussard felt very much as Sergeant McGillicuddy described himself when in the abhorred buggy which Mrs. McGillicuddy had given him as a Christmas gift, "Hollow inside." There is something appalling to a subaltern in the kind of an interview which Broussard felt was ahead of him. He knew in advance the very tone in which Colonel Fortescue and all other Colonels prepare a wiggling for a junior. "It is my painful duty." The extreme politeness with which this was accompanied was not reassuring. Then the Colonel, taking the advice of old Horace, plunged into the middle of things.

"I was very much surprised," said Colonel Fortescue, fixing his clear gaze on Broussard, "when, yesterday evening, after dark, I saw you standing in the passage-way to the home of an enlisted man, and evidently upon familiar terms with the man's wife."

"I was on my way to you, sir, just now, to explain that occurrence when I received your order," replied Broussard promptly.

"I shall be glad to have it satisfactorily explained," said the C. O.

Colonel Fortescue had the eye of command, that secure power in his glance which is possessed by all the masters of men; the look that can wring the truth out of a man's

mouth even if that man be a liar, and can see through the eyes of a man into his soul. This look of command suddenly flashed into Colonel Fortescue's face, and gazing into the clear eyes of Broussard saw honor and truth and candor there as Broussard spoke.



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“The man, Lawrence, as you may know, sir, is a gentleman in origin and socially above most of the good fellows in the ranks.”

“And these men sometimes make trouble,” interrupted the Colonel.

“He came from the same place that I do and tells me he knew my mother—God bless her—and that she was very kind to him in his boyhood. That was before I was born. He knows a surprising deal about my parents, both of whom died when I was a boy. Sometimes I have doubted whether all he told me was true, but invariably it tallies with my own childish recollections and what I have been told of my mother. Lawrence has a passionate attachment to my mother’s memory. He knows her birthday, and the day of her death, and more even than I do about her. The first word I had with him was on the anniversary of my mother’s death. He came to my quarters and asked to see me, told me of my mother’s goodness to him, and burst into tears before he got through. Of course, that melted me—my mother was one of God’s angels on this earth. He is always in money troubles, and I helped him. That brought me into contact with his wife—a woman of his own class, who has stood by Lawrence, and is worthy, I think, to be classified with my mother. If you could see the way that woman works for Lawrence and their child—there’s a little boy five years old,—and how she struggles to keep him straight and sober. I had just done her a little favor at the post trader’s place, and went to her to explain it privately. She was very grateful; you saw her put her hand on my shoulder. The truth is, Mrs. Lawrence does not yet fully understand her position as a private soldier’s wife. What I have told you, sir, is all, upon my honor.”

“I believe you,” said Colonel Fortescue, after a moment, and holding out his hand, which Broussard grasped with a feeling of vast relief.

“The man seems to be doing pretty well, except about his money troubles, of which I know nothing but what you tell me,” went on the Colonel. “He is one of the best aviators in the corps. Of course, his name isn’t Lawrence.”

“So he admitted to me,” replied Broussard, “I am all abroad concerning his knowledge of my family. I only know that he loves my mother’s memory, that he evidently knew her well, and that his wife is an heroic woman. I have promised her that when the little boy is old enough I will do a good part by him. I have something besides my pay.”

This “something” was of a size that made the Colonel think it was rather a drawback to Broussard.

“I only advise you to be prudent in your intercourse with Lawrence and his wife,” said the Colonel, rising. And the interview was over.

Broussard went back with a light heart to his day’s duties. The Colonel knew the truth, and so, some day, would Anita, the little witch.



It was growing dusk when Broussard again passed the headquarters building. The last mail had come in and the published orders were fastened on the bulletin board. Broussard stopped to read them. The first name mentioned was that of Lieutenant Victor Broussard, who was detached from his present duty at Fort Blizzard and ordered on special duty to the Philippines.



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CHAPTER IV

"Good-bye, sweetheart, good-bye"

Broussard, after reading his orders, walked quickly to his quarters. On the desk in his luxuriously furnished sitting-room was a letter from the C. O. giving the order in detail from the War Department; Broussard was to make the next steamer sailing from San Francisco. He went through with a rapid mental calculation. To do that, he would be obliged to leave Fort Blizzard not later than the next afternoon.

Broussard took his orders with a soldier's coolness. He particularly disliked them; he did not want to leave Fort Blizzard for any other spot on the habitable globe, and least of all did he want to go to the island possessions. But he said no word of complaint, took, with perfect good humor, the condolences and chaff of his brother officers at the mess dinner that night, and plunged into his preparations to leave.

The disposal of the expensive impedimenta which Broussard had accumulated gave him much trouble. He did not value them greatly, and without much thought determined to give his costly rugs and lamps and glass and china to the Lawrences—they were originally used to that sort of thing and Broussard was in no fear of the Colonel's misunderstanding it, or any one else, for that matter, as it had been well known that there was some tie or association between Broussard and Lawrence in their childhood.

The scattering of costly gifts by a very free-handed person is usually most indiscreet, and Broussard was no exception to the rule. He presented his finest motor to a brother officer, who had to support a wife and children on a captain's pay and could not afford to support the motor besides. The game chickens, the beloved of Broussard's heart, he presented to another officer, whose wife objected seriously to cock-fighting. The chaplain, seeing the grand piano was about to be thrown away on anybody who could take it, managed to secure it for the men's reading-room. The thing which perplexed Broussard most was, what to do with Gamechick. He longed to give the horse to Anita but dared not. However, fate befriended him in this matter and Anita got Gamechick by other means. When Colonel Fortescue came home for the cup of tea that Mrs. Fortescue was always waiting to give him at five o'clock, with the sweet looks and tender words that made the hour so happy, he mentioned, in an off-hand way, Broussard's orders and that he was leaving the next day. Neither the father nor the mother looked toward Anita, sitting a little in the shadow of the dim drawing-room. Mrs. Fortescue, by way of making conversation, said:

"I wonder what he will do with his motors and horses and game chickens, and all those beautiful things he has in his quarters?"



“Oh, that’s easy enough to tell,” answered Colonel Fortescue. “All these young officers who load themselves up with that kind of thing act just alike. As soon as they are ordered somewhere else they throw away these things. They call it giving, but it is merely largesse.”



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"I wish," said Anita, in a soft, composed voice, "that I could have Gamechick. I can't help loving the horse that might have killed me and did not. Daddy, if I give up half my allowance for every month until I pay for him, would you buy him for me?"

Colonel Fortescue was quite as well able as Broussard to own Gamechick, but Anita had been brought up with a wholesome economy.

"I think so, my dear," replied the Colonel, gravely.

It would, in reality, have taken Anita's modest allowance for a couple of years to buy Gamechick. Mrs. Fortescue said as much.

"It would take all your allowance for a long time, Anita, to buy Gamechick. The horse has a pedigree longer than mine, and I have often noticed that ancestors are worth a great deal more to horses than to human beings."

"Oh, the price can be managed," said the Colonel, good naturedly. "Broussard's horses will probably be sold for a song."

Gamechick was not sold for a song, however, but for an excellent price. Colonel Fortescue was not the man to buy a good horse for a song of any man, least of all one of his own subalterns. When Broussard got the Colonel's note containing an offer for Gamechick, he laughed with pleasure, although he was not in a laughing mood.

"I should like to own the horse," the Colonel's note ran, "which, together with your fine horsemanship, saved my daughter's life, and he is well worth my offer."

Broussard would have given all of his other possessions at Fort Blizzard if he could have made Anita a gift of the horse, but the next best thing to do was, to sell him to her father. Broussard felt sure that Anita would ride Gamechick and there was much solid comfort in that, for an officer's charger, which carries him in life and is led behind his coffin in death, is near and dear to him. So, Broussard lost not a moment in accepting the Colonel's offer for Gamechick.

It was quite midnight before Broussard, with the assistance of his soldier attendant, had got those of his belongings which he intended to take with him sorted out and packed up. He dismissed the man and in the midst of his disordered sitting-room settled himself for his last cigar before turning in for the night. At that moment he heard a tap at the door, and opening it, Lawrence was standing on the threshold. He entered, taking off his cap and loosening his heavy uniform greatcoat. Once he had been a handsome fellow, but he had danced too long to the devil's fiddling, and that always spoils a man's looks.



For the first time, Lawrence seemed to forget the distance between the private soldier and the officer. He sat down heavily, without waiting for an invitation, and turned a haggard face on Broussard.

“So you are going,” said Lawrence.

“Yes,” replied Broussard.

Broussard saw that Lawrence was oppressed at the thought, there would be no more Broussard to help him pay the post trader’s bills and to give him a good word when he got into trouble with the non-coms.



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Broussard handed him a box of cigars and Lawrence absently took one. It was a very expensive cigar, as Broussard's things were all expensive. Lawrence, after rolling it in his fingers for a moment, laid it down.

"It's a shame not to be able to smoke such a brand as that," he said, "but the truth is, I can't stand tobacco to-night. It makes me nervous instead of soothing me."

Broussard, lighting a cigar for himself, looked closely at Lawrence, whose face was pallid and his eye sombre and uneasy.

"What's the trouble? More bills at the post trader's?" asked Broussard.

"Worse," replied Lawrence, becoming more agitated as he spoke. "My wife—the best wife that ever lived—has been traced here by her people. Of course, my name isn't Lawrence, and there was some trouble in finding her. They want her to leave me, and offer to provide for her and the boy. The work is killing her—you see how pale and thin she is—and the boy hasn't the chance he ought to have. They are worth more than a broken and beaten man like I am. But ever since I married her I've led a fairly decent life—she is the one creature who can keep me a little on this side of the jail. If she leaves me, I'm lost. What shall I do?"

Lawrence rose to his feet, and stood, trembling like a leaf. Broussard rose, too. By some strange, psychic foreknowledge, Broussard knew that some disclosure, poignant and even vital to himself, was then to be made by Lawrence. It came in Lawrence's next words, dragged out of him, as it were, by a force like that which drags the soul from the body.

"I ask you this," cried Lawrence, "in the name of our mother, for you and I, Victor Broussard, are brothers of the half blood."

By that time, Lawrence was weeping convulsively. Broussard's lighted cigar dropped to the floor, and lay there smoldering.

"But—but—" stammered Broussard, "my half-brother, my mother's son by her first marriage, died when I was a boy. My mother wore mourning for him."

"Yes," answered Lawrence, recovering himself a little, "she thought I was dead when I was in double irons for mutiny on a merchant ship. It was one of God's mercies that she thought me dead when I was living a life that would have been worse than death to her. Look you, I have disobeyed and defied and disgraced the God that made me, but I have never ceased to believe in Him. And, blackguard that I was and am, I had the best mother, and I have the best wife——"



There was a tense silence for a minute. Through all the bewildering and overwhelming thoughts that were crashing through Broussard's brain, but one thing was clear and unshakable, the deathless loyalty that a son owes to his mother.

"Of course," said Broussard, in a cool and resolute voice, "I'll stand by my mother's son, for my mother's sake. I was always puzzled at your knowledge of my parents, but I want some actual proof of what you say. Not for myself, you understand, but for others."



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“Here it is,” said Lawrence, taking a small, thin gold ring from his little finger. “When my mother married your father, I was fourteen years old. She gave me the wedding ring my father had given her; she put it on my finger and it has never been removed since—but I will take it off to show to you.”

Lawrence pulled the ring off and Broussard, under the glare of the electric lamp, read the initials and the date he had seen in the family record. Then, handing the ring back, Broussard studied Lawrence’s haggard face. Lawrence, answering the unspoken words, said:

“I was always thought like my mother, and the boy is the image of her.”

A sudden illumination flooded Broussard’s mind with light. He recalled the child’s face, frank and handsome—a face that had always appealed to him so strongly, and so strangely. Yes, it was the call of the blood, and instantly the mysterious attraction the boy had for him developed into the affection of a kinsman.

“If you could see my wife and talk with her,” continued Lawrence, recovering himself a little. “I can’t urge her to leave me, but I think in common justice to her somebody ought to put the thing before her.”

“Certainly,” replied Broussard.

He was turning things rapidly in his mind. It would never do, after the Colonel’s warning, to go to Lawrence’s quarters, and he said so.

“It would look as if I had called for a farewell visit to your wife, when I haven’t time to pay any calls except to the C. O.,” said Broussard, after a moment. “But I will see the Colonel in the morning and try to arrange, through him, an interview with your wife.”

“But don’t, for God’s sake, tell who I am,” cried Lawrence. “Don’t tell it, for the sake of our mother’s memory. It isn’t necessary.”

“No, it is not necessary,” replied Broussard. He was full of brotherly pity for Lawrence, his respect and sympathy for Mrs. Lawrence suddenly changed into the love of a brother for a sister, and the little boy became dear to him in the twinkling of an eye.

A silence fell between the two men, which was broken by Broussard.

“Couldn’t you get a discharge from the army?”

“No,” answered Lawrence, “there are too many black marks against me—not enough to turn me out, but enough to keep me in. However, I’ve kept soberer and acted straighter since I’ve been an enlisted man than for a long time past; the non-coms. know how to handle men like me. And I’m a good aviator, and they want to keep me.”



“At all events,” said Broussard, taking Lawrence’s hand, “I’ll look out for your wife and child. The boy shall have his chance—he shall have his chance, the jolly little chap!”

Then, standing up, the two men embraced as brothers do, and felt their mother’s tender spirit hovering over them.

The next morning, while Colonel Fortescue was at breakfast, a note was handed to him by Broussard’s soldier attendant. It read:



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“Last night I had a visit from Lawrence. He has a great affection for his wife and child, and wanted me to talk with his wife about a family matter in which he feels he can not advise her. Can you kindly suggest some way by which I may have a private talk of a few minutes with Mrs. Lawrence?”

Colonel Fortescue scribbled on the back of the note:

“Come to my office in my house at ten o'clock and I will have Mrs. Lawrence here.”

Broussard felt a little chagrined when he received this note. Suppose Anita should see him? She had already seen Mrs. Lawrence put her hand on his shoulder. There was, however, no gainsaying the C. O., and at ten o'clock Broussard rang the bell at the Commandant's house. Sergeant McGillicuddy opened the door for him and showed him into the little office across the hall, saying:

“Them's the Colonel's orders, sir.”

At the same moment Mrs. Lawrence, pale, beautiful and stately, walked in from the back entrance. As she and Broussard met in the sunny hall, brimming with the morning light, Anita walked down the stairs and came face to face with Broussard and Mrs. Lawrence.

Broussard's dark skin turned dull red; Mrs. Lawrence, calmly unconscious, bowed to Anita, who, in her turn, bowed and passed on; her head, usually with a graceful droop, was erect; she radiated silent displeasure. Then Broussard and Mrs. Lawrence entered the office and Broussard closed the door. He was full of discomfort and chagrin, but it did not make him forgetful of the pale woman before him.

Mrs. Lawrence sat down in a chair; it was plain that she was not strong. Broussard, taking her hand, said to her affectionately:

“Last night Lawrence told me all. Remember, after this, that you and he have a brother, and the boy will be to me as a son.”

The slow tears gathered in Mrs. Lawrence's eyes and fell upon her thin cheeks.

“My husband told me when he came home last night. I can't express what I feel—but the boy shall remember you in his innocent prayer.”

“It's the boy I want to speak about,” said Broussard, “Lawrence tells me that you have a chance of going back to your own people and that you are breaking down under the hard work of a soldier's wife. You can never get used to it.”

“Perhaps not,” replied Mrs. Lawrence, calmly, “especially as I was brought up to have a French maid. But I don't intend to leave my husband. I love him too well. Don't ask me why I love him so. I couldn't explain it to you to save my life, but I will say that since the



day we were married—I ran away to marry him—he has never spoken an unkind word to me. He had nothing to give me except his love, but he has given me that. Whatever his faults may be as a soldier, he has been a good husband to me.”

“A good husband!”

Broussard involuntarily repeated the words, marvelling and admiring the constancy, the self-delusion, the blind devotion of the woman before him.



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“A loving husband, I should have said,” said Mrs. Lawrence, a faint color coming into her face, “But my resolution is made. What you said about helping the boy only fixes it firmer, because it did seem as if his only chance would be thrown away.”

The conversation had not lasted five minutes but Broussard saw that five decades of persuasion would not move Mrs. Lawrence. Besides, he had spoken to her from a profound sense of justice; in his heart, the tie of blood between him and Lawrence made him wish that the wife should continue to stand by the husband.

They both rose, feeling that the matter was settled inevitably. Broussard took from his breast pocket a roll of notes.

“It is better for you than bank checks,” he said; “when this is gone, write to me and there will be more. Lawrence feels, as I do, that for the sake of our mother’s memory it would be better that his identity should not be revealed.”

A vivid blush flooded Mrs. Lawrence’s face. Her woman’s pride was cut to the quick and Broussard, seeing it, said quickly:

“It was his suggestion, not mine.”

Then, taking Mrs. Lawrence’s hand, Broussard gave her a brother’s kiss, which she returned as a sister might, and they passed out of the office. In the hall Broussard left cards for Colonel and Mrs. Fortescue and Anita. Kettle, having heard that Broussard was leaving, came out of the dining-room, where he had been washing dishes, and wiping his hands on his long checked gingham apron, offered a friendly grasp to Broussard.

“I ain’ goin’ ter let Miss ’Nita furgit you, suh,” Kettle whispered, “doan’ you be skeered of Mr. Conway—he treat Miss ’Nita same like he did when she wear her hair down her back.”

Broussard inwardly thought that perhaps Conway’s plan was best. But he gave Kettle a confidential wink and a bank note.

“Some day I’ll come back, Kettle, and then——”

Broussard did not finish the sentence in his own mind. Anita had seen just enough to prejudice a young, innocent girl against him.

Outside the door, a trooper was holding Gamechick by the bridle, delivering the horse to his new master.



“Good-bye, good horse,” said Broussard, patting Gamechick’s neck. “You did me the best turn any creature, man or beast, ever did me, and I promise never to forget my obligations to you.”

Horses are sentimental creatures. Gamechick knew that Broussard’s words were a farewell. He turned his large, intelligent eyes on Broussard, saying as plainly as a horse can speak:

“Good-bye, good master. Never will I, your faithful horse, forget you.”



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Broussard, walking rapidly off, in the bright January morning, turned around for one last glimpse at the house that held Anita. At that moment the great doors of the Commandant's house opened, and Anita, with a long crimson cloak around her and a hood over her head, ran down the broad stone steps to where Gamechick was standing like a bronze horse, the best-trained and best-mannered and best-bred cavalry charger at Fort Blizzard. Anita put her arm about his neck and rubbed her cheek against his satin coat, Gamechick receiving her caresses with dignity, as a cavalry charger should, and not with the tender bondings and nosings for lumps of sugar, like Pretty Maid. The last glimpse Broussard had of Anita was, as she stood, her arm about Gamechick's neck, her crimson mantle falling away from her graceful shoulder.

[Illustration: The last glimpse Broussard had of Anita was, as she stood, her arm about Gamechick's neck.]

"How much simpler," thought Broussard, as he buttoned his heavy fur coat, for the ride to the station, "is love for a horse, for a child, for anything created, than love for a woman! No man gets out of that business without complications, and when the woman is half a child, an idealist, precocious, an angel with a devil lurking somewhere about her, it's the most complicated thing on this planet!"

Broussard carried these thoughts with him through the frozen Northwest, across the sapphire seas, and into the jungles of the tropics, to which he was destined.

CHAPTER V

UNFORGETTING

"As the passing of leaves, so is the passing of men." Thus it was with Broussard. Another man came to take his place; his once luxurious quarters, now plainly furnished, were occupied by another officer, his fighting cocks had disappeared, and Gamechick became a lady's mount. Anita quite gave over riding Pretty Maid, and rode Gamechick every day. She had some of the superstitions of the Arabs about horses, and when she dismounted, she always whispered something in the horse's ear. The words were:

"We won't forget him, Gamechick, although he has forgotten us."

At this, Gamechick would turn his steady, intelligent eyes on her, and nod, as if he understood every word. Colonel Fortescue and Mrs. Fortescue noticed this little trick of Anita's and looked at each other in silent pity for the girl. She suddenly developed amazing energy, working hard at her violin lessons and delighting Neroda by her progress, reading and studying until Mrs. Fortescue took the books away from her, going to all the dances, doing everything that her young companions did, and many things which they did not. She became the chaplain's right hand for work among the

soldiers' children, and from daybreak until she went to bed at night Anita was ever employed at something and throwing into that something wonderful force and perseverance. One thing became immediately noticeable to Colonel and Mrs. Fortescue; this was that Anita never spoke Broussard's name from the hour he left Fort Blizzard.

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“It is only a girl's fancy; she will get over it,” said Mrs. Fortescue to the Colonel.

“She would if she were like most girls, but I tell you, Betty, this child of ours, this devoted, obedient little thing, has more mind, more introspection, than any young creature I ever knew. There is the making of a dozen tragedies in her.”

“It is you who are too introspective and too tragic about her,” answered Mrs. Fortescue, and the Colonel, recognizing the germ of truth in his wife's words, remained silent for a moment. Then he said:

“It's the sky and the snow and this altitude, and being shut in from all the world that make everything so tense. On these far-off, ice-bound plains, life is abnormally vivid. We are all keyed up too high here.”

Mrs. Fortescue, seeing Anita reading often, and getting many books from the post library, glanced at the literature that crowded the table in Anita's sunny bed room. They were of two sorts—books of passionate poetry and books about the Philippines, their geography, their history, the story of the natives, “the silent, sullen peoples, half savage and half child,” tales of the creeping, crawling, stinging things that make life hideous in the jungles, all these was Anita studying. Mrs. Fortescue said nothing of this to the Colonel, but recalled that Broussard was in the Philippines, and Anita's soul was there, although her body was at Fort Blizzard. In a book of her own, Anita had written her name, in the firm, clear hand that belonged to thirty rather than to seventeen, and these words:

“This I, who walk and talk and sleep and eat here, is not I. It is but my body; my soul is with the Beloved.”

Mrs. Fortescue said nothing of this to the Colonel, but the trend of Anita's reading was unexpectedly revealed at one of the stately and handsome dinners that were given weekly at the Commandant's house during the season. When the officers were in the smoking-room a question of the geography of the Philippines came up, and was not settled. Colonel Fortescue called for a book on the subject, which was in Anita's room. Anita herself brought it, and hovered for a moment behind her father's chair; the subject of the Philippines had a magic power to hold her.

Not even the book gave the desired information and Anita leaned over and whispered into her father's ear:

“Daddy, I can tell you about it.”

“Do,” answered the Colonel, smiling, and turning to his guests, “This young lady will interest us.”



Anita, whose air was shy and her violet eyes usually downcast, was the least shy and the most courageous creature imaginable. She got a map, and, spreading it out on the table, pointed out the true solution, and produced books to explain it. The officers, all mature men, listened with interest and amusement, complimenting Anita, and telling her she ought to have an officer's commission. Colonel Fortescue beamed with pride; no other girl at the post had as much solid information as Anita.



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When the guests were gone and Anita was lying wide awake in her little white bed, thinking of Broussard, Colonel Fortescue, in the pride of his heart, was telling Mrs. Fortescue about it, as he smoked his last cigar in his office.

"It was great!" said the Colonel. "The child knew her subject wonderfully. She sat there, talking with men who had served in the Philippines, and they said she knew as much as they did."

"Broussard is in the Philippines," replied Mrs. Fortescue quietly.

Colonel Fortescue dashed his cigar into the fireplace and remained silent for five minutes.

"At any rate," he said presently, "The child's love affair hasn't made a fool of her. She is actually learning something from it. That's where she is so far ahead of most young things of her age."

"She will be eighteen next spring," said Mrs. Fortescue.

The mention of Anita's age always made the Colonel cross; so nothing more was said between the father and mother about Anita that night. But the Colonel yearned over the beloved of his heart, nor did he classify Anita's silent and passionate remembrance of Broussard with the idle fancies of a young girl; it was like Anita herself, of strong fibre.

The winter wore on, and the whirlpool of life surged in the far-distant post, as in the greater centres of life. The chaplain, an earnest man, found men and women more willing to listen to him, than in any spot in which he had ever spoken the message entrusted to him. Perhaps the aviation field had something to do with it; the people in the fort were always near to life and to death. The chaplain disliked to find himself watching particular faces in the chapel when he preached the simple, soldierly sermons on Sundays, and was annoyed with himself that he always saw, above all others, Anita Fortescue's gaze, and that of Mrs. Lawrence, as she sat far back in the chapel. Anita's eyes were full of questionings, and dark with sadness; but Mrs. Lawrence, in her plain black gown and hat, sometimes with Lawrence by her side, always with the beautiful boy, sitting among the soldiers and their wives, embodied tragedy. The chaplain sometimes went to see Mrs. Lawrence; she was a delicate woman, and often ill, and the chaplain was forced to admire Lawrence's kindness to his wife, although in other respects Lawrence was not a model of conduct. As with Mrs. McGillicuddy, and everybody else at the fort, Mrs. Lawrence maintained a still, unconquerable reserve. One day, the chaplain said to Anita:

"I hear that Lawrence's wife is ill. Could you go to see her? You know she isn't like the wives of the other enlisted men, and that makes it hard to help her."



Anita blushed all over her delicate face. She felt a deep hostility to Mrs. Lawrence; she had seen Broussard with her twice, and each time there was an unaccountable familiarity between them. But women seek their antagonists among other women, and Anita felt a secret longing to know more about this mysterious woman.



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“Certainly I will go,” answered Anita. “My father is very strict about letting me intrude into the soldier’s houses—he says it’s impertinent to force one’s self in, but I know if you ask me to go to see Mrs. Lawrence my father will think it quite right.”

The Colonel stood firmly by his chaplain, who was a man after his own heart, and that very afternoon Anita went to Mrs. Lawrence’s quarters. The door was opened by the little boy, Ronald, whom Anita knew, as everybody else did. The girl’s heart beat as she entered the narrow passage-way in which she had seen Broussard and Mrs. Lawrence standing together, and it beat more as she walked into the little sitting-room, where Mrs. Lawrence sat in an arm chair at the window. She was evidently ill, and the knitting she was trying to do had fallen from her listless hand.

The Colonel’s daughter was much embarrassed, but the private soldier’s wife was all coolness and composure.

“The chaplain asked me to come to see you,” said Anita, standing irresolute, not knowing whether to stay or to go.

“Thank you and thank the chaplain also,” replied Mrs. Lawrence. Then she courteously offered Anita a seat.

Anita had meant to ask if Mrs. Lawrence needed anything, but she found herself as unable to say this to Mrs. Lawrence as to any officer’s wife. All she could do was to pick up the knitting and say:

“Perhaps you will let me finish this for you. I can knit very well.”

It was a warm jacket for the little boy, who needed it. Mrs. Lawrence’s coldness melted a little.

“Thank you,” she said, “there is not much to be done on it now.”

With that oblique persuasion, Anita took up the jacket, and her quick fingers made the needles fly. Her glance was keen, and although apparently concentrated on her work, she saw the strange mixture of plainness and luxury in the little room. The floor was covered with a fine rug, and a little glass cupboard shone with cut glass and silver.

The two women talked a little together but Mrs. Lawrence showed her weariness by falling off to sleep in the chair. The little boy went quietly out, and Anita sat knitting steadily in the silent room. The setting sun shone upon Mrs. Lawrence’s pale face, revealing a beauty that neither time nor grief nor hardship could wholly destroy.

Involuntarily, Anita’s eye travelled around the strange-looking room. On the mantel was a large photograph; Anita’s heart leaped as she recognized it to be Broussard. It was evidently a fresh photograph, and a very fine one. Broussard stood in a graceful



attitude, his hand on his sword, looking every inch the *beau sabreur*. Anita became so absorbed that her hand stopped knitting; it was as if Broussard himself had walked into the room.

Presently she felt, rather than saw, a glance fixed upon her. Mrs. Lawrence was wide awake, lying back in her chair, her dark eyes bent on Anita, whose hands lay idle in her lap.

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The gaze of the two women met, for Anita was a woman grown in matters of the heart. She imagined she saw pity in Mrs. Lawrence's expression. Instantly, she began to knit rapidly. She wished to talk unconcernedly, but the words would not come. Broussard's association with the pallid woman before her was a painful mystery to Anita. Jealousy is a plant that springs from nothing, and grows like Jonah's gourd in the minds of women.

Anita was too innocent, too rashly confident in the honor of all the other women in the world to think any wrong of the woman before her. But it was enough that Mrs. Lawrence knew Broussard well, and was in communication with him—a strange thing between an officer and the wife of a private soldier, even if the soldier be of a station unusual in the ranks. Ever in Anita's heart smouldered the joy of the words Broussard had spoken to her under thousands of eyes on that memorable night of the music ride, and the sharp pain that came from Broussard's saying no more.

In a few minutes the jacket was done, and Anita rose. It required all her generosity as well as justice to say to Mrs. Lawrence:

"If I can do anything for you, please let me know."

"I thank you," replied Mrs. Lawrence. "You have already done much for me and for Ronald."

Then Anita went out into the dusk, and in her soul was rebellion. Youth was made for joy and she was robbed of her share. Anita was scarcely eighteen and deep-hearted.

In Mrs. Fortescue's room, Anita found Mrs. McGillicuddy, engaged in one of the comfortable chats that always took place between the Colonel's lady and the Sergeant's wife at the After-Clap's bed-time. As Sergeant McGillicuddy kept the Colonel informed of the happenings at the fort, so Mrs. McGillicuddy, who had great qualifications, and would have made a good scout, kept Mrs. Fortescue informed of all the news at the fort, from Major Harlow, the second in command, down to the smallest drummer boy in the regiment. Mrs. Fortescue being nothing if not feminine, she and Mrs. McGillicuddy were "sisters under their skins."

Anita's face was so grave that Mrs. Fortescue said to her tenderly—one is very tender with an only daughter:

"Is anything troubling you, dear?"

"Nothing at all," replied Anita, "I went to see Mrs. Lawrence, as the chaplain asked me, and finished a little jacket she was knitting for her boy. She doesn't seem very strong."

"And I dessay," said Mrs. McGillicuddy, who had held Anita in her arms when the girl was but a day old, "you saw all that cut glass and the rugs, as Mr. Broussard give to Lawrence. Them rugs! They're fit for a general's house. It seems to me it oughter be



against the regulations for privates to have such rugs when sergeants' wives has to buy rugs off the bargain counter.”

Mrs. McGillicuddy stood stiffly upon her rank as a sergeant's wife and believed in keeping the soldiers' wives where they belonged.



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"I don't fancy Mr. Broussard is living in luxury himself just now," said Mrs. Fortescue. And Mrs. McGillicuddy's kind heart, being touched with remorse for having given Broussard a pin prick, hastened to say:

"No, indeed, mum, for McGillicuddy heard Major Harlow readin' a letter from Mr. Broussard, and he says as how he lives on bananas and has got only two shirts, and his striker has to wash one of 'em out every day for Mr. Broussard to wear the next day. McGillicuddy says that Major Harlow says that Mr. Broussard says that he don't mind it a bit, and he's glad to see real service and proud to command the men that is with him, and they behaves splendid."

Anita fixed her eyes on Mrs. McGillicuddy's honest, rubicund face, and listened breathlessly as Mrs. McGillicuddy continued:

"And Mr. Broussard says the Philippines is one big hell full of little hells, and nobody can get warm there in winter, or cool in summer, but there's lots of life to be seen there, and he's a-seein' it. And Blizzard is so far away, he can't sometimes believe there ever was such a place."

Suddenly, without the least warning, a quick warm gush of tears fell on Anita's cheeks. They were so far apart, the jungles and the icy peaks, the palm tree on the burning sands, and the pine tree in the frozen mountains! Anita walked quickly out of the room. Mrs. McGillicuddy, soft-hearted as she was hard-handed, looked at Mrs. Fortescue. The mother's eyes were moist; Anita was very unlike her, but Mrs. Fortescue remembered a period in her own young life when she, too, felt that the world was empty because of the absence of the Beloved. And suppose he had never come back? Mrs. Fortescue, remembering the brimming cup of happiness that had been hers merely because the man she loved came back, felt a little frightened for Anita. The girl was so precocious, so passionate—and how difficult and baffling are those women whose loves are all passion!

Anita baffled her mother still more, by appearing an hour later in a gay little gown, and taking the After-Clap from his crib and dancing with him until he absolutely refused to go to sleep. Then, Anita was in such high spirits at dinner that the Colonel told Mrs. Fortescue in their nightly talk while the Colonel smoked, he believed Anita had completely forgotten Broussard. At this, Mrs. Fortescue smiled and remained as silent as the Sphinx.

The winter was slipping by, and work and study and play went on in the snow-bound fort, and Colonel Fortescue was congratulating himself upon the wonderfully good report he could make of his command. There had not been a man missing in the whole month of February. But one day Lawrence, the gentleman-ranker, was reported missing.



The Colonel had no illusions concerning broken men and said so to Mrs. Fortescue.

“The fellow has deserted—that’s the way most of the broken men end. He was in the aviation field yesterday and his going away was not premeditated, as he did not ask for leave. But something came in the way of temptation, and he couldn’t stand it, and ran away.”



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The “something” was revealed by Sergeant McGillicuddy, with a pale face, while he was shut up with the Colonel in his office.

“It’s partly my fault, sir,” said the Sergeant. “The fellow has been doing his duty pretty well, and yesterday, on the aviation field, the aviation officer was praisin’ him for his work. You know, sir, how I likes the machines and studies ’em at odd times. The flyin’ was over and there wasn’t anybody around the sheds but Lawrence and me. I was lookup at his machine, and, no doubt, botherin’ him, an he says sharp-like:

“You can’t understand these machines. It takes an educated man like me to understand ’em. They’re more complicated than buggies.’ That made me mad, sir, and I says, ‘That’s no way to speak to your Sergeant.’ ‘You go to the devil,’ says Lawrence. ‘You’ll get ten days in the guard house for that,’ I says. Then Lawrence seemed to grow crazy, all at once. ‘Yes,’ he shouts, like a lunatic, ‘that’s a fit punishment for a gentleman. You’ll see to it, Sergeant, that I get ten days in the guard house, and my wife breakin’ her heart with shame, and the other children tauntin’ my boy!’ With that, sir, he hit me on the side of the head with his fist. I was so unprepared that it knocked me down, but I saw Lawrence runnin’ toward the station. I picked myself up and went and sat down on the bench outside the sheds to think what I ought to do. I knew, as well as I know now, that Lawrence was runnin’ away, and I had drove him to it. But I swear, sir, before my Colonel and my God, that I didn’t mean to make Lawrence mad, or misuse him in any way. You know my record, sir.”

“Yes,” answered Colonel Fortescue, his pity divided among Lawrence and his wife, and the honest, well-meaning McGillicuddy, who had brought about a catastrophe.

“For God’s sake, sir,” said McGillicuddy, “wiping his forehead, be as easy on Lawrence as you can, and give me a day—two days—leave to hunt him up.”

This the Colonel did, warning McGillicuddy not to repeat what had occurred on the aviation plain.

The Sergeant got his leave, and another two days, all spent in hunting for Lawrence. There was nowhere for him to go except to the little collection of houses at the railway station. No one had seen Lawrence board the train that passed once a day, but a man, even in uniform, can sometimes slip aboard a train without being seen. The Sergeant came back, looking woe-begone, and Lawrence was published on the bulletin board as “absent without leave.”

The shock of Lawrence’s departure quite overcame his unhappy wife. She took to her bed and had not strength to leave it.

Sergeant McGillicuddy begged that he might be allowed to tell to the chaplain the provocation he had given Lawrence, who might tell Mrs. Lawrence. The blow struck by



Lawrence was the act of a mad impulse, and having struck an officer, Lawrence might well fear to face the punishment. This the Colonel permitted, and the chaplain, sitting by Mrs. Lawrence's bed, told her of it, and of Sergeant McGillicuddy's remorse. Until then, Mrs. Lawrence, lying in her bed, had remained strangely tearless, although a faint moan sometimes escaped her lips. At the chaplain's words she suddenly burst into a rain of tears.



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“My husband never meant to desert,” she cried between her sobs. “He was doing his duty well—his own Sergeant said so. He must have been crazy when he struck the blow!”

“Poor McGillicuddy,” said the chaplain quietly. “The Colonel has forbidden him to speak of it to any one, and he is breaking his heart over it.”

No word of forgiveness came from Mrs. Lawrence’s lips.

“It is the way with all of them, officers and men, they were all down on my husband because they thought he had done something wrong,” said Mrs. Lawrence, with the divine, unreasoning love of a devoted woman.

“Mr. Broussard was not down on your husband,” said the chaplain.

“True,” replied Mrs. Lawrence, and then shut her lips close. If any one wished to know the secret bond between Broussard and Lawrence, one could never find it out from Mrs. Lawrence.

Sergeant McGillicuddy could keep from Mrs. McGillicuddy the details of what had occurred on the aviation field, but he could not conceal from her the fact that he was unhappy and conscience-stricken. All he would say to his wife was:

“I’ve done a man a wrong. I never meant it, as both God and the Colonel know.” McGillicuddy had a way of bracketing the Deity with commanding officers, and did it with much simplicity and meant no irreverence.

“And I know it too, Patrick,” replied Mrs. McGillicuddy, with the faith of a true wife in her husband.

“I’d tell you all about it, Araminta,” said the poor Sergeant, “but the Colonel forbid me, and orders is orders.”

“I know it,” answered Mrs. McGillicuddy, “and I’ll trust you, Patrick, I won’t ever ask you the name because I can guess it easy. It’s Lawrence.”

The Sergeant groaned.

“If you can do anything for Mrs. Lawrence,” he said, “or the boy——”

“I’ll do it,” valiantly replied Mrs. McGillicuddy, and straightway put her good words into effect.

Lawrence had then been missing five days. It was seven o’clock in the evening, and Mrs. McGillicuddy had already put the After-Clap to bed when she started for Mrs.



Lawrence's quarters. There was no one to open the door, and Mrs. McGillicuddy walked unceremoniously into the little sitting-room, where the boy sat, silent and lonely and frightened, by the window. Mrs. McGillicuddy spoke a cheery word to him, and then passed into the bedroom beyond. The light was dim but she could see Mrs. Lawrence lying, fully dressed, on the bed. At the sight of Mrs. McGillicuddy she turned her face away.

"Come now," said Mrs. McGillicuddy undauntedly, "I think I know why you don't want to see me. Well, Patrick McGillicuddy is as good a man as wears shoe-leather, but every Sergeant that ever lived has made some sort of a mistake in his life. So Patrick wants me to do all I can for you until something turns up, and I hope that something will be your husband—and my husband will be mighty easy on him at the court-martial."



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Mrs. Lawrence made no reply. Then Mrs. McGillicuddy went into the little kitchen, and stirring up the fire soon had a comfortable meal ready, and calling to the little boy, gave him his first good supper in the five days that had passed since his father came no more.

“You’d feel sorry for McGillicuddy if you could see him,” Mrs. McGillicuddy kept on, ignoring Mrs. Lawrence’s cold silence. “And recollect, if you feel sorry for your husband, I feel sorry for mine. ’Taint right to keep the little feller here while you can’t lift a hand to do for him, so I’m goin’ to take him to my house, with my eight children, because there’s luck in odd numbers, and I’ll feed him up, pore little soul, and wash him and mend him, and start him to playin’ with Ignatius and Aloysius, for children ought to play, and Patrick ’ll come every morning and start your fire, although he is a Sergeant, and we want to help you, and you must help us.”

Mrs. Lawrence was not made of stone, and could not forever resist Mrs. McGillicuddy’s kindness, and so it came about that the McGillicuddys took care of Lawrence’s boy, whose face grew round and rosy with the generous McGillicuddy fare. A part of Mrs. McGillicuddy’s good will to him was that she instructed Ignatius and Aloysius McGillicuddy, both excellent fist fighters for their age, that they were to lick any boy, no matter what his age or size, who dared to taunt little Ronald about his father or anything else. These orders were extremely agreeable to the McGillicuddy boys, who loved fighting for fighting’s sake, and who sought occasions to practise the manly art.

Colonel Fortescue sent word to Mrs. Lawrence that she could occupy her quarters until she was able to make some plan for the future. It seemed, however, utterly indefinite when Mrs. Lawrence would be able to plan anything. She lay in her bed or sat in her chair, silent, pale, and as weak as a child. The blow of her husband’s desertion seemed to have stopped all the springs of action. Neither the chaplain, the post-surgeon, nor Mrs. McGillicuddy, singly or united, could rouse Mrs. Lawrence from the deadly lassitude of a broken heart. Both the chaplain and the surgeon had seen such cases, and nothing in the pharmacopoeia could cure them.

Mrs. Fortescue, whose heart was not less tender from long dwelling on the airy heights of happiness and perfect love, was full of sympathy for Lawrence’s unfortunate wife, and would have gone to see her, but Mrs. McGillicuddy, who delivered the message, brought back a discouraging reply.

“She says, mum, as she don’t need nothin’ at all, and I think, mum, she kinder shrinks from the orficers’ wives more than from the soldiers’ wives.”

Anita, who was sitting by, went to her mother and, putting her arms around Mrs. Fortescue’s neck, whispered:



“Mother, let me go to see Mrs. Lawrence. I don’t think she will mind seeing me. You and daddy are always telling me that I am only a child.”



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Mrs. Fortescue took Anita in her lap, as if the girl were indeed the age of the After-Clap.

“Do what you like, dear child,” she said. “Girls like you can do some things that women can’t, because you have the enormous advantage of not knowing anything.”

CHAPTER VI

SOME LETTERS AND KETTLE’S ENLISTMENT

Anita, who could plan things quite as well as if she were forty instead of eighteen, bided her time until the hour when Mrs. McGillicuddy was putting the After-Clap to bed. Then the girl slipped away and took the road to the long street of the married men’s quarters. An icy fog swept from the Arctic Circle, enveloped the world, hiding both moon and stars, and made the great arc lamps look like little points of light in the great ocean of white mist. Every step of the way Anita’s heart and will battled fiercely together. Broussard knew Mrs. Lawrence in some mysterious way. Perhaps he had loved her once; Anita was all a woman, and at seventeen was learned in the affairs of the heart.

This woman, however, between whom and Broussard some strong link was forged, Anita knew not when, nor how, nor where, was ill and poor and suffering, and Anita’s natural inclinations were merciful. Besides, she had been taught by her father and mother the great lessons of life in kindness and tenderness. She had seen her father give up a party of pleasure to walk behind the pine coffin of a private soldier, and her mother had robbed her greenhouse of its choicest blossoms to lay a wreath on a soldier’s grave.

By instinct, rather than sight, Anita stopped in front of the right door and met the chaplain coming out.

“Glad to see you, Anita,” said the chaplain, who was muffled up to his eyes. “Go in and talk to that poor lady. We all want to help her, but we find it hard, for she will tell nothing of herself, of her family, or anything, except that she knows Lawrence didn’t mean to desert, and will yet report himself.”

In the plain little bedroom Mrs. Lawrence lay on her bed, the shaded electric light by her bedside showing her thin face, made more pallid by the great braids of lustrous black hair that fell about her. A look of faint surprise came into her languid eyes as Anita drew a chair to her bed and took her hand.

“My mother sent me,” Anita said, gently, “to ask if I could do anything for you.”

Mrs. Lawrence murmured her thanks, and then hesitated for a moment, the words trembling upon her lips.



“Yes,” she said, “you can do something for me. Something I haven’t asked anybody to do. I tried to ask the chaplain just now—he is a kind man, and tries to help me but for some reason my courage failed; I don’t know why, but I didn’t ask him. It is, to write a letter for me.”

“Certainly I will write a letter for you,” said Anita.

“It is to Mr. Broussard,” answered Mrs. Lawrence.

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The thought of writing to Broussard startled and overwhelmed Anita. She glanced about her nervously, fearing Mrs. Lawrence's words had been overheard, and stammered and blushed. But the woman, lying wan and weak in the bed, did not notice this.

"I am not strong enough to dictate it exactly as I want," said Mrs. Lawrence, "and you will have to write it at your own home. But I am very anxious for you to write to Mr. Broussard for me and tell him that my husband is missing and will soon be posted as a deserter; that I don't know where he is, but I am sure he will return. Don't tell Mr. Broussard how ill I am, but just say that the Colonel has let me stay on here, and the boy is well. Mr. Broussard is my husband's best friend; they were playmates in boyhood."

A dead silence fell between the woman and the girl and lasted for some minutes. Anita was already composing the letter in her mind.

"Perhaps before I go I can do something else for you," she said presently.

"No, everything has been done for me, and Mrs. McGillicuddy brings the boy over every night to tell me good-night. What you can do for me is to write the letter, as I asked you, and post it to-night. It can't reach Mr. Broussard in less than a month, perhaps two months. The last letter I received from him he was in some wild place a long distance from Guam, but he will get the letter eventually, if he lives."

Anita rose and walked back home through the icy mist. Mrs. Fortescue was in the shaded drawing-room seated at her harp, playing soft chords and arpeggios, with Colonel Fortescue leaning over her chair. It was a picture Anita had often seen, and at those times, from her childhood and from Beverley's, they were made to feel that they were secondary, and even the After-Clap was superfluous. Nevertheless, Anita walked into the room. The Colonel and Mrs. Fortescue started apart like young lovers.

"I have been to see Mrs. Lawrence," said Anita, "and she asked me if I would write a letter for her. She didn't, of course, tell me not to say anything about it to you, mother and daddy, but I would rather not tell you to whom the letter is to be written. You must trust me, my own dear daddy. It is a very simple letter, just to say that Lawrence has disappeared and Mrs. Lawrence and the little boy are in kind hands."

"Of course we trust you," answered Colonel Fortescue, smiling. "You are a very trusty person, Anita."

"Like my father and mother," answered Anita, and ran out of the room. As they heard her light step tripping up the stairs, the father and mother looked at each other with troubled eyes.



“It is to Broussard,” said the Colonel, remembering his last interview with him. “I think Broussard steadily befriended Lawrence and his wife.”

Mrs. Fortescue’s candid eyes grew clouded.

“It is a strange intimacy,” she said.

“It’s all right,” unhesitatingly replied the Colonel.



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“Oh, well,” said Mrs. Fortescue, touching the harpstrings, “If you are fomenting a love affair between Anita at Fort Blizzard and Broussard in the tropics, it is your affair.”

“Elizabeth,” said the Colonel, “I am not a person to foment love affairs, or any other private and personal affairs.”

“I said *if* you were fomenting a love affair, John,” replied Mrs. Fortescue; and then there was no more music from the harp, the Colonel going into his office and Mrs. Fortescue to the After-Clap’s nursery.

In her own little room Anita was already hard at work on her letter to Broussard. It was a very short and simple letter, telling exactly, and only, what Mrs. Lawrence had asked, and it was signed “Sincerely Yours.” But when it was to be sealed Anita’s insurgent heart cried out to be heard, and she added a little postscript, which read:

“Gamechick is very well and sends his love. I ride him nearly every day.”

Anita would not trust her precious letter to the mail orderly, or even Sergeant McGillicuddy or Kettle, but throwing her crimson mantle around her, she slipped out, in the cold mist, to the letter box. For one moment she held the letter poised in her hand before it took its flight toward the tropics; Anita’s tender heart went with the letter.

A fortnight later, the March sun having come in place of the February snows, Mrs. McGillicuddy succeeded in dragging Mrs. Lawrence out of doors, one day about noon, and after placing her on a bench in the glow of the light, went off to look after the eight McGillicuddys, the little Lawrence boy, and the After-Clap, none of whom could have got on without her. Colonel Fortescue, coming out of the headquarters building, and going to his own house, passed Mrs. Lawrence, sitting on the bench. The Colonel, who knew her well enough by sight, raised his cap and, stopping a moment, asked courteously after her health.

“I am better,” replied Mrs. Lawrence, “and I want to thank you for your kindness in letting me stay in the quarters. I will not trespass any longer than I can help.”

“May I ask,” said the Colonel, kindly, “if you have any friends with whom I could help you to communicate?”

Mrs. Lawrence smiled as she answered:

“I have relatives, if that is what you mean. But I do not care to communicate with them. Please understand me that I do not, for a moment, admit that my husband is a deserter.”

“I wish I could think he was not,” said Colonel Fortescue, “but unfortunately, his misconduct——”



Colonel Fortescue caught himself; he had done what he seldom did—used the wrong word. Mrs. Lawrence struggled feebly to her feet, the divine obstinacy of a loving woman shining in her melancholy eyes.

“Stop!” she cried, “I can’t allow any one, even the Colonel of the regiment, to disparage my husband before my face.”

“I beg your pardon,” said Colonel Fortescue, “I regret the word I used.”



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Mrs. Lawrence, inclining her head, sank, rather than sat, upon the bench.

“Perhaps I should not have spoken so,” she said, in a composed voice, “as my husband was only a private, and you are the Colonel; but I think you understand that I was neither born nor reared to this position.”

“I do understand,” replied Colonel Fortescue, “and some one has done you a very great wrong in bringing you to this post; but you may depend upon it that neither you nor your child shall suffer for the present, and I hope you will soon be well.”

[Illustration: “Neither you nor your child shall suffer for the present.”]

“It is my heart that is more ill than my body,” replied Mrs. Lawrence, and the Colonel passed on.

The tragedy of a desertion is very great, and as Colonel Fortescue said, tragedies grow more intense in the fierce cold of winter, and Mrs. Lawrence and the beautiful little boy were, in themselves, living tragedies. Sergeant McGillicuddy, too, had a tragic aspect. In spite of all the Colonel could say, the Sergeant still accused himself of being the cause of Lawrence’s desertion. McGillicuddy’s bronzed face, like a hickory nut, grew so haggard, his self-reproaches so piteous, that Colonel Fortescue thought it well to give him a positive order to say nothing of the circumstances that led up to Lawrence’s striking him. The Sergeant begged to be allowed to tell the chaplain about it; to this Colonel Fortescue consented, and McGillicuddy had a long conversation with the chaplain.

“The Colonel says, sir,” McGillicuddy declared mournfully to the chaplain, “as it is the damned climate,—excuse me, sir,—that makes everybody queer.”

“I’ll excuse you,” replied the chaplain, who had the same opinion of the Arctic cold as Colonel Fortescue. “I think the cold gets on men’s nerves and makes them queer.”

However, the chaplain had the power to console, and McGillicuddy became a trifle more resigned, and even had a faint hope of Lawrence’s return, caught from Mrs. McGillicuddy’s report of Mrs. Lawrence’s fixed belief that Lawrence would come back and give himself up. One great consolation to the Sergeant was, to spend a large part of his pay in comforts for Mrs. Lawrence and clothes and books and toys for the little Ronald. Mrs. McGillicuddy, who had reasoned out a very good solution of McGillicuddy’s troubles, encouraged him in his kindness to Mrs. Lawrence and the boy, so that the old rule of God making the devil work for Him was again illustrated; much good came to those whom Lawrence had deserted.

The chaplain thought it a good time to preach a sermon on loyalty, and on the very Sunday after Colonel Fortescue had talked with Mrs. Lawrence, the congregation that



crowded the chapel heard an exposition of what loyalty meant, especially loyalty to one's country. Among the most attentive listeners was Kettle, whose honest black face glowed when the chaplain proclaimed that every man owed it to his country to defend it, if required. When the congregation streamed out of the chapel, Mrs. Fortescue stopped a moment to congratulate the chaplain on his sermon. Behind her stood Kettle, who was never very far away from Miss Betty.



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"I listen to that sermon, suh," said Kettle, earnestly, to the chaplain, "and it cert'ny wuz a corker, suh."

"That is high praise," answered the chaplain, "I would rather an enlisted man should tell me that a sermon of mine was a corker, than for the archbishop of the archdiocese to write me a personal letter of praise."

Just then the chaplain, who was accused of having eyes in the back of his head, saw something directly behind him. No less than four of the seven McGillicuddy boys were altar boys, wearing little red cassocks and white surplices in church. They were supposed to leave the cassocks and surplices in the sacristy, but Ignatius McGillicuddy, aged ten, had sneaked out of the sacristy, still wearing his red cassock, and, seeing the chaplain passing out of the gate, thought it safe to begin an elaborate skirt dance, in his cassock, and making many fancy steps, with much high kicking, while the skirt of his cassock waved in the air. In the midst of his final pirouette, he caught the chaplain's stern glance fixed on him. Instantly Ignatius appeared to turn to stone, and the vision of a switch, wielded by Mrs. McGillicuddy's robust arm, passed before his eyes. He was immensely relieved when the chaplain said, grimly:

"Ten pages of catechism next Sunday."

Kettle went home and was very solemn all day. Not even the After-Clap's pranks could make him smile, nor were the After-Clap's orders always orders to him that day. In the late afternoon Mrs. Fortescue, seeing Kettle seated in a corner of the back hall, and evidently in an introspective mood, asked him:

"What's been the matter with you all day, Kettle?"

"I'm a-seekin', Miss Betty," Kettle replied solemnly.

"What are you seeking?" Mrs. Fortescue inquired.

"Seekin' light, Miss Betty," answered Kettle. "I'm seekin' light on my duty to my country, arter the chaplain done preached to-day."

"Glad to hear it," responded Mrs. Fortescue. "Your duty at present is to look after the baby and me."

"Gord knows I does the bes' I kin," replied Kettle, raising his eyes, full of faith and love and simplicity, to Mrs. Fortescue's. "But the chaplain, he say we orter fight for our country; maybe at this heah very minute I orter be a-settin' on a hoss, a-shootin' down the enemies of my country."

"Well, Kettle," said Mrs. Fortescue, laughing, "as you can't ride and you can't shoot, I don't think you will ever do much damage to the enemies of your country."



Mrs. Fortescue passed on, laughing. But some one else had heard Kettle. This was Sergeant Halligan, a chum of Sergeant McGillicuddy, who had stopped at the Commandant's house on an errand. Sergeant Halligan, seeing no one around in that part of the house, winked to himself, and went up to "the naygur," as he, like Sergeant McGillicuddy called Kettle.

"I say," said the sergeant, in a whisper, "you're right about the chaplain's sermon. It's the duty of every man who can carry a gun to fight for his country. I saw the chaplain looking straight at you, and he was as mad as fire. A white-livered coward stands a mighty poor chanst of salvation, is what the chaplain thinks."



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"Does you mean that?" anxiously asked Kettle.

"Don't I?" responded Sergeant Halligan, confidently. "Maybe you think it's hard lines to have to drill all day and walk post all night, but it's a merry jest compared with burning in hell fire. I'd ruther drill and walk post all my life than find myself in the lake of brimstone and sulphur that's a-waitin' for cowards."

"Tain't the drill and the walkin' post as skeers me," said Kettle, "but I ain't noways fond of guns. If it wasn't for them devilish guns I'd enlist, pertickler if they'd let me stay with Miss Betty and the baby."

"Sure they would," replied the artful Halligan with a wink. "The Colonel wouldn't disoblige his lady. You'd be detailed to work around the house here, and you'd look grand in uniform."

"You think so?" said Kettle, with a delighted grin, "I always did have a kinder honin' after them yaller stripes down my legs."

"And a sabre and a sabretache," continued the Sergeant. Times were sometimes dull at Fort Blizzard, and the men in the barracks could get a good many laughs out of Kettle as a soldier.

The yellow stripes down his legs and the sabre and sabretache were dazzling to Kettle, But an objection rose on the horizon.

"How 'bout them hosses?" he asked, "I ain't never been on no hoss sence the time when I wuz a little shaver, and the Kun'l—he wasn't nothin' but a lieutenant then—wuz courtin' Miss Betty, and he pick me up and put me on a hoss he call Birdseye. Lord! It makes me feel creepy now, to tink 'bout that hoss!"

"Oh, you needn't bother about horses," answered the Sergeant, cheerfully. "The Colonel could manage that, and you can wear your uniform just the same."

"I reckon I could ride a gentle hoss," ventured Kettle.

"Course," replied the Sergeant confidently, "I think I can manage it with the orficer in charge of mounts. I could get the milkman's hoss for you. She is twenty-three years old and as quiet as an old maid of seventy-five; she wouldn't run away or kick, not even if you was to build a fire under her."

This seemed to dispose of the great difficulty in Kettle's mind, when the Sergeant suggested that he would see the milkman that very evening, and at nine o'clock the next morning, he would go to the officer in charge of mounts, and by ten o'clock Kettle, as soon as he had finished washing up the breakfast things and had taken the After-Clap for his airing in the baby carriage, could step down to the recruiting office and enlist.



Everything looked rosy to Kettle. That night, at dinner, Kettle was radiant and informed Mrs. Fortescue, between the fish and the roast, that he had “done found his duty and was a-goin’ to do it.”

Mrs. Fortescue had some curiosity to know what this new duty of Kettle’s was, but Kettle maintained a mysterious silence, only admitting that it would not take him away from “Miss Betty and the baby.”



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Next morning, however, in the cold light of day, the proposition had lost something of its charms for Kettle. The yellow stripes down his legs did not appear quite so overwhelmingly fascinating. He remembered that Sergeant McGillicuddy was afraid to ride in the buggy behind the milkman's horse. Sergeant Halligan did not give Kettle any time to repent of his decision, and promptly appeared at ten o'clock and escorted Kettle to the recruiting office. The recruiting sergeant was on hand and Sergeant Halligan explained Kettle's martial enthusiasm. Something like a wink passed between Sergeant Halligan and Gully, the recruiting sergeant, who agreed to enlist Kettle, under the name of Solomon Ezekiel Pickup, as a unit in the army of the United States.

A sudden illumination came to Kettle. "Yon c'yarn' enlist me in no white regiment," cried Kettle to Sergeant Halligan, "I'm a nigger and you have to put me in a nigger regiment."

"Oh, that's all right," responded Sergeant Halligan, airily, "we can get you in all right, and we'll be proud to have you. Won't we, Gully?"

"Certainly," replied Sergeant Gully, "we can fix that up. It's fixed up already."

The rapidity of the proceedings rather startled Kettle.

"But doan' the doctor have to thump me, and pound me, and count my teeth?" he asked. Kettle had not spent twenty years at army posts without finding out something.

"No, indeed," answered Sergeant Gully, who was a chum of Sergeant Halligan, "not with such a husky feller as you. I can thump and pound and count your teeth."

With that Gully made a physical examination of Kettle, and declared that no surgeon who ever lived would turn down such a magnificent specimen of robust manhood as Kettle.

All this was very disheartening to Kettle but seemed of great interest to Sergeant Halligan and his side partner, Sergeant Gully, and also to the orderly, who grinned sympathetically with the two sergeants.

"I say," said Sergeant Gully, "there's nothing doing here this morning and I'll just leave the orderly in charge and step in with you and introduce Private Pickup to the drill sergeant. The sergeant is a honey, but the bees don't know it."

Then, with Sergeant Halligan on one side of him and Sergeant Gully on the other, Kettle started across the plaza in the clear morning light for the great riding hall. By this time Kettle was thoroughly alarmed.

The sight of the class in riding, smart young privates, marching gaily into the drill hall, made Kettle feel very uneasy about the riding.



“How 'bout the milkman's hoss?” asked Kettle anxiously.

“The milkman's horse? The milkman's horse?” sniffed Sergeant Halligan, “D'ye think I'm an infernal fool to put such a proposition up to the oficer in charge of mounts? He'd kick me full of holes if I did.”

“But I say,” replied Kettle, spurred by fear, “you is a deceiver, suh—a deceiver, and I'm a'goin to tell the Kun'l on you and he'll do for you—that he will.”



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“Look-a-here, Solomon Ezekiel Pickup,” shouted Sergeant Halligan savagely, “it’s against the regulations to talk to your superior officers so damned impudent, and I’m a going to prefer charges against you, and you can face three months in the military prison for it. And I’m a-thinkin’ that Briggs, the drill sergeant, will put you on the kickingest horse in the regimental stables. Sergeant Gully here says the drill sergeant is a honey, but he’s awful mistaken. I’ve known Briggs ever since we was rookies together, and he’s a cruel man, and has caused the death of several rookies by his murderin’ ways.”

Just then the three came face to face with Sergeant McGillicuddy. In those days McGillicuddy’s honest face was gloomy and he had not much spirit for jokes, but he laughed when Sergeant Halligan explained to him that Sergeant Gully had enlisted Kettle and had passed him both mentally and physically, and that he was then on his way to take his first lesson in riding.

Sergeant McGillicuddy went his way, laughing, for once in a blue moon, and Kettle, marching between the two sergeants, felt like a prisoner on his way to execution.

Arrived at the great drill hall, now dim and silent except for a batch of recruits, and Briggs, the drill sergeant, a trooper brought in Corporal, a handsome sorrel, and the model of a trained cavalry charger. The trooper at the same time handed the Sergeant a long whip. Corporal, the charger, understood as well as any trooper in the regiment what the crack of the whip meant, from walk, trot, to gallop. As Kettle appeared, almost dragged in by the two sergeants, a grin went around among the young recruits, ruddy-skinned and clear-eyed youngsters, well set up and worthy to wear the uniform of their country.

A whispered conversation followed among the three sergeants and although Kettle was not in uniform as the other recruits were, Sergeant Briggs, for a reason imparted to him by Sergeant Halligan, called out to Kettle:

“Here, Pickup, you get up, and you stay up, and if you don’t you’ll get a whack up!”

This passed for a witticism to the recruits, who made it a point to laugh at all the drill sergeant’s jokes. Kettle, with much difficulty, managed to climb on Corporal’s back and crouched there in a heap. Corporal turned his mild intelligent eyes toward Sergeant Briggs, as much as to say:

“What kind of a fool have I got on my back now?”

“Take the reins and let her go, Gallagher!” said the sergeant with a crack of his whip.

Corporal, seeing his duty, did it. He started off in a brisk walk around the tanbark, and in twenty seconds he heard another crack, and still another, which sent him into a hard



gallop. As the horse quickened his pace, Kettle dropped the reins, and grasping Corporal around the neck, hung on desperately as the horse sped around the great ellipse. At a word from Sergeant Briggs, the horse stopped and walked sedately to the middle of the hall. Kettle slipped off and staggered to his feet.



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[Illustration: Kettle dropped the reins, and grasping Corporal around the neck, hung on desperately.]

“Good Gord A’mighty,” he groaned, to Sergeant Briggs, “I k’yarn’ ride that air hoss, Mr. Briggs, and I ain’t a goin’ to, neither. Miss Betty, she tole me the way to surve my country wuz to look after the baby and her, so I’m jes’ goin’ to resign from the army and go home, ’cause it’s scrub day.”

“You go to the orficer of the day, and report yourself under arrest,” promptly replied Briggs. “His office is in the headquarters building and he’ll straighten you out, I’m thinkin’.”

Kettle started off cheerfully enough, but instead of going to the headquarters building he made a bee line for the C. O.’s house, where he at once took off his coat and went down on his knees to scrub the pantry. Two hours afterward, when the drill sergeant’s work was done in the riding hall and he discovered that Kettle had not reported himself to the officer of the day, the sergeant walked over to the C. O.’s house and sent in a respectful request to see the commanding officer.

“Come in, Sergeant,” called out Colonel Fortescue, sitting at his desk.

“Beg your pardon, sir,” said the Sergeant, once inside, “but I have come to you privately, to tell you about your man, known as Kettle. He came into the riding hall this morning, and Sergeant Gully and Sergeant Halligan said he enlisted. Of course, I know, sir, they couldn’t enlist him, but I’m afraid I helped ’em on with the joke. Anyhow, I made him get on a horse, and it would have broke your heart, sir, to see such riding! Then he got sassy, and I told him, just to get rid of him, to report himself under arrest, but nobody hasn’t seen him since.”

At that moment, the new recruit was seen passing the window, and wearing blue overalls, in which he did scrubbing. The Colonel tapped on the window and Kettle came in by the office entrance.

“What’s this, Solomon, about your being saucy to Sergeant Briggs?” asked Colonel Fortescue, sternly.

“Well, suh, I enlisted,” answered Kettle, promptly, “an’ I done resigned. I tole that there Briggs man so, and lef’ the drill hall and come home, ’cause it was scrub day.”

“Three days in the guardhouse,” thundered the Colonel, in a voice terrible to Kettle.

Sergeant Briggs, touching his cap, walked out, Kettle following him. At the door stood Mrs. McGillicuddy holding in her arms the After-Clap, in all his morning freshness, his little white fur cap and coat showing off his eyes and hair, so dark, like his mother’s.



The After-Clap gave a spring which he meant to land him in Kettle's arms, but Kettle, bursting into tears, would not take him.

"I k'yarn' take you now, honey," cried Kettle, wiping his eyes, "I'm a goin' to the guardhouse, my lamb, for three days and maybe I never see you no mo'."

The baby seemed to think this might be true, and set up a series of loud shrieks.



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“Do you mean to say as you've tried to enlist?” cried Mrs. McGillicuddy, struggling with the baby and her astonishment and indignation all at once. “The idea of you being a soldier! It beats the band, it does!”

Sergeant Briggs, without giving Kettle time to explain further, marched him off, and Mrs. McGillicuddy went to report to Mrs. Fortescue, while Sergeant McGillicuddy appeared to report to Colonel Fortescue.

“I believe, sir,” said the Sergeant confidentially, “as it's a crooked business about the naygur's wantin' to enlist. Gully and Sergeant Halligan was jokin', but it's mighty risky jokin' with the regulations.”

So thought Sergeant Halligan and Sergeant Gully, when confronted with the Colonel. As they were two of the best sergeants in the regiment, the Colonel satisfied himself with a stern reprimand, which was not entered against them. But having sentenced Kettle to three days in the guardhouse for insolence to Sergeant Briggs, Colonel Fortescue thought it well to let the sentence stand.

Colonel Fortescue, in spite of being the commanding officer at one of the finest cavalry posts in the world, and whose word was law, could yet be made to feel domestic displeasure. The family at once divided itself into two camps, one on the Colonel's side and one on Kettle's. Anita, of course, sided with her father, and declared he had done perfectly right about Kettle, as he did about everything. Sergeant McGillicuddy was also a faithful adherent of the Colonel's in the wordless warfare that prevailed in the commanding officer's house for the three days in which Kettle enjoyed the hospitality of the guardhouse.

“Served the naygur right for sassing a sergeant,” was Sergeant McGillicuddy's view. On the other side was arrayed, of course, Mrs. Fortescue, who outwardly observed an armed neutrality, but who called the Colonel “John” during the entire three days of Kettle's imprisonment. Colonel Fortescue retaliated by calling Mrs. Fortescue “Elizabeth.”

There were frequent references, in the Colonel's hearing, to “Poor Kettle,” and the After-Clap was not rebuked in his insistent demand for “my Kettle, I want my Kettle! Where is my Kettle?”

At intervals, from the time he waked in the morning until Mrs. McGillicuddy put him in his crib at night, the After-Clap was screaming for Kettle, and as the baby was extremely robust, his shrieks and wails for Kettle were clearly audible to the Colonel, sitting grimly in his private office, or at luncheon, or having his tea in the drawing-room. Colonel Fortescue, however, spent most of his time during those three days at the headquarters building or the officers' club. As for Mrs. McGillicuddy, she was openly on the side of Kettle and against the Colonel, and shrewdly surmised exactly what had happened



about the enlistment, and also that Sergeant McGillicuddy was implicated with the other two sergeants in the outrage. Mrs. McGillicuddy boldly propounded this theory to Mrs. Fortescue while the latter was dressing for dinner on the first evening of Kettle's incarceration. The Colonel, in the next room, going through the same process of dressing, could hear every word through the open door.



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“It’s Patrick McGillicuddy that had a hand in it, mum,” said Mrs. McGillicuddy wrathfully. “He’s been takin’ rises out of the naygur, as he calls Kettle, for twenty years, and he seen Sergeant Gully and Sergeant Halligan draggin’ poor Kettle along to the riding hall. I seen Kettle when he run out, and McGillicuddy was a standin’ off, a-laffin’ fit to kill himself, and I know that Gully and Halligan has been jokin’ Kettle and makin’ him believe he has enlisted in the aviation corps and will have to go flyin’, and Kettle’s scared stiff.”

“Poor Kettle,” said Mrs. Fortescue softly, clasping her pearls about her white throat. “It’s been a sad day to all of us, except the Colonel. Of course, I never attempt to criticise Colonel Fortescue’s professional conduct, but I do feel lost without Kettle.”

“Well, mum,” replied Mrs. McGillicuddy, “I haven’t been a sergeant’s wife for twenty years without findin’ out that nobody can’t say a word about the orficers, but I do think, mum, as three days in the guardhouse for poor Kettle, who was bamboozled by Tim Gully and Mike Halligan, is one of the cruelest things a commandin’ orficer ever done. Not that I’m a-criticisin’ the Colonel, mum—I wouldn’t do such a thing for the world.”

“Nor would I,” replied Mrs. Fortescue meekly, and fully conscious of the Colonel’s presence in the next room, shaving himself savagely, “but three days for such a little thing does seem hard.”

Colonel Fortescue ground his teeth and gave himself such a jab with his razor that the blood came.

This subtle persecution of the Colonel went on, with variations, for three whole days.

On the Friday when Kettle’s time was up he was released and his return was hailed with open delight by his partisans, Mrs. Fortescue, Mrs. McGillicuddy and the After-Clap, and with secret relief by the Colonel, Anita and Sergeant McGillicuddy.

Kettle, on reporting to the Colonel, said solemnly, “Kun’l, I ain’t never goin’ ter try an’ enlist no mo’, so help me Gord A’mighty. An’ I ain’t a’goin’ to pay no more ’tention to the chaplain’s sermons, ’cause ’twuz that there chaplain as fust got me in this here mess, cuss him!”

This last was under Kettle’s breath, and the Colonel pretended not to hear.

CHAPTER VII

THE PLEADING EYES OF WOMEN

It was May before the winter loosened its grasp on Fort Blizzard. Once more, the fort was in touch with the outside world for a few months. The mails came regularly and

there were two trains a day at the station, ten miles away. In May Anita had a birthday—her eighteenth.

“You can’t call me a child any longer, daddy,” she said to Colonel Fortescue, on the May morning when she was showered with birthday gifts. Nevertheless, Colonel Fortescue continued to call her a child, but a glance at her reading showed that Anita was very much grown up. She still read piles of books and pamphlets concerning the Philippines and knew all about the stinging and creeping and crawling things that made life hideous in the jungles, the horrors of fever, the merciless heat, and the treacherous Moros who stabbed the sleeping soldiers by night. No word had come from Broussard across the still and sluggish Pacific.



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The chaplain did not fail to remind Anita that it was a Christian act to continue her visits to Mrs. Lawrence, who still remained weak and nerveless and ill, and Anita was ready enough to do so. Mrs. Lawrence never mentioned Broussard's name and, in fact, spoke little at any time. A mental and bodily torpor seemed to possess her, and she was never able to do more than walk feebly, supported by Mrs. McGillicuddy's strong arm, to a bench, sit there for an hour or two, and return to her own two rooms. Occasionally she asked if she should give up her quarters, but as the surgeon and the chaplain and Mrs. McGillicuddy all united in telling Colonel Fortescue that Mrs. Lawrence was really unable to move, the Colonel silently acquiesced in her occupation of the quarters, which were not needed for any one else.

Once or twice a week, Anita would go to see her, and read to her, and take the sewing or knitting out of her languid hand and do it for her. Mrs. Lawrence, who appeared to notice little that went on around her, observed that Anita's eyes always sought the photograph of Broussard on the mantel, but his name was never uttered between them, nor did Mrs. Lawrence ever ask Anita to write another letter.

On Anita's birthday, in the afternoon, she went to see Mrs. Lawrence, ostensibly to carry her some of the fruit and flowers that were so abundant at the Commanding Officer's house, where the great garden was blooming beautifully. Mrs. Lawrence accepted Anita's gifts with more animation than usual, and buried her face in the lilac blossoms. From her lap a letter dropped and Anita picked it up; it was in Broussard's handwriting, which Anita knew. A vivid blush came into Anita's face; however silent she might be about Broussard, her eyes and lips were always eloquent when anything suggested him. Mrs. Lawrence made no comment on the letter and presently Anita went away. The Colonel and Mrs. Fortescue, sitting in the drawing-room at tea, saw her pass the wide window and go into the beautiful walled garden, which was, next her violin, Anita's chief delight. It was a wonderful garden for a couple of years of growth and it had developed amazingly under Anita's hand.

Sergeant McGillicuddy was a good amateur gardener, and at that very moment, wearing a suit of blue overalls, was digging away industriously. The Sergeant had lost a good deal of his cheerfulness in those later days of winter, but the garden seemed to inspire him, as it did Anita. The girl went up to him and the two were in close conference concerning a bed of cowslips the sergeant was making. Through the open window the sunny air floated, drenched with perfume. Anita was laughing at something the Sergeant said;—they had usually been serious enough while working together in the garden.

Presently Anita came into the drawing-room, carrying in her thin, white skirt, as if it were an apron, a great mass of blossoms. Colonel Fortescue held out a letter to her.



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"This was enclosed in a letter to me from Mr. Broussard," said the Colonel.

[Illustration: "This was enclosed in a letter to me from Mr. Broussard," said the Colonel.]

Anita, although eighteen years old that day, acted like a child. She dropped the corners of her skirt and the flowers fell to the floor. One moment she stood like a bird poised for flight, and then taking the letter, tripped out of the room and up the stairs.

Both Colonel and Mrs. Fortescue in the still May afternoon heard her turn the key in the lock of her little rose-colored room.

Mrs. Fortescue gathered up the blossoms, the Colonel with moody eyes looking down.

"Oh, the jealousy of fathers," said Mrs. Fortescue, after a minute. "You think we mothers are jealous, but it is nothing compared with the jealousy of fatherhood. I have already made up my mind to be all graciousness and kindness to Beverley's future wife, but you have already made up your mind to hate your future son-in-law, whoever he may be."

"How can a man love the man who robs him of his child? That's what actually happens," replied Colonel Fortescue.

"Then the only thing you can do," replied Mrs. Fortescue, "is to concentrate all of your love upon your wife, for then you have no other man for a rival."

Colonel Fortescue agreed to this proposition, and also that his objections to Broussard were purely fanciful and that he would contrive to pick flaws in any man to whom Anita was inclined.

"But she thinks and dreams too much about Broussard," said the Colonel. "Probably he looks upon her as a pretty child, just as Conway does."

"One can't control the thoughts and dreams of youth," replied Mrs. Fortescue, "Anita must study the lesson-book of life and love like other women."

"Did you see her face when I gave her the note?" asked Colonel Fortescue.

"You are an old goose," was all the reply Mrs. Fortescue would make to this question.

Locked in her own room, Anita read her precious note. It was very short and perfectly conventional, thanking her for writing to him for Mrs. Lawrence. Broussard knew of Lawrence being among the missing men.



“Lawrence, as you may have heard,” said the letter, “was a playmate of mine in my boyhood and, although he has had hard luck, I have a deep interest in him and his wife and child.”

Then came a sentence that, to Anita, contained a sweet and hidden meaning: “Although Gamechick is no longer mine, I shall always love the horse because of something that happened last Christmas at the music ride.”

Anita was late for dinner that evening, and at the table, as she took her lace handkerchief from the bosom of her little blue evening gown, Broussard’s note came out with the handkerchief, and fell upon the floor. Her father and mother in kindness looked away, but Kettle, with well-meant but indiscreet good will, picked the letter up, saying:



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“Hi! Miss 'Nita, here's your letter you carry in your bosom.”

Colonel Fortescue suddenly grew cross; this thing of having a man's daughter carrying around next her heart a letter from another man is very annoying to a father of Colonel Fortescue's type. And Anita was more tender and devoted than ever, keeping up a brave show of loyalty, although she had already surrendered the citadel.

As the winter at Fort Blizzard was like the frozen regions which the old Goths believed to be the Inferno, so the summer was like a blast from the eternal furnace. The hot winds swept over the arid plains and the sun was more vengeful than the biting cold. The energies of many drooped, and the sergeants grew short with the men. But cheerfulness prevailed at the Commandant's house. In July Beverley Fortescue, named for the fine old Virginia Colonel, Mrs. Fortescue's grandfather, was to come home, in all the glory of his twenty-one years, wearing for the first time the splendid cavalry uniform instead of the grey and gold and black of a military cadet. More than that, he was to be assigned to duty at Fort Blizzard. When Mrs. Fortescue heard this, she trembled a little; it was almost too much of joy; this last crowning gift of fate made her almost afraid. And Beverley was to see, for the first time, the After-Clap, who was so much like Beverley that the Colonel and Mrs. Fortescue could hardly persuade themselves he was their last born, and not their first born.

On the great day, Beverley came. In the soft July evening, at the threshold, stood Mrs. Fortescue, holding by the hand the After-Clap, a sturdy little chap for his two-and-a-half years. The mother was smiling and blushing like a girl. Behind her stood Kettle, his face shining as if it had been varnished, and next him was Sergeant McGillicuddy, who had taught Beverley to ride and to shoot and to skate and to box, and all the manly sports of boyhood. Mrs. McGillicuddy, ruddy and beaming, towered over the little Sergeant.

Colonel Fortescue and Anita stood on the lowest of the stone steps. Presently, a motor whirled up and Beverley stepped out, looking so handsome in his well-fitting civilian clothes, with his new straw hat, in which he felt slightly queer. The Colonel wrung his hand saying:

“Boy! Boy! How glad we are to have you once more!”

Anita covered Beverley's face with kisses, but Mrs. Fortescue stood like a queen, smiling and gracious, to receive her boy's reverence. Beverley caught her in his strong young grasp; she looked so young, so lovely, so full of radiant life, that she seemed like an older Anita. Then Mrs. Fortescue raised the After-Clap and put him in Beverley's arms. Accustomed to much adulation, the After-Clap was, in general, coolly supercilious to strangers, but he seemed much pleased with Beverley's appearance, and called him “Bruvver,” as he had called Broussard, who had been long since forgotten by the After-Clap.



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“What a jolly little rascal!” cried Beverley, whose experience with small children was nil.

The After-Clap returned the compliment, by rapturously hugging Beverley. In fact, they became such chums on the spot that much difficulty was experienced in persuading the After-Clap to go to bed when Mrs. McGillicuddy was ready for him.

There was a joyous dinner. Beverley, like Colonel Fortescue, was surprised to find that Anita was grown up, like other girls of eighteen. Also, that his father was almost as young and handsome as his mother.

“I say, Colonel,” said Beverley, “you’re the handsomest Colonel in the army.”

The Colonel smiled.

“For your age, that is.”

The Colonel scowled.

“Your father’s touchy about his age,” Mrs. Fortescue explained, “and so am I, so please, Beverley, keep away from the unpleasant subject.”

Beverley Fortescue had three months’ leave before taking up his duties as an officer at the post and it was a halcyon time at the Commandant’s house. In spite of the torrid heat, there were parties of pleasure and little dances, and all the round of gaieties that prevail at army posts. The Colonel was proud of his well-set-up stripling, although, of course, a boy could never be of so much value in a family as a girl, according to Colonel Fortescue’s philosophy. With Mrs. Fortescue it was the other way. Dear as was Anita to her, the mother’s heart was triumphant over her soldier son. As for the After-Clap, he frankly repudiated his whole domestic circle, except Kettle, for Beverley, who was as tall and strong as his father and could do many more things amusing to a two-and-half-year-old than a stern and dignified Colonel. Anita and Beverley were as intimate and passionately fond of each other as when they were little playmates. Beverley asked some questions of his mother concerning Anita.

“All the fellows like to dance with her and ride with her, but she treats them all as she does old Conway.”

“Old Conway,” Colonel Fortescue’s aide, was barely turned thirty; but to the twenty-one-year-old Beverley, Conway seemed an aged veteran.

“I can’t understand it,” plaintively responded Mrs. Fortescue. “Sometimes I think Anita has no coquetry in her. Again I think she is the worst type of coquette—she treats all men alike. You remember my writing you about Anita being thrown at the music ride last Christmas Eve, and Broussard jumping his horse over her?”



“I should think so,” answered Beverley. “I wish you could have seen the letter the Colonel wrote me about it. I felt more sorry for what the poor old chap must have suffered than for you, mother.”

“Don’t call your father ‘the poor old chap,’” said Mrs. Fortescue positively. “And don’t make jokes about the After-Clap being the child of his old age. Your father doesn’t like it. It’s perfectly disgusting the way young people now speak of their elders, who are barely middle-aged, as if they were centenarians. Well, I think, and your father thinks, that Anita had a fancy for Broussard. He was a very attractive man. Your father thought him a prodigal with his money, but, of course, some fault must be found with every man who looks at Anita.”



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[Illustration: "Don't call your father 'the poor old chap,'" said Mrs. Fortescue positively.]

"But Anita is so young—a chit, a child."

"She is not quite three years younger than you," replied Mrs. Fortescue. "This notion that Anita is a child and must be treated as such is ridiculous. Why, when I was Anita's age, I had had a dozen love affairs."

"Did no one ever tell you, mother, that you are a born coquette, and you will be coquettish at ninety, if you live to bless us so long?"

Mrs. Fortescue laughed the soft, musical laugh that was a part of her armory of charms, and made no reply.

At dinner that night Beverley suddenly began to ask questions about Broussard, praising his horsemanship, but wanting to know what kind of a fellow he was. The Colonel spoke guardedly and damned Broussard with faint praise, as he would any man whom he thought likely to rob him of his one ewe lamb; yet the Colonel thought himself a just man.

The eloquent blood leaped into Anita's cheeks, and there was something like resentment in her eyes at the Colonel's cool commendation. After dinner she took Beverley into the garden, and the brother and sister walked up and down in the moonlight, and Anita, thinking she was keeping her secret, revealed everything to Beverley. Broussard was the finest young officer, the most beautiful horseman, he could sing Koerner's Battle Hymn as no one else could, and when she played a violin obligato to his songs of love——

Anita stopped short, and turned her long-lashed eyes full on Beverley.

"Daddy doesn't do justice to Mr. Broussard," she said, "but you ought to have seen the way he grasped Mr. Broussard's hands after the music ride."

Colonel and Mrs. Fortescue, sitting in the cool, dim drawing-room, heard Beverley's laughter floating in from the garden. Beverley saw the case at a glance.

The torrid summer slipped by, and in November it was winter again, and the earth was snowbound once more. In all those months Mrs. Lawrence remained, feeble and nerveless, in the two little rooms she was still permitted to occupy. By that time she was a shadow. Mrs. McGillicuddy was more kind than ever to her, and Sergeant McGillicuddy grew more sombre every day, thinking that his words had brought Lawrence to ruin and his unfortunate wife close to the boundaries of the far country. The chaplain took the Sergeant in hand, and so did the Colonel, but the Sergeant, who had a tender heart under his well-fitting uniform, was not a happy man. Anita went regularly to see Mrs. Lawrence, and as the young are appalled at the thought of life



going out, she watched with palpitating fear what seemed a steady journey toward the land where spirits dwell. But always on those visits to the woman who seemed slipping from life into the great ocean of forgetfulness, there was a thrill of joy for Anita; she could see Broussard's picture. Young and imaginative souls live and thrive on very little.



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The introspective life that Anita led was strongly expressed in her music. Never had Neroda a pupil who was willing to work so hard as Anita, and the result charmed him. On this afternoon Anita was at her lesson in the great drawing-room, the red sunset pouring in through the long windows and flooding the room with crimson lights and purple shadows. Anita, wearing a little, nun-like black gown that outlined her slim figure, played, with wonderful fire and finish, a wild and gorgeous Hungarian dance by Brahms.

There was a delicate melody winding through all of the rich harmonies, as it ran up the scale, like a bird soaring into the blue sky, and then descended with splendid double notes, into the sombre and passionate G string, the string that touches the soul. It grew more of a miracle to Neroda than ever to watch Anita's slender bow-arm flashing back and forth, drawing out, with amazing force, the soul of the violin, her slender figure erect and poised high, vibrating with the strings, and her eyes darkening and lightening as the music grew deeply passionate or brilliantly gay. When she finished, and stood, smiling and triumphant, still holding the violin and bow, Neroda said to her:

"Are you not tired, Signorina?"

"Not a bit," cried Anita. "I feel that I could play as long as you did, in the days of which you told me when you first came to America and would play the violin all night long for dancers on the East Side in New York."

"I believe you could, almost," replied Neroda, smiling. "I, who had been a concert master in Italy, was only too glad to get three dollars for fiddling from eight in the evening until three in the morning; but they were happy nights, because I was young and strong and full of hope and loved my fiddle. Sometimes, when I am leading the band in my fine uniform, I long to take the instrument away from one of the bandsmen and play it as I did in those days, without any baton to hold me back; but the violin is a man's instrument and requires much strength. Now, where, Signorina, in your girlish arms and little hands, did you get such strength?"

"It is here," said Anita, smiling and tapping her breast. "I have a strong heart, my blood circulates well, and I am not afraid of the violin, like most girls. I am its master, and it shall do my will."

At that she tapped her violin sharply with the bow, saying to it:

"Do you hear me? You are my slave, and I shall make you do what I wish you to do. If I wish you to talk Brahms, you shall talk Brahms; if I wish you to be sad, I will make you sad with funeral marches. You shall speak Italian, German, French or English, as I tell you."

Neroda laughed with delight. He loved the imaginative nature of the girl, who treated her violin as if it were a living thing, and whispered her secrets into the ear of her riding horse, and told love stories to her birds.



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“In Italy,” said Neroda, “a fiddler, if he really knows how to play dance music, can dance as well as play. In those nights on the East Side, in New York, when I played for the workmen and working girls in their cheap finery, I went among the dancers myself while I played, and they always gave me a round of applause and danced harder themselves.”

Anita suddenly swept the strings with her bow and dashed into another Hungarian dance of Brahms, herself taking pretty dancing steps and pirouetting as she played, sinking upon one knee and then rising, the toe of her little slipper pointing skyward. She felt an unaccountable gaiety of heart that day. Why, she knew not, only that some strong current of emotion inspired her arms, her hands, her little, twinkling feet, as she danced the length of the drawing-room and back again. Suddenly the music stopped with a crash. She looked up and saw Broussard standing in the door.

“Thank you, thank you!” said Broussard, advancing and bowing and smiling. “I have seen it all. When you dance and play at the same time, you can master the heart of a man, as well as that of a violin.”

Anita stood still for a moment, thrilled with the shock of joy at seeing Broussard. She laid her violin and bow down on the piano, and gave him her hand, which trembled in his. Broussard’s first thought was that Anita was grown into a woman. Anita’s first glance at Broussard showed her that he was thin and sallow, and that his clothes hung loosely upon him, and that, in spite of his smile and playful words, his mind was not at ease.

Neroda, standing near, saw the glow in the eyes of Anita and Broussard, and as they had evidently forgotten his existence, he slipped, without a word, out of the room. The next moment Colonel Fortescue walked in.

All at once, Anita and Broussard assumed strictly conventional attitudes; poetry became prose, music became silence. Broussard hastened to explain his presence, after exchanging greetings with Colonel Fortescue.

“I came on private business, sir,” he said, “very important. Not finding you at the headquarters building, I ventured to come to your house, as I wished to see you immediately.”

“Will you come into my office?” said the Colonel, in a business-like voice, which seemed to reduce Anita to the age of the After-Clap, and classify Broussard with the poker that stood by the fireplace.

The two men crossed the hall and entered the private office and sat down. Then Colonel Fortescue noticed that Broussard looked haggard and worn, and his dark skin



had turned darker. His face and manner assumed a gravity which made Colonel Fortescue feel that Broussard's errand was not one of pleasure.

"I am on sick leave," said Broussard. "We were in the jungles eight months and every one of us had fever. I was the last to come down, and I had a bad case. The doctors sent me home for three months, and when I go back—for I didn't mean to let the infernal climate out there get the better of me—I shall be in Guam. That's paradise compared with the interior."



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“So I know,” answered the Colonel, remembering the snakes and mosquitoes and the flies and the beetles and the hideous swamps and sickening forests, the slime, the mud, the marshes and all the horrors of the tropics.

“I should like to spend my leave at Fort Blizzard,” Broussard continued, “I thought the climate here was what I needed.”

Colonel Fortescue nodded courteously; nobody could stay at Fort Blizzard without the permission of the C. O. But Broussard felt that the Colonel saw through him and beyond him. As Colonel Fortescue would not encourage him by so much as a word, Broussard kept on:

“In the Philippines, I heard some news that was enough to kill a well man, much less a man just out of jungle fever. You perhaps remember, sir, the man Lawrence, who, I heard in the Philippines, had deserted?”

“He was supposed to have deserted,” corrected the Colonel, who was always the soul of accuracy.

He glanced at Broussard’s face and saw there deep agitation and distress.

“Lawrence has come back,” continued Broussard.

Then he stopped, as if unable to keep on, and taking out his handkerchief, wiped away drops upon his forehead, so deadly white under his black hair.

Colonel Fortescue remained silent. He saw that Broussard had something to tell that racked his soul. Broussard sighed heavily, and after a pause spoke again:

“I found Lawrence in San Francisco; he was trying to work his way back to Fort Blizzard. I gave him the money to come and came here with him. He wishes to give himself up and is willing to take his punishment. He got frightened at striking McGillicuddy and deserted.”

“Do I understand that Lawrence was returning voluntarily?” asked the Colonel.

“Yes, sir—voluntarily. He saw my arrival in the San Francisco newspapers and came straight to my hotel. If I ever saw a man crazy with remorse, it was Lawrence. His sobs and cries were terrible to hear. He knew nothing of his wife and child, and that, too, was helping to drive him to madness.”

“His wife and child are still here,” said Colonel Fortescue. “Lawrence’s disappearance has nearly killed his wife; that’s always the way with these faithful souls who do no wrong themselves. But somebody else always does wrong enough for both. Where is Lawrence now?”



“At the block house, a mile away,” replied Broussard. “I wished to see you before Lawrence gives himself up.”

Broussard’s strange agitation was increasing. Colonel Fortescue took up a newspaper and glanced at it, to give Broussard a chance to recover himself. In a minute or two Broussard managed to speak calmly.

“You remember, sir,” he said, “that I asked you to take my word there was nothing wrong in my association with Lawrence and his wife.”

“I remember quite well,” answered Colonel Fortescue, “I never doubted your word.”



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“Thank you,” said Broussard. Once more he wiped the cold drops from his forehead, and continued in a low voice, tremulous and often broken.

“I told you that Lawrence and I had been playmates in our boyhood, although he is much older than I. Sir, Lawrence is my half-brother—the son of my mother. She was an angel on earth, and she is now an angel in Heaven. If heavenly spirits can suffer, my mother suffers this day that her son should have deserted from his duty.”

Never had Colonel Fortescue felt greater pity for a man than for Broussard then. The shame of confessing that his mother’s son had forfeited his honor was like death itself to Broussard.

“But there is joy in Heaven over a penitent sinner,” said Colonel Fortescue, who believed in God, and was neither afraid nor ashamed to say so.

Broussard bowed his head.

“My mother—God bless her—was the very spirit of honor. She was the daughter of an officer. When I was a little chap and said I wanted to be a soldier, she would tell me the stories of the Spartan mothers, who had their sons return with their shields or on them. Thank God, she was taken away before dishonor fell upon her eldest son. She thought him dead, and so did I, until last January, when Lawrence told me, the night before I left this post, who he really was. When I met him in San Francisco I told him I would come with him here to give himself up, that I would acknowledge him for my half-brother, that I would sit by him at his court-martial and go to the door of the military prison with him. He begged me to keep our relationship secret for the sake of our mother’s memory.”

Colonel Fortescue held out his hand, and grasped that of Broussard.

“You speak like a man,” he said, “but Lawrence is right in keeping the relationship a secret, and it shows that he understands the height from which he has fallen. Does his wife know of the relationship?”

“Yes, sir,” Broussard replied. “I thought it best to tell her. But she kept the secret well. My brother’s wife is worthy of my mother.”

“There are many heroic women in the world,” said Colonel Fortescue.

“True,” answered Broussard. “My sister-in-law was glad when my brother enlisted. She said it was a good thing for him, and he undoubtedly did better at this post than he had done for a long time. And his wife, who was born and bred to luxury, stood by my brother and tried to save him. She worked and slaved for him harder than any private’s wife I ever saw. She never uttered a reproach to him. Each day she mounted a Calvary. I could kiss the hem of that woman’s gown, in reverence for her.”



“So could I,” said Colonel Fortescue.

“Of course,” continued Broussard, “I told her and wrote her that neither she nor her child should ever suffer. I have sent her money—all that was needed, as I have something besides my pay.”

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The Colonel, recalling the motors, the oriental rugs, the grand piano, and other articles *de luxe*, which Broussard had once possessed, thought Broussard had a trifle too much beside his pay.

"I don't think she has had much use for money since her husband deserted," said Colonel Fortescue. "She has been constantly ill. My wife and daughter and the other ladies at the post have done everything possible for her, and Sergeant McGillicuddy took the boy. McGillicuddy feels himself responsible for Lawrence running away. He said something exasperating to Lawrence, who struck him in a fit of rage, and then ran away."

"So my sister-in-law wrote, or rather Miss Fortescue wrote for her."

"The army is the place for good hearts," said the Colonel, well knowing what he was talking about.

As Colonel Fortescue spoke, a man was seen, in the fast falling dusk, to pass the window. The next moment a tap came at the door, and when Colonel Fortescue answered, the door opened and Lawrence walked in.

The Colonel, who had watched Lawrence closely, saw a subtle change in him. He held his head up, and his face, always handsome, had lost the dissipated, reckless look that dissipated and reckless men readily acquire. His hair and mustache, which a year before had been coal black, were now quite grey; he seemed another man than he had once been. He saluted the Colonel, and said quietly:

"I have come, sir, to give myself up—I am the man, John Lawrence, who struck Sergeant McGillicuddy last January, and deserted."

"You were a great fool," replied the Colonel, "I think it was a clear case of a fool's panic."

"All I have to say, sir," said Lawrence, after a moment, "is, that I had no intention of deserting until I struck the Sergeant and got frightened. And I've been trying to get back for the last two months. Mr. Broussard can tell you all about it."

"Mr. Broussard has told me all about it," said the Colonel. "Consider yourself under arrest until nine o'clock tomorrow morning, when you will report at the headquarters building. Meanwhile, go to your wife; she is a million times too good for you."

"I know it, sir," replied Lawrence.

"And my wife is a million times too good for me," added the Colonel, reflectively.

Lawrence went out and Broussard rose to go.



“You have not asked me to consider this talk as confidential,” said the Colonel, “nevertheless, I shall so consider it. As your Colonel, I advise and require that you should say nothing about Lawrence’s relationship to you. This much is due your mother’s memory.”

“Thank you, sir,” replied Broussard, a great load lifted from his heart.



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Broussard did not wish to go at once to Mrs. Lawrence; she should have one hour alone with her husband. Nor did he care to go to the officers' club at that moment. He walked toward the quarters of the non-commissioned officers, scarcely noticing where his steps led. As he passed the McGillicuddy quarters, the door opened, and little Ronald ran out bareheaded. He recognized Broussard, and Broussard, feeling strongly and strangely the call of the blood, took the boy in his arms and covered his little face with kisses much to the lad's surprise, and sent him to the house. The next minute, Broussard came face to face with Sergeant McGillicuddy.

The Sergeant, who did not often smile in those days, smiled when he saw Broussard.

"But, Mr. Broussard, you don't look quite fit," said the Sergeant. "The Philippines, drat 'em, ain't good for the complexion."

"I know I look like the devil," replied Broussard, "but I'm on sick leave and I hope Fort Blizzard is the right kind of a climate for me. By the way, the man Lawrence, who deserted in January, has come back. We travelled from San Francisco together. He has already given himself up—voluntarily, you know."

In the gloom of the November twilight Broussard could not see the Sergeant's face clearly. There was a bench close by, on the edge of the asphalt walk, and the Sergeant dropped rather than sat upon it.

"Excuse me, sir," he said to Broussard, "but the news you give me takes all my nerve away, and yet it's the best news I ever heard in my life. You know, sir, it was some words of mine—and God knows I never meant to harm Lawrence—that made him strike me, and then he got scared and——"

"I know all about it," replied Broussard, sitting down on the bench by the Sergeant. "Of course, you felt pretty bad about it. Any man would."

Something between a sob and a groan burst from the Sergeant.

"I've worn chevrons for twenty-seven years, sir," he said. "I was made a sergeant when I was twenty-five. I've handled all sorts of men and licked 'em into shape and I ain't got it on my conscience as I ever tried to make a man's lot any harder, or to discourage him, and I never spoke an insultin' word to a soldier in my life, and I hope I'll be called to report to the Great Commander before I do. But I said something chaffin'-like to that poor devil and he struck me, and I didn't hit him back—I didn't hit him back, thank God, nor threaten to report him. But I had to tell the truth to the Colonel and take part of the blame on myself."

"That's right," answered Broussard with deep feeling. The Sergeant little knew how great a stake Broussard had in the business.



“And the chaplain, he seen something was wrong with me and so did Missis McGillicuddy—she’s a soldier, sir, is Missis McGillicuddy. I made a clean breast of it to the chaplain and he helped me a lot. I’ve been goin’ to church on Sundays ever since I was married—to tell you the truth, sir, Missis McGillicuddy marched me off every Sunday without askin’ me if it was agreeable, any more than she’d ask Ignatius or Aloysius. But since my trouble, I’ve gone of my own will, and I’ve headed the prayin’ squad, I can tell you, Mr. Broussard.”



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“And you took good care of the boy, you and Mrs. McGillicuddy,” said Broussard, who had learned of it from the letter written by Anita at Mrs. Lawrence’s request. The Sergeant took off his cap for a moment, baring his grey head to the biting cold.

“The best we could, so help me God. There wasn’t nothin’ me and Missis McGillicuddy could do for the kid as we didn’t do. The chaplain told us we done too much, we was over-indulgent to the boy. But we taught him to do right, although we give him better food and better clothes than any of our own eight children ever had, and now——”

The Sergeant stood in silence for a moment, his cap once more in his hand, his head bowed. Broussard knew he was giving thanks.

Broussard, under cover of the darkness, took his way to the quarters which Mrs. Lawrence had never left. He knocked and, receiving no answer, entered the narrow passage-way and walked into the little sitting-room. Lawrence lay back in the arm chair in which his wife had spent so many hours of helpless misery. His face was paler than ever and his lank hair lay damp upon his forehead. Mrs. Lawrence, who had been suffering from the cruel malady known as a shamed and broken heart, sat by her husband, speaking words of cheer and tenderness. As Broussard entered she rose to her feet with new energy, no longer tottering as she walked, and placed both arms about Broussard’s neck.

“Oh, my brother! The best of brothers,” she cried and could say no more for her tears.

Presently they were sitting together, all externally calm, but all filled with a tense emotion.

“Try to persuade her,” said Lawrence to Broussard, “to go away before the court-martial sits. It will be too much for her.”

Mrs. Lawrence turned her dark eyes, once tragic but now brimming with light, full on Broussard. Broussard said to Lawrence:

“These angelic women are very obstinate.”

“Would your mother, of whom my husband has told me so much, go away if she were in my place?”

Both Broussard and Lawrence remained silent.

“Then,” said Mrs. Lawrence, “can you blame me if I act as your mother would act?”

Broussard took her hand and kissed it; the marks of toil upon it went to his soul.

“But the boy must be sent away,” cried Lawrence.



“Yes, he may go,” replied Mrs. Lawrence, “but I shall stay.”

It was nearly seven o'clock, the hour for dinner at the officers' club, before Broussard left the Lawrences' quarters. All the men at the club were delighted to see Broussard, and all of them told him he looked seedy and every one who had served in the Philippines and had caught the jungle fever proposed a different regimen for him, but all agreed that Fort Blizzard was a good place to recuperate and that the “old man,” as the commanding officer is always called, was rather a decent fellow, and might let him stay, and then they plunged into

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garrison news and gossip. Broussard was thoroughly glad to be back once more at the handsome mess table, with the bright faces of the subalterns around him and the cheery talk and honest laughter, but his heart was full of other things—Anita Fortescue, for instance, and Lawrence and his wife and the little boy. Some questions were asked him about Lawrence. Broussard replied briefly that he found the man in San Francisco trying to get back to Fort Blizzard; he wanted to give himself up at the scene of his crime and Broussard had paid for his railway ticket.

“And brought him with you to keep him from getting away,” said Conway, “very judicious thing to do with men like Lawrence.”

“I think he would have given himself up anyway,” Broussard replied quietly.

Military justice is short and simple and severe. Within forty-eight hours the court-martial sat. As Lawrence marched into the courtroom between two soldiers, guarding him, his wife, dressed in black, as always, and with Mrs. McGillicuddy sitting near her, rose from her seat and took another one as close to her husband as she could get and smiled encouragement at him. Lawrence, watching her tender gaze, burst into tears.

It was all done very quickly. Sergeant McGillicuddy was one of the two witnesses, Broussard being the other. The Sergeant testified as if he were the criminal and not Lawrence. Broussard was the second witness and merely told of Lawrence coming to him in San Francisco, saying he wished to get to Fort Blizzard and give himself up. He could have done so at San Francisco but he wanted to see his wife and child and believed he would get more mercy at Fort Blizzard than any where else.

Then the prisoner was called to tell his story. He did it quietly and in a few words. He had no thought of deserting until he struck the Sergeant. Then he was frightened and ran away and, making the railway station, hid in a freight car and got away. He worked his way East, and found employment as a miner and was earning good wages, but his conscience troubled him, especially after he received a letter from his wife. He had got as far as San Francisco, which took all his savings, when he saw Mr. Broussard’s name in the newspapers and went to see him. He asked the mercy of the court.

The court was merciful, and gave him the shortest possible prison sentence, to be served out at the military prison of Fort Blizzard. All the officers kept their eyes turned from the pale woman in black, sitting close to the prisoner. They wished to do justice and not to be turned from it by a woman’s pleading eyes.



CHAPTER VIII

LOVE, THE CONQUEROR

Broussard meant to spend his three months' leave in the pursuit of happiness at Fort Blizzard, where he could see Anita every day if he wanted—and he always wanted to see Anita. She was now nearing her nineteenth birthday and could hardly be considered the infant which Colonel Fortescue continued to proclaim her to be.



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The day after Broussard's arrival was Sunday and on Sunday afternoons. Broussard knew he should find Anita at home. It was the pleasant custom in the C. O.'s house for Mrs. Fortescue to receive the young officers, for whom she always had a tender spot in her heart. Broussard was one of the later arrivals. Already through the great windows the blue peaks of ice were seen, touched with a moment's golden glory from the setting sun, and the purple shadows were softly descending upon the snow-white world.

The first member of the Fortescue household who met Broussard gave him a rapturous greeting. This was Kettle, who opened the massive doors to visitors.

"Hi! Mr. Broussard, I cert'ny is glad to see you, and Miss 'Nita, she is right heah in the drawin'-room, and I spect she jump fer joy when she see you!" shouted Kettle, who was a child of nature and spoke the truth as he saw it.

"And I'm glad enough to get back to snow and ice after snakes and mosquitoes and Moros," replied Broussard.

Immediately a small financial transaction passed between Broussard and Kettle, accompanied with the usual wink from Broussard and grin from Kettle.

"She doan' take no notice of none of 'em," whispered Kettle confidentially, "she jes' smile at 'em all and goes 'long thinkin' about you!"

This was most encouraging and Broussard considered it well worth a quarter.

As he entered the drawing-room, bright with a glowing wood fire, Anita, who was entrenched behind a little tea table, rose to greet him. She wore a little white gown and like another white gown of hers it had a train—Anita was very anxious to appear as old as possible. As Broussard spoke to Mrs. Fortescue, who received him with her usual graceful cordiality, they could hear from the plaza the band playing the solemn hymn which precedes the retreat on Sunday afternoons. Suddenly the sunset gun roared out, showing that the flag was descending from the flagstaff. At once, every one in the room rose and stood respectfully at attention until the flag came down. Broussard, in the friendly shadow of the tea table, held on a moment to Anita's hand. She looked straight away from Broussard, her red lips smiling at an infatuated second lieutenant on the other side of her, but her cheeks, already of a delicate rose color, hung out the scarlet flag which means, in love, a surrender. Broussard even felt a faint returning pressure of the fingers, so well screened that only they themselves knew of the meeting of the hands.

Then they all sat down again and the pleasant talk began once more, Anita taking her part with a subdued current of gaiety unusual in her, for, as Mrs. Fortescue was essentially L'Allegro, so Anita was by nature, Il Penseroso.



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Once more, when the color-sergeant brought the flag in, and placed it in a corner of the fine drawing-room, all present stood up; then there was much merry chatter and tea and chaff and that universal kindness which seems to develop around a friendly tea table. One thing surprised Broussard—not only that Anita appeared quite grown up but that she could talk of many things of which he had never before heard her speak. As for the Philippines, she had all the lore about them at her finger tips. Broussard, watching her out of the tail of his eye, saw that she was no longer the adorable child, who lived with her birds and her violin, but an adorable woman, who had learned to think and feel and speak as a woman. How was it that she had read so many books on the Philippines?

“When did you begin your study of the Philippines?” asked the wily Broussard.

“Only since January,” answered Anita; and realizing that she had unconsciously revealed a great secret she lowered her lashes and turned her violet eyes away from Broussard.

That night, over his last cigar in his room at the officers’ club, Broussard began to plan a regular campaign for Anita against Colonel Fortescue. But ever in the midst of it would come those sweet inadvertent words of Anita’s and Broussard would fall into a delicious reverie with which Colonel Fortescue had no part. But then Broussard would come back to the real business of the matter—outgeneralling Colonel Fortescue—for everybody knew how devoted Anita was to her father and Broussard considered the C. O. as a lion in his path. Of course, the old curmudgeon, as Broussard in his own mind called the Colonel, would rake up a lot of imaginary objections—he always was a martinet, and would be a stiff proposition to master in the present emergency. Broussard was tolerably certain of Mrs. Fortescue’s assistance, who was an open and confessed sentimentalist, and was generally understood to be the guardian angel of all the love affairs at Fort Blizzard. Beverley Fortescue might be reckoned as a neutral, being himself in the toils of Sally Harlow, who was Anita’s age. Then, Kettle and the After-Clap could be reckoned upon as auxiliaries—Broussard swore at himself for not remembering the After-Clap’s existence that afternoon; Anita was ridiculously fond of the little chap.

But Colonel Fortescue would be a hard nut to crack—Broussard threw the stump of his cigar into the fire and thought all fathers of adorable daughters highly undesirable persons. After long and hard thinking Broussard concluded to begin at once an earnest and devoted courtship of Colonel Fortescue as the best way to win Anita.

“Because I’ll have to court the old fellow anyhow, cuss him!” was Broussard’s inner belief. “Anita will expect any man she marries to be as much in love with the Colonel as she is—so here goes!”

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The very next morning Broussard began his open attentions to the Colonel and his secret wooing of Anita. He had plenty of opportunities for both. It was easy enough to see Anita every day. Often they rode together in the gay riding parties that were among the constant amusements of the young things at the post. Then, there was the weekly dance in the great ball-room and many little dances and dinners, and Broussard always contrived to be with Anita the best part of the evening. He was always willing to sing and Anita was always ready to play the violin obligatos for him. Broussard developed wonderful knowledge of song birds and entirely abandoned game chickens, and was astonishingly regular in his attendance at the chapel, which induced Anita to think him a model of Christian piety. If Broussard had been a conceited man he would have seen that Anita's heart was his long before he asked for it; but being a modest fellow and thinking Anita was but a little lower than the angels, Broussard paid her the delicate and tender court which women love so well.

The regimen of love and leisure did wonders for Broussard. His thin face filled up, his color returned, he was soon able to dance and ride and shoot with the best of his comrades. He did not forget the man in the military prison or the wife that watched and waited and prayed and hoped. But there was reason to hope: Lawrence was, from the beginning, a model prisoner, and the chaplain, who had lost, in the course of years, some of his confidence in repentance, began once more to believe that it was possible to regenerate a man's soul. Most prisoners are a trifle too ready to accept the theory of the forgiveness of sins. Not so Lawrence. Often, he had paroxysms of despair, accusing himself wildly and doubting whether the good God could forgive so evil a sinner as he. Sometimes, he would refuse to see his wife, declaring he was not fit for her to speak to; again, he would weep and ask for a sight of his child, now far away and in good hands. All these things, and more, the chaplain knew, from long experience, meant that Lawrence's soul was struggling toward the light. Regularly Broussard went to see him at the prison and the two men, the high-minded officer and the disgraced private, were drawn together by the secret bond between them. Often, they talked in whispers of their dead mother and Broussard would say to Lawrence:

"Our mother's spirit and your wife's love ought to save you."

Another visitor Lawrence had was Sergeant McGillicuddy. The Sergeant's merciful soul could not accept the chaplain's theory that the blow provoked by McGillicuddy had been Lawrence's salvation.

"I never knew a man who was helped by being a deserter, sir," was the Sergeant's answer to the chaplain's kindly sophism, "but Lawrence is a penitent man—that I see with my own eyes. I don't need no chaplain to tell me that, sir."

Meanwhile, Broussard kept up a steady courtship of Colonel Fortescue. Whatever views the Colonel advanced, Broussard promptly endorsed. He gave up cock fighting, motors, superfluous clothes and high-priced horses, and, if his word could be taken for

it, he had adopted Spartan tastes and meant to stick to them. Colonel Fortescue rated Broussard's newly-acquired taste for the simple life at its true value, and was sometimes a trifle sardonic over it.



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"I wish," said Colonel Fortescue savagely one night in his office, where he always smoked his last cigar, Mrs. Fortescue sitting by, "I wish Broussard would let up a little in his attention to me. I know exactly what it means and it is getting to be an awful nuisance."

"Cheer up," answered Mrs. Fortescue encouragingly, "he'll let up on his devotion to you as soon as he marries Anita—for I have seen ever since the night of the music ride that Anita has a secret preference for him, and it's very natural—Broussard is an attractive man."

"Can't see it," growled the Colonel.

"If you would just limber up a little and not be so stiff with him," urged Mrs. Fortescue, "let him see he can have Anita."

"How can I limber up and tell him he can have Anita?" roared the Colonel. "The fellow hasn't asked me for Anita."

"He's asking you all the time," answered Mrs. Fortescue, smiling.

Colonel Fortescue looked up at her with sombre eyes. He had seen Anita become the target for the flashing eyes of junior officers. He realized that Mrs. Fortescue, woman-like, did not share and could not understand the pangs of his soul at the thought of parting with Anita. He had often observed that mothers willingly gave their daughters in marriage, but he had never seen a father give up his daughter cheerfully to another man. Mrs. Fortescue saw something of this in Colonel Fortescue's face and leaned her cheek against his.

"Dear," she said, "I believe most fathers suffer as you do at the thought of giving up a daughter and some day I shall suffer the same at giving up my son to another woman. So, after all, since our children will take on a new love, we must return to our honeymoon days and not let anything matter so long as we are together. Then, the After-Clap—I always feel so ridiculously young whenever I look at that baby."

At this the Colonel's heart was soothed and he did not hate Broussard quite so much.

There was, however, no let-up in Broussard's ardent wooing of the Colonel, who took it a trifle more graciously. One afternoon, late in December, Broussard, passing the headquarters building, saw Colonel Fortescue's orderly holding the bridle reins of Gamechick, who was saddled. Broussard was in his riding clothes and was himself waiting for the horse lent him for the afternoon by a brother officer. He stopped and began to pat Gamechick's beautiful neck and the horse, who was, like all intelligent horses, a sentimentalist, rubbed his nose against Broussard's head, and said, as plainly as a horse can say:



“Dear master, I love you still.”

Colonel Fortescue, coming out of the gate, saw Broussard, and his heart softened as he recalled the last time he had seen Broussard riding Gamechick. It was now nearly a year ago.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Broussard,” said the Colonel, “I see you are dressed for riding. Perhaps you would like to ride that old charger again; if so, I will send for my own horse. Gamechick belongs to my daughter and I only ride him to keep him in condition, because sometimes she is a little lazy about exercising him.”



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“Ladies are seldom judicious with horses,” answered Broussard, agreeing as always with Colonel Fortescue. “I shall be glad to ride the old horse once more, and thank you very much.”

In a few minutes, the Colonel’s own horse was brought and the two men, mounting, rode off and away from the post for an hour’s brisk ride in the late winter afternoon.

Broussard, whose tongue was usually frozen to the roof of his mouth when he was in the Colonel’s presence, felt a sudden sense of freedom and talked naturally and therefore intelligently. His description of military affairs in the East was wonderfully illuminating, and the Colonel plied him with questions. They were so interested in their talk that they reached the spur of the mountain ranges before they knew it. The crisp air had got into their blood and into that of their horses, which took the mountain road sharply, and at an eager trot. They had climbed a good mile along the steep winding road, the snow under their feet frozen as hard as stone, the rocks ice-coated, and the fir trees like great trees of crystal. Gamechick was so sure-footed that Broussard gave him the reins but Colonel Fortescue watched his horse carefully.

Ahead of them was a sudden turn in the road under the great overhanging cliff, and on it, a magnificent fir tree reared itself, glittering with icicles, in the rose-red light of the sunset.

“Look,” said Colonel Fortescue, pointing to the tree. “Was there ever anything more beautiful?”

As the words left his lips he saw, and Broussard saw, a huge boulder suddenly start down the mountain side and strike like a cannon ball the splendid tree. There was a fearful breaking and splintering and all at once it was as if the cliff crumbled and trees and boulders and ice and snow came thundering and crashing down into the roadway. One moment the crystal air had been so still that the click of the iron hoofs of their horses seemed to be the only sound in the world. The next minute the roar of breaking trees and falling rocks echoed like an earthquake and a white cloud of misty snow and flying icicles hid the steel-blue heavens.

It was done in such a fragment and flash of time that Broussard hardly knew what had happened. He found himself standing on his feet, entangled in the frozen branches of a fir tree. A little way off he heard Gamechick, whinnying with fear, while under a fallen boulder Colonel Fortescue’s horse lay, his neck broken. Close by Colonel Fortescue lay stark upon the ground. Broussard ran to him; he was lying upon his back and said as coolly as if on dress parade:

“I had a pretty close shave, but I don’t think I’m hurt, except my ankle.”



Broussard, having had experience with injured men, thumped and punched the Colonel only to find that he was not injured in any way except the broken ankle; but a man with a broken ankle, six miles away from the fort, with night coming on, and the thermometer below zero, presents problems.



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“What a pity neither of us has a pistol,” said Colonel Fortescue, when Broussard had got him up from the frozen earth and arranged a rude seat from the branches of the fir tree for him. “We could kill my poor horse and end his sufferings.”

“He’s already dead, thank God,” replied Broussard, going over and looking at the horse, lying as still and helpless as the rock that lay upon his neck. Gamechick, the broken rein hanging upon his neck, stood trembling and snorting with terror.

“I think you had better ride back to the post and get help,” said Colonel Fortescue.

Broussard walked toward Gamechick, but the horse, stricken with panic, backed away and before Broussard could catch him, he whirled about wildly and galloped down the mountain road at breakneck speed. The sound of his iron hoofs pounding the icy road as he fled, driven by fear and anguish, cut the silence like a knife. The two men listened to the clear metallic sound borne upon the clear atmosphere by the winter wind.

“He’s a good messenger,” said Broussard, “he is making straight for the post.”

“If he gets there before he breaks his neck,” replied the Colonel coolly, taking out his cigar case and striking a light.

Broussard listened attentively until the last echo had died away in the distance.

“He has got down all right and is now on the open road, and will get to the fort in thirty minutes,” he said.

Then Broussard, gathering the broken branches of the fir tree, made a fire which not only warmed them, but the blue smoke curling upward was a signal for those who would come to search for them. He took the saddle and blanket from the dead horse and arranged a comfortable seat for the Colonel, who declared that a broken ankle was nothing; but his face was growing pale as he spoke.

“You remember,” he said to Broussard, “that story about General Moreau, something more than a hundred years ago, who smoked a cigar while the surgeons were cutting off his leg.”

“Yes, sir,” replied Broussard. “You are not as badly off as General Moreau, and I think I can help you, sir.” Broussard proceeded to take off the Colonel’s boot and stocking. He rubbed the broken ankle with snow and then, with his handkerchief and a splinter of wood, made a bandage and splints, as soldiers are taught to do.

Then Broussard accepted the cigar offered him by the Colonel, and smoked vigorously. A lieutenant does not lead the conversation with a Colonel, and so Broussard said nothing more and devoted himself to keeping the fire going.



Colonel Fortescue bore the pain, which was extreme, in grim silence, but Broussard noticed that he stopped smoking and threw away his cigar. It could not soothe him as it did General Moreau. Broussard immediately threw away his cigar, too, which annoyed the Colonel.

“Why don’t you keep on smoking?” asked the Colonel tartly.



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“Oh, I don’t care about it particularly,” shamelessly answered Broussard, who was an inveterate smoker.

“When we got out of tobacco in the jungle I kept the men quiet by singing the old song ‘Twas Off the Blue Canaries I Smoked My Last Cigar.’”

“Music has always had a soothing influence over me,” said Colonel Fortescue, after a moment. “Suppose you sing that song. It may help this infernal ankle of mine.”

Broussard obeyed orders immediately, and the old song was sung with all the feeling that Broussard could infuse into his fine, rich voice. When it was over, the Colonel said sternly:

“Sing another song. Keep on singing until I tell you to quit.”

Broussard, being a sly dog, did not sing any of the modern songs that he was wont to troll out at the club, or on the march, but chose for his second number a song that subalterns sang to pianos, to banjos and guitars, and even without accompaniment, the favorite song of the subaltern, “A Warrior Bold.” Broussard’s clear baritone, sweet and ringing, echoed among the icy cliffs in the wintry dusk. At the end, Colonel Fortescue nodded his head in approval.

“I used to sing that song,” he said, “when I was a youngster, but I never had a fine voice like yours. Tune up again.”

Broussard tuned up again, and this time it was a sweet old sentimental ballad. He went conscientiously through his repertory of old-fashioned ballads, not smiling in the least, Colonel Fortescue listening gravely to these songs of love. The purple twilight was coming on fast and the ruddy glare of the fire threw a beautiful crimson light upon the snow-draped cliffs and ice-clad trees. During the intervals between the songs, the two men listened for the sound of coming help. With a good fire, plenty of cigars, and Broussard’s cheerful singing, their plight was not so bad. But a disturbing thought came to both of them.

“The horse running back riderless, will alarm my wife and daughter,” said Colonel Fortescue after a while.

Broussard made no reply; he hoped that Anita would be a little frightened about him.

CHAPTER IX

THE REVEILLE



Half an hour after Colonel Fortescue and Broussard rode away, Anita, walking into her mother's room, said to Mrs. Fortescue:

"Mother, let us ride this afternoon. It is so gloriously clear and cold."

Mrs. Fortescue turned from the desk where she was writing and hesitated.

"I saw your father go off on Gamechick. You can ride Pretty Maid, but your father objects so much to my riding Birdseye."

"But there are plenty of mounts besides Birdseye," said Anita.

Mrs. Fortescue glanced out of the window at the winter landscape and shivered a little.

"It is very cold," she said, "and rather late; the sun will be gone in a little while."



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Anita came behind her mother and put her hands under Mrs. Fortescue's pretty chin.

"Dear mother," she said, "I want so much to ride this afternoon; I feel that I must. Won't you go out, if it is only for half an hour?"

Anita's eloquent eyes and pleading voice were not lost upon Mrs. Fortescue, who found it difficult always to resist pleadings.

"Well then," she said, "call up the stables and tell them to bring the horses around as soon as possible, and some one to go with us, perhaps McGillicuddy."

Ten minutes later, Mrs. Fortescue and Anita, in their trim black habits and smart little hats fastened on with filmy veils, came out on the stone steps. The trooper was leading the horses up and down, and Sergeant McGillicuddy, as escort, put both ladies into their saddles and then himself mounted. Just as Mrs. Fortescue settled herself in saddle and gave her horse a light touch with her riding-crop, a strange sound was borne upon the sharp wind, the unmistakable sound of a runaway horse. Sergeant McGillicuddy and Anita heard the sound at the same moment, and stood motionless to listen. It grew rapidly near and nearer and stray passers-by turned toward the main entrance, from which direction came the wild clatter of iron-shod hoofs in maddened flight. Suddenly through the open main entrance dashed Gamechick without a rider.

A riderless horse fleeing in terror, is one of the most tragic sights on earth. The horse came pounding at breakneck speed, blinded in his fright, as runaway horses are, but instinctively taking the straight path across the plaza. It was as if the frantic hoof-beats awakened the whole post. Soldiers ran out and officers stepped from their comfortable quarters, while the officers' club emptied itself into the street. The horse was recognized in a moment as Colonel Fortescue's mount, and he made straight for the commandant's house. It was not necessary for the trooper to seize the reins hanging loose on Gamechick's neck. He came to a sudden halt, his sides heaving as if they would burst, and he was dripping wet as if he had been in a river. He stood, quivering, his sensitive ears cocking and uncocking wildly.

Mrs. Fortescue's face grew pale, but she said to McGillicuddy calmly:

"Some accident has happened to Colonel Fortescue. Send word at once to Major Harlow and to my son."

Major Harlow, next in command, was on the spot almost as Mrs. Fortescue spoke.

"It is all right, Mrs. Fortescue," said Major Harlow, cheerfully. "The Colonel probably dismounted and the horse got away. We will find him in a little while."

"Yes," replied Mrs. Fortescue, "and Anita and I will ride with you."



Anita looked with triumphant eyes at her mother.

“I felt that we must be on horseback,” she said, “I didn’t understand why a few minutes ago, but now I know why.”

A messenger was sent for Beverley Fortescue, but he was not to be found. Some one in the group of officers remembered having seen him riding off with Sally Harlow. Major Harlow did not attempt to keep up with his daughter’s cavaliers.



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"We'll find the Colonel all right," said Major Harlow, confidently, "the horse will show us the way."

Major Harlow rode in front with Sergeant McGillicuddy, who led Gamechick, his head hanging down, looking the picture of shame but carefully retracing his steps. Behind them rode Mrs. Fortescue and Anita, and then came a small escort. Gamechick, walking wearily in advance over the frozen snow, suddenly lifted his head and gave a loud whinnying of joy, and at the same moment his tired legs seemed to gain new strength, and he started off in a brisk trot.

"He has caught the trail, Mrs. Fortescue," called back Major Harlow, turning his head and meeting Mrs. Fortescue's glance; her face was pale and so was Anita's, but the eyes of both were undaunted.

Gamechick trotted ahead, sometimes faltering and going around in a circle, the escort waiting patiently until he once more found his own tracks. They were still a mile away from the entrance of the mountain pass when Anita, looking up into the clear dark blue sky where the palpitating stars were coming out, saw the blue smoke curling upward from the pass.

"Daddy and Mr. Broussard have made a fire," she cried.

"Is Mr. Broussard with the Colonel?" asked Major Harlow, in surprise. Until then, no one had spoken Broussard's name, or knew he was with Colonel Fortescue.

"I think so," replied Anita, "I was watching my father as he rode toward the main entrance and I saw Mr. Broussard join him and they rode off together."

When they reached the rugged mountain road, the horses, with rough-shod feet, scrambled up like cats. Now the searching party could not only see the blue smoke floating above their heads, but they perceived a delicate odor of burning fir branches. When they reached a spot in the pass where a bridle path diverged Gamechick halted, putting his nose to the ground as he stepped about and then throwing back his head in disappointment.

In the midst of the stillness came the sound of a voice; Broussard was troling out a ballad in Spanish which he had learned in the far-off jungles of the Philippines. Mrs. Fortescue glanced at Anita. A brilliant smile and a warm blush illuminated the girl's face. The mother smiled; she knew the old, old story that Anita's violet eyes were telling.

Major Harlow raised a ringing cheer in which Sergeant McGillicuddy and the officers and troopers joined. An answering cheer came back. It was unnecessary then for Gamechick to show the way by galloping ahead.



Within five minutes the pass was full of cavalrymen. Mrs. Fortescue, down on her knees in the snow, was examining Colonel Fortescue's broken ankle. Anita, for once losing the quiet reserve that was hers by nature, was sitting by the Colonel, her arm around his neck, her cheek against his, and the tears were dropping on her cheeks.

"Oh, daddy," she was whispering, "I knew that something had happened to you and that I must come to you, and that was why I begged and prayed my mother to come with me, and now we have found you, we have found you!"



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Colonel Fortescue drew the girl close to his strong beating heart for a brief moment.

"It is a very neat splint," said Mrs. Fortescue, rising to her feet and bestowing one of her brilliant smiles on Broussard. "Mr. Broussard is a capital surgeon."

"And a capital soldier," said the Colonel, quite clearly.

A smile went around, of which Broussard's was the brightest and the broadest. Everybody present knew that the stern Colonel was melting a little toward Broussard.

Then Colonel Fortescue insisted upon mounting Gamechick.

"You are so obstinate," murmured Mrs. Fortescue, in his ear. "You are as bent on riding that horse as you say I am on riding Birdseye."

The Colonel nodded and smiled; the little differences which arose between Mrs. Fortescue and himself were not settled in the presence of others.

Colonel Fortescue was helped on Gamechick's back and a trooper dismounted and gave his horse to Broussard, the trooper mounting behind a comrade; and without asking anybody's leave, Broussard rode beside Anita. As the cavalcade took its way down the road, the darkness of a moonless night descended suddenly, and the difficult way out of the pass was lighted only by the large, bright stars, that seemed so strangely near and kind. Often, in guiding Anita's horse along the rocky road, Broussard's hand touched Anita's. Sometimes he dismounted to lead her horse; always he was close to her, and when they spoke it was in whispers. The rest of the party, including even Colonel Fortescue, in sheer good nature left them to themselves and their happiness.

Soon the party reached the broad, white plain from which a great crown of lights from the fort shone brilliantly in the dusk of the evening. Half way across the plain they met Beverley Fortescue, riding in search of them. He glanced at Anita, who blushed deeply, and at Broussard, who smiled openly, and the two young officers exchanged signals, which meant that the Colonel had been outgeneralled, out-footed and "stood on his head," as Beverley undutifully expressed it at the officers' club an hour later.

"How did you manage the C. O.?" asked Beverley of Broussard, as they exchanged confidences in the smoking-room.

"I sang to him, like David did to Saul, and got the evil spirit out of him. You ought to have seen him, sitting before the fire, grinding his teeth with the pain of his ankle, and listening to 'Love's Old Sweet Song.' I gave him a genteel suffering of sentimental songs, I can tell you, and never cracked a smile, and no more did the old man"—this being the unofficial title of all commanding officers.



“Do you think it would work on Major Harlow?” anxiously inquired Beverley, “because this afternoon Sally and I——”

Here the conference was reduced to whispers, as plans were made to conquer Major Harlow. Only daughters are highly prized by doting fathers.



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A broken ankle at fifty does not heal in a day, and until Christmas Eve Colonel Fortescue was a prisoner in his chair, doing his administrative work; and when that was done being cheered and soothed by the tenderness in which he had been lapped since the day when, as a young lieutenant, he married Betty Beverley in an old Virginia church. Never was anything seen like Anita's devotion to her father. It seemed as if she were never out of sound and reach of him and gave up all the merry-making of the Christmas time to be with him. This prevented Broussard from seeing Anita very often, and never alone, but they had entered the Happy Valley together, and basked in the delicate joy of love unspoken, but not unfelt. Anita knew that Broussard was only biding his time, and Broussard knew that Anita was waiting, in smiling silence. The Colonel wrote Broussard a very handsome note of thanks and Mrs. Fortescue greeted him with grateful thanks. Then, Christmas was coming, the claims of the After-Clap and the eight McGillicuddys became insistent. Broussard did not forget the prisoner in the grim military prison, nor the woman so faithful to the prisoner. Sergeant McGillicuddy spent a small fortune in such comforts as Lawrence was allowed to receive at Christmas time, and his knotty, weather-beaten face grew positively cheerful over the way Lawrence was really reforming.

Broussard knew that Anita would not come to the Christmas Eve ball, because in the evening her father liked her to read to him. But Broussard went to the ball, and for the first time found a Christmas ball dull. Flowers were scarce at Fort Blizzard, but by the expenditure of much time and money Broussard succeeded in getting a great box of fresh white roses for Anita on Christmas Day.

Broussard went to the early service at the chapel in the darkness that comes before the dawn. The little chapel shone with lights and echoed with the triumphant Christmas music. It was quite full, but Anita sat alone in the C. O.'s pew. She was all in black, except a single white rose pinned over her heart. When the service was over, and the people had streamed out, and the brilliant lights were replaced by a radiance, faint and soft, Anita remained on her knees, praying. Broussard remained on his knees, too, thinking he was praying, but in reality worshipping Anita. Presently, she rose and passed out into the cold, gray dawn. Broussard went out, too, meaning to intercept her and walk home with her. But at the door Kettle appeared, carrying in his arms the After-Clap, now nearly three years old, and capable of making a great deal of noise. At once, he sent up a shout for "'Nita!" and Anita, cruelly oblivious of Broussard's claims, took the After-Clap by the hand and ran off to see his Christmas tree—that being the After-Clap's day. Kettle, however, lagged behind to administer consolation to Broussard.

"Doan' you mind, Mr. Broussard," said Kettle, confidentially, "Miss 'Nita, she's jes' cipherin' on you all the time. She makes the Kun'l tell her all 'bout them songs you done sing him that night in the mountains, an' she and Miss Betty laffed fit ter kill when the Kun'l tell 'em he made you sing like the devil to keep him from groanin' over his ankle."

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For six mortal days, Broussard sought his chance to be alone with Anita, but that chance eluded him in a maddening manner. Either the Colonel or the After-Clap was perpetually in his way, and neither Beverley Fortescue nor Kettle, who were his open allies, nor Mrs. Fortescue, who was secretly on his side, could help him. Broussard, however, swore a mighty oath that he would have Anita's promise before the new year began.

Late in the afternoon of the last day of the year, Broussard, who kept, from the officers' club, a pretty close watch on the Commanding Officer's house, saw Anita come out in her dark furs and the little black gown and hat in which she looked most charming, and take her way to the chapel. There was a back entrance, screened from the plaza by a stone wall and a projection of the chapel, and Broussard thought there could not be a better place for the words he meant to speak to Anita. He seized his cap and ran out, ignoring the jeers of his comrades, who had seen Anita pass and suspected Broussard's errand. In two minutes he had entered the little walled-in spot, and there, indeed, stood Anita. Within the chapel he could hear voices—the chaplain's voice directing some changes; Kettle and a couple of men moving seats and arranging things at the chaplain's directions. But as long as they remained in the chapel they mattered little to Broussard.

Anita's cheeks hung out their red flags of welcome.

"At last!" said Broussard, clasping her hand, "I have watched and waited for this chance!"

In the little secluded spot, with a small, crescent moon stealing into the sunset sky and the happy stars shining down upon them, Broussard told Anita of his love. He knew not what words he spoke, for Love, the master magician, speaks a thousand languages, and is eloquent in all. Nor did Anita know what reply she made. After a deep and rapturous silence they returned to earth, only to find it still Heaven.

"I love you better than anything on earth except my honor," said Broussard, holding Anita's little gloved hand in his.

"Yes," answered Anita softly, "next your honor."

"And I have loved you for a long time," Broussard continued, "for a whole year." In their brief, bright lives, a whole year seemed a long time. "But you were so young—last year you were but a child, and I was ashamed of myself for what I said to you the night of the music ride—it isn't right to speak words of love to a girl who is not yet a woman. Will you forgive me?"

Anita's forgiveness shone in her eyes and smiled upon her scarlet mouth when Broussard laid his lips on hers.



Suddenly, a wild shriek resounded. The After-Clap, who had been in hiding behind Anita, and was unseen by Broussard, and forgotten by Anita, emerged and set up a violent protest. Being now a sturdy three-year-old, he was well able to express himself.

“You go ’way!” screamed the After-Clap, raising a copper-toed foot, and kicking Broussard’s shins.



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“You let my 'Nita 'lone, you bad man!”

The After-Clap's shrieks brought the chaplain and Kettle and a couple of soldiers quickly out of the chapel. Meanwhile, with what Broussard thought superhuman and intelligent malice, the After-Clap dragged the iron gate open that led to the plaza, and rushed straight into the arms of Colonel Fortescue, returning from his first walk, aided by a stick in one hand and Mrs. Fortescue's arm on the other side.

“Daddy! Daddy! You come here and beat Mr. Broussard. He kissed 'Nita! He kissed 'Nita!” shrieked the After-Clap.

Broussard and Anita, standing in the circle of eyes, were much embarrassed; Kettle, grabbing the After-Clap, shook him well, saying:

“Heish yo' mouth! you didn't see no sich a thing!”

This only increased the After-Clap's indignation, and he bawled louder than ever:

“I see Mr. Broussard kiss 'Nita! I see him kiss my 'Nita.”

“Yes, I kissed Anita,” responded Broussard, recovering his native impudence, “but she is my Anita and not your Anita any longer.”

This produced another attack on Broussard's shins by the After-Clap.

“I think,” said Mrs. Fortescue demurely, “Kettle had better take the After-Clap home.”

“So do I,” said Broussard, “he has been very much in my way ever since he began yelling.”

The Colonel and the chaplain began to make conversation, as Kettle carried the After-Clap off, still proclaiming he had seen Broussard kiss Anita. The two soldiers grinned silently at each other. The whole party started off to the C. O.'s house, Mrs. Fortescue walking between the Colonel and the chaplain, while Broussard and Anita brought up the rear.

When they reached the house, Colonel Fortescue went straight to his office. Mrs. Fortescue and the chaplain made little jokes on the lovers, but the Colonel had looked as solemn as the grave. The hour had come when his little Anita was no longer his.

“Come,” said Broussard to Anita, “let us face the battery now.”

Hand in hand they entered Colonel Fortescue's office. The Colonel behaved better than anybody expected. When he had given his formal consent, Anita slipped behind his chair and said to him softly:



“Daddy, I made up my mind when I was a little girl, a long time ago, that I would never marry any man that was not as good as you, my darling daddy!”

Fond fathers are generally won by these tender pleas. Broussard turned his head away as the Colonel drew his daughter to him; the passion of father-love was too sacred even for the eyes of a lover. On the way out they met Sergeant McGillicuddy, who tried to look unconscious.

“Congratulate me!” cried Broussard.

“I do, sir,” replied the Sergeant, solemnly, “and if I may make bold to say it, the Colonel will make a father-in-law-and-a-half, sir.”

This was enigmatic, but Broussard was too happy then to study enigmas.



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That night, when the Colonel, limping a little, entered the ballroom he leaned upon Beverley's strong young arm, while on the other side was Mrs. Fortescue, always particularly radiant in evening dress. Broussard and Anita walked behind them. The news, as rashly announced by the After-Clap, that Mr. Broussard had kissed Anita, had spread like wildfire through the post. Everybody knew it, and everybody smiled upon Broussard and Anita; even second lieutenants who envied Broussard's luck; good wishes and kind congratulations were showered upon them.

It was a very gay ball; as Colonel Fortescue held, the sharp cold, the radiant arc lights, always going, the wall of ice by which the fort was surrounded, gave an edge to joy as well as to pain. To mark this last ball of the year the young officers introduced some of the prankish features of their happy cadet days.

At five minutes to midnight, when the great floor was a whirl of dainty young girls, their heads crowned with roses or with flashing ornaments that matched their sparkling eyes, and with dashing young officers, glittering in gold and blue, the band, with Neroda leading, stopped suddenly. A handsome young bugler appeared and in the midst of the tense silence the wonderful melody of "Taps," the last farewell, was played for the dying year. Then Anita, as the commanding officer's daughter, had the honor of turning off the lights. To-night she looked her sweetest, wearing a little white dancing gown that showed her satin-slippered feet. With Broussard escorting her, Anita walked the length of the long ballroom to the point where, with one touch of the hand every light went out in an instant of time, and the ballroom was plunged into the blackness of darkness and the stillness of silence.

The band then played softly the delicious waltz "Auf Wiedersehen," with its sweet promise of eternal meeting.

On the stroke of twelve came a great roar and reverberance from the outside and a dazzling flash of light blazed in at the window from a *feu de joie* on the plaza. At the same moment, the young bugler played the splendid fanfare that welcomes the dawn, the reveille. Broussard and Anita, looking into each others' smiling eyes, began the new year of their perfect happiness with the joyous echo of the silver trumpet proclaiming the coming of the sunrise.

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