Capt. Charles King.

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CHAPTER I.

"Take this, porter."

In the Pullman car of the westward bound express, half way across the continent, two passengers were gazing listlessly out over the wintry landscape. It was a bitter morning in February. North and south the treeless prairie rolled away in successive ridge and depression. The snow lay deep in the dry ravines and streaked the sea like surface with jagged lines of foam, between which lay broad spaces clean swept by the gale. Heavy masses of cloud, dark and forbidding, draped the sky from zenith to horizon, and the air was thick with spiteful gusts and spits of snow, crackling against the window panes, making fierce dashes every time a car door was hurriedly opened, and driving about the platforms like a myriad swarm of fleecy and aggressive gnats raging for battle. Every now and then, responsive to some wilder blast, a blinding white cloud came whirling from the depths of the nearest gully, and breaking like spray over the snow fence along the line. Not a sign of life was visible.

The tiny mounds in the villages of the prairie dogs seemed blocked and frozen; even the trusty sentinel had "deserted his post" and huddled with his fellows for warmth and shelter in the bowels of the earth. Fluttering owl and skulking coyote, too, had vanished from the face of nature. Timid antelope—fleetest coursers of the prairie—and stolid horned cattle had gone, none knew whither, nor cared to know until the "blizzard" had subsided. Two heavy engines fought their way, panting, into the very teeth of the gale and slowly wound the long train after them upgrade among the foothills of the great plateau of the Rockies. Once in a while, when stopping for a moment at some group of brown painted sheds and earth battened shanties, the wind moaned and howled among the iron braces and rattled chains beneath the car, and made such mournful noise that it was a relief to start once more and lose sound of its wailing in the general rumble. As for the scenery, only as a picture of shiver provoking monotony and desolation could one care to take a second look.

And yet, some miles ahead, striving hard to reach the railway in time to intercept this very train, a small battalion of cavalry was struggling through the drifts, officers and men afoot and dragging their own benumbed limbs and half benumbed chargers through the drifts that lay deep at the bottom of every coulee." Some few soldiers remained in saddle; they were too frozen to walk at all. Some few fell behind, and would have thrown themselves flat upon the prairie in the lethargy that is but premonition of death by freezing. Like men half maddened by morphine, their rescue demanded on heroic measures, humane in their seeming brutality. Officers who at other times were all gentleness now fell upon the hapless stragglers with kicks and blows. As the train drew up at the platform of a station in mid-prairie, a horseman enveloped in fur and frost and steam from his panting steed reined up beside the leading engine and shouted to the occupants of the cab:

"For God's sake hold on a few minutes. We've got a dozen frozen men with us we must send on to Fort Warner." And the train was held.

Meantime, those far to the rear in the sleeper knew nothing of what was going on ahead. The car was warm and comfortable, and most of its occupants were apparently appreciative of its shelter and cliniess in contrast with the cheerless scene without. A motherly looking woman had produced her knitting, and was blithely clicking away at her needles, while her enterprising son, a youth of four summers and undaunted confidence in human nature, tacked up and down the aisle and made impetuous incursions into the various sections by turns, receiving such modified welcome as could be accorded features streaked with mingled dirt and cinders, and fingers whose propensity to cling to whatsoever they touched was due no more to instincts of predatory nature than to the adhesive properties of the glucose which formed the chief ingredient of the confections that had been industriously consuming the early morning. Four men playing pitch at the rearmost section, two or three commercial travelers, whose intimacy with the porter and airs of easy proprietorship told of an apparent conveniling interest in the road, a young man of reserved manners, reading in a position all by himself, a baby sleeping quietly upon the seat opposite the two passengers first mentioned, and a Maltese kitten curled up in the lap of one of them, completed the list of occupants.

The proximity of the baby and the kitten furnishes strong presumptive evidence of the sex and general condition of the two passengers referred to, and renders detail superfluous. A baby never travels without a woman, or a woman with a woman already encumbered with a baby. The baby belonged to the elder passenger, the kitten to the younger. The one was a buxom matron, with a slender maid. In their ages there must have been a difference of fifteen years; in feature there was still more disparity. The elder was a fine looking woman, and one who prided herself upon the Junoesque proportions she occasionally exhibited in a graceful exercise up and down the aisle. Some one would call her a beauty. Her eyes were of a somewhat fishy and cold blue; the lids were tinged with a ornamental pink that told of the irritability of the adjacent interior surfaces. A possible irritability of temperament. Her complexion was of that mottled pink which is so sore a trial to its owner, and yet so inestimable a comfort to rivals; but her features were fine, her teeth fine, her dress, and her demeanor those of a woman of birth and breeding, and yet one who might have resented the intimation that she was not strikingly handsome.

She looked like a woman with a will of her own; her head was high, her step was firm; it was of just such a walk as hers that Virgil wrote his "vera incessu patuit dea," and she made the young man in the section by himself think of that very passage as he glanced at her from under his heavy, bushy eyebrows. She looked, moreover, like a woman with a capacity for influencing people contrary to their will and judgment, and with a decided fondness for the exercise of that unpopular function. There was the air of grande dame about her, despite the simplicity of her dress, which, though of rich material, was severely plain. She wore no jewelry. Her hands were snugly gloved and undisfigured by the distortions of any ring except the marriage circlet. Her manner attested her a person of consequence in her social circle and one who realized the fact. She had repelled, though without rudeness or discourtesy, the garrulous efforts of the motherly knitter to be sociable.

She had promptly inspired the small, candy crusted explorer with such awe that he had refrained from further visits after his first confiding attempt to poke a sticky finger through the baby's velvety cheek. She had spared little scorn in her rejection of the bourgeois advances of the commercial traveler with the languishing eyes of Israel; he confided to his comrades, in relating the incident, that she was smart enough to see that it wasn't her he was hankering to know, but the pretty sister by her side; and when challenged to prove that they were sisters—a statement which aroused the skepticism of his shrewd associates—he had replied, substantially:

"How do I know? 'Cause I saw their pass before you was up this morning, cully. It's for Mrs. Capt. Rayner and sister, and they're going out here to Fort Warrener. That's how I know." And the porter of the car had confirmed the statement in the sanctity of the smoking room.

And yet—such is the uncertainty of feminine temperament—Mrs. Rayner was no more incensed at the commercial "gent" because he had obtruded his attentions than she was at the young man reading in his own section because he had refrained. Nearly twenty-four hours had elapsed since they crossed the Missouri, and in all that time not once had she detected in him a glance that betrayed the faintest interest in her or—still more remarkable—in the unquestionably lovely girl at her side. Intrusiveness she might resent, but indifference she would and did. Who was this youth, she wondered, who not once had so much as stolen a look at the sweet, bonny face of her maiden sister? Surely 'twas a face any man would love to gaze upon—so fair, so exquisite in contour and feature, so pearly in complexion, so lovely in the deep, dark brown of its shaded eyes.

The bold glances of the four card players she had defiantly returned and vanquished. Those men, like the traveling gents, were creatures of coarser mold; but her experienced eye told her the solitary occupant of the opposite section was a gentleman. The clear cut of his pale features, the white, slender hand and shapely foot, the style and finish of his quiet traveling dress, the soft modulation and refined tone of his voice on the one occasion when she heard him reply to some importunity of the train boy with his endless round of equally questionable figs and fiction, the book he was reading—a volume of Emerson—all combined to speak of a culture and position equal to her own. She had been over the transcontinental railways often enough to know that it was permissible for gentlemen to render their fellow passengers some slight attention which would lead to mutual introductions if desirable; and this man refused to see that the opportunity was open to him.

True, when first she took her survey of those who were to be her fellow travelers at the "transfer" on the Missouri, she decided that here was one against whom it would be necessary to guard the approaches. She had good and sufficient reasons for wanting no young man as attractive in appearance as this one making himself interesting to pretty Nellie on their journey. She had already decided what was Nellie's future was to be. Never, indeed, would she have taken her to the gay frontier station whither she was now en route, had not that future been already settled to her satisfaction. Nellie Travers, barely out of school, was betrothed, and willingly so, to the man she, her devoted elder sister, had especially chosen. Rare and most unlikely of conditions! she had apparently fallen in love with the man picked out for her by somebody else. She was engaged to Mrs. Rayner's fascinating friend Mr. Steven Van Antwerp, a scion of an old and esteemed and wealthy family; and Mr. Van Antwerp, who had been educated abroad, and had a Heidelberg scar on his left cheek, and dark, lustrous eyes, and wavy hair—almost raven—was a devoted lover, though fully fifteen years Miss Nellie's senior.

Full of bliss and comfort was Mrs. Rayner's soul as she journeyed westward to rejoin her husband at the distant frontier post she had not seen since the early spring. Army woman as she was, born and bred under the shadow of the flag, a soldier's daughter, a soldier's wife, she had other ambitions for her beautiful Nell. Worldly to the core, she herself would never have married in the army but for the unusual circumstance of a wealthy subaltern among the officers of her father's regiment. Tradition had it that Mr. Rayner was not among the number of those who sighed for Kate Travers' guarded smiles. Her earlier victims were kept a-dangling until Rayner, too, succumbed, and then were sent adrift. She meant that no penniless subaltern should carry off her "baby sister"—they had long been motherless—and a season at the seashore had done her work well. Steven Van Antwerp, with genuine distress and loneliness, went back to his duties in Wall street after seeing them safely on their way to the west. "Guard her well for me," he whispered to Mrs. Rayner. "I dread those fellows in buttons." And he shivered unaccountably as he spoke.

Nellie was pledged, therefore, and this youth in the Pullman was not one of "those fellows in buttons," so far as Mrs. Rayner knew, but she was ready to warn him off, and meant to do so, until, to her surprise, she saw that he gave no symptom of a desire to approach. By noon of the second day she was as determined to extract from him some sign of interest as she had been determined to resent it. I can in no wise explain or [illegible] The fact is stated [illegible]

"[illegible] on earth can we be stopping so [illegible]?" was Mrs. Rayner's some[illegible] peculiant inquiry, addressed to no [illegible] in particular. There was no reply. Miss Travers was busily twitching the ears of the kitten at the moment and sparring with upraised finger at the threatening paw.

"Do look out of the window, Nell, and see."

"There is nothing to see, Kate—nothing but whirling drifts and a big water tank all covered with ice. Br-r-r-r! how cold it looks!" she answered, after vainly flattening her face against the inner pane.

"There must be something the matter, though," persisted Mrs. Rayner. "We have been here full five minutes, and we are behind time now. At this rate we'll never get to Warrener to-night. I do wish the porter would stay here where he belongs."

The young man quietly laid down his book and arose. "I will inquire, madam," he said, with grave courtesy. "You shall know in a moment."

"How very kind of you!" said the lady. "Indeed I must not trouble you. I'm sure the porter will be here after a while."

And even as she spoke, and as he was pulling on an overcoat, the train rumbled off again. Then came an exclamation, this time from the younger:

"Why, Kate! Look! see all these men—and horses! Why, they are soldiers—cavalry! Oh, how I love to see them again! But, oh, how cold they look—frozen!"

"Who can they be?" said Mrs. Rayner, all vehement interest now, and gazing eagerly from the window at the lowered heads of the horses and the muffled figures in blue and fur. "What can they be doing in the field in such awful weather? I cannot recognize one of them, or tell officers from men. Surely that must be Capt. Wayne—and Maj. Stannard. Oh, what can it mean?"

The young man had suddenly leaped to the window behind them, and was gazing out with an eagerness and interest little less apparent than her own; but in a moment the train had whisked them out of sight of the storm beaten troopers. Then he hurried to the rear window of the car, and Mrs. Rayner as hastily followed.

"Do you know them?" she asked.

"Yes. That was Maj. Stannard. It is his battalion of the —th cavalry, and they have been out scouting after renegade Cheyennes. Pardon me, madame, I must go forward and see who have boarded the train."

He stopped at his section, and again she followed him, her eyes full of anxiety. He was busy tugging at a flask in his traveling bag.

"You know them! Do you know—have you heard of any infantry being out? Pardon me for detaining you, but I am very anxious. My husband is Capt. Rayner, of Fort Warrener."

"No infantry have been sent, madame, I—have reason to know; at least, none from Warrener."

And with that he hurriedly bowed and left her. The next moment, flask in hand, he was crossing the storm swept platform and making his way to the head of the train.

"I believe he is an officer," said Mrs. Rayner to her sister. "Who else would be apt to know about the movement of the troops? Did you notice how gentle his manner was?—and he never smiled. He has such a sad face. Yet he can't be an officer, or he would have made himself known to us long ago."

"Is there no name on the satchel?" asked Miss Travers, with pardonable curiosity. "He has an interesting face—not handsome." And a dreamy look came into her deep eyes. She was thinking, no doubt, of a dark, oval, distingue face with raven hair and mustache. The youth in the traveling suit was not tall, like Steven—not singularly, romantically handsome, like Steven. Indeed, he was of less interest to her than to her married sister.

Mrs. Rayner could see no name on the satchel, only two initials; and they revealed very little.

"I have half a mind to peep at the fly leaf of that book," she said. "He walked just like a soldier; but there isn't anything there to indicate what he is," she continued, with a doubtful glance at the items scattered about the now vacant section. "Why isn't that porter here? He ought to know who people are."

As though to answer her request, in came the porter, disheveled and breathless. He made straight for the satchel they had been scrutinizing, and opened it without ceremony. Both ladies regarded this proceeding with natural astonishment, and Mrs. Rayner was about to interfere and question his right to search the luggage of passengers, when the man turned hurriedly towards them, exhibiting a little bundle of handkerchiefs, his broad Ethiopian face clouded with anxiety and concern:

"The gentleman told me to take all his handkerchiefs. We'se got a dozen frozen soldiers in the baggage car—some of 'em mighty bad—and they'se tryin' to make 'em comfortable until they get to the fort."

"Soldiers frozen! Why do you take them in the baggage car?—such a barn of a place! Why weren't they brought here, where we could make them warm and care for them?" exclaimed Mrs. Rayner, in impulsive indignation.

"Laws, ma'am! never do in the world to bring frozen people into a hot car! Sure to make their ears an' noses drop off, that would! Got to keep 'em in the cold and pile snow around 'em. That gentleman sittin' here—he knows," he continued; "he's an officer, and him and the doctor's workin' with 'em now."

And Mrs. Rayner, vanquished by a statement of facts well known to her yet forgotten in the first impetuosity of her criticism, relapsed into the silence of temporary defeat.

"He is an officer, then," said Miss Travers, presently. "I wonder what he belongs to."

"Not to our regiment, I'm sure. Probably to the cavalry. He knew Maj. Stannard and other officers whom we passed there."

"Did he speak to them?"

"No; there was no time. We were beyond hearing distance when he ran to the back door of the car; and there was no time before that. But it's very odd!"

"What's very odd?"

"Why, his conduct. It is so strange that he has not made himself known to us, if he's an officer."

"Probably he doesn't know you—or we—are connected with the army, Kate."

"Oh, yes, he does. The porter knows perfectly well, and I told him just before he left."

"Yes, but he didn't know before that time, did he?"

"He ought to have known," said Mrs. Rayner, uncompromisingly. "At least, he should if he had taken the faintest interest. I mentioned Capt. Rayner so that he could not help hearing."

This statement being one that Miss Travers could in no wise contradict—as it was one, indeed, that Mrs. Rayner could have dispensed with as unnecessary—the younger lady again betook herself to silence and pulling the kitten's ears.

"Even if he didn't know before," continued her sister, after a pause in which she had apparently been brooding over the indifference of the young man in question, "as courtesy is supposed to have made himself known after I told him who I was."

Another pause. "That's what I did it for," she wound up, conclusively.

"And that's what I thought," said Miss Travers, with a quiet smile. "However, he had no time then; he was hurrying off to see whether any of the soldiers had come on board. He took his flask with him, and apparently was in haste to offer some one a drink. I'm sure that is what papa used to do," she added, as she saw a frown gathering on her sister's face.

"What papa did just after the war—a time when everybody drank—is not at all the proper thing now. Capt. Rayner never touches it, and I don't allow it in the house."

"Still I should think it a very useful article when a lot of frozen and exhausted men are on one's hands," said Miss Travers. "That was but a small flask he had and I'm sure they'll need more."

There came a rush of cold air from the front, and the swinging door blew open ahead of the porter, who was heard banging shut the outer portal. Then he hurried in.

"Can some of you gentlemen oblige me with some whisky or brandy?" he asked. "We've got some frozen soldiers aboard. Two of 'em are pretty nearly gone."

Two of the card players dropped their hands and started for their section at once. Before they could rummage in their bags for the required article Mrs. Rayner's voice was heard: "Take this, porter." And she held forth a little silver flask. "I have more in my trunk if it is needed," she added, while a blush mounted to her forehead as she saw the quizzical smile on her sister's face. "You know I always carry it in traveling, Nellie—in case of accident or illness, and I'm most thankful I have it now."

"Ever so much obliged, ma'am," said the porter, "but this would be only a thimbleful and I can get a quart bottle of this gentleman."

"Where are they?" said the person thus referred to, as he came down the aisle with a big brown bottle in his hand. "Come, Jim, let's go and see what we can do. One of you gentlemen take my place in the game," he continued, indicating the commercial gents, two of whom, nothing loath, dropped into the vacated seats, while the others pushed on to the front of the train. The porter hesitated one moment.

"Yes, take my flask; I shouldn't feel satisfied without doing something. And please say to the officer that I'm Mrs. Rayner—Mrs. Capt. Rayner, of the infantry—and ask if there isn't something I can do to help."

"Yes, ma'am; I will, ma'am. Oh, he knows who you are; I done told him last night. He's goin' to Fort Warrener, too." And, touching his cap, away went the porter.

"There! He did know all along," said Mrs. Rayner triumphantly. "It is most extraordinary."

"Well, is it the proper thing for people in the army to introduce themselves when traveling? How are they to know it will be agreeable?"

"Agreeable? Why, Nellie, it's always done, especially when ladies are traveling without an escort, as we are. The commonest civility should prompt it, and officers always send their cards by the porter the moment they find army ladies are on the train. I don't understand this one at all, especially"— But here she broke off abruptly.

"Especially what?" asked Miss Nell, with an inspiration of maidenly curiosity.

"Especially nothing. Never mind now." And here the baby began to fidget, and stir about, and stretch forth his chubby hands, and thrust his knuckles in his eyes, and pucker up his face in alarming contortions preparatory to a wail, and after one or two soothing and tentative sounds of "sh—sh—sh—sh" from the maternal lips the matron abandoned the attempt to induce a second nap, and picked him up in her arms, where he presently began to take gracious notice of his pretty aunt and the kitten.

Two hours later, just as the porter had notified them that Warrener Station would be in sight in five minutes, the young man of the opposite section returned to the car. He looked tired, very anxious, and his face was paler and the sad expression more pronounced than before. The train conductor stopped him to speak of some telegrams that had been sent, and both ladies noted the respect which the railway official threw into the tone in which he spoke. The card players stopped their game and went up to ask after the frozen men. It was not until the whistle was sounding for the station that he stood before them and with a grave and courteous bow held forth Mrs. Rayner's silver flask.

"It was a blessing to one poor fellow at least, and I thank you for him, madam," he said.

"I have been so anxious. I wanted to do something. Did you not get my message, Mr. ——?" she asked, with intentional pause that he might supply the missing name.

"Indeed there was nothing we could ask of you," he answered, totally ignoring the evident invitation. "I am greatly obliged to you for your kindness, but we had abundant help, and you really could not have reached the car in the face of this gale. Good morning, madam." And with that he raised his fur traveling cap and quickly turned to his section and busied himself strapping up his various belongings.

"The man must be a woman hater," she whispered to Miss Travers. "He's going to get out here, too. Who can he be?"

There was still a moment before the train would stop at the platform, and she was not to be beaten so easily. Bending partly across the aisle she spoke again:

"You have been so kind to those poor fellows that I feel sure you must be of the army. I think I told you I am Mrs. Rayner, of Fort Warrener. May we not hope to see you there?"

A deep flush rose to his forehead, suffusing his cheeks, and passed as quickly away. His mouth twitched and trembled. Gazing at him in surprise and trouble, Nellie Travers saw that his face was full of pain and was turning white again. He half choked before he could reply; he spoke low and yet distinctly, and the words were full of sadness:

"It—it is not probable that we shall meet at all."

And with that he turned away.

CHAPTER II.

Even in the excitement attendant upon their reception at the station neither Mrs. Rayner nor her sister could entirely recover from the surprise and pain which the stranger's singular words had caused. So far from feeling in the least rebuffed, Mrs. Rayner well understood from his manner that not the faintest discourtesy was intended. There was not a symptom of rudeness, not a vestige of irritation or haste, in his tone. Deep embarrassment, inexpressible sadness even, she read in the brief glimpse she had of his paling face. It was all a mystery to her and to the girl seated in silence by her side. Both followed him with their eyes as he hurried away to the rear of the car, and then, with joyous shouts, three or four burly, fur enveloped men came bursting in the front door, and the two ladies, as many, and the arms were pounced upon and surrounded by a group that grew larger every minute. Released finally from the welcoming embrace of her stalwart husband, Mrs. Rayner found time to present the other and younger officers to her sister. As many as half a dozen had followed the captain in his wild rush upon the car, and, while he and his baby boy were resuming acquaintanceship after a separation of many long months, Miss Travers found herself the center of a circle of young officers who had braved the wintry blizzard in their eagerness to do her proper homage. Her cheeks were aflame with excitement and pleasure, her eyes dancing, and despite the fatigue of her long journey she was looking dangerously pretty, as Capt. Rayner glanced for a moment from the baby's wondering eyes, took in the picture like an instantaneous photograph, and then looked again into Mrs. Rayner's smiling face.

"You were wise in providing against possibilities as you did, Kate," he said, with a significant nod of the head. "There are as many as a dozen of them, or at least there will be when the —th gets back from the field. Stannard is out yet with his battalion."

"Oh, yes; we saw them at a station east of here. They looked frozen to death; and there are ever so many of the soldiers frozen. The baggage car is full of them. Didn't you know it?"

"Not a word of it. We have been here for three mortal hours waiting at the station, and any telegrams must have been sent right out to the fort. The colonel is there, and he would have all arrangements made. Here, Graham! Foster! Mrs. Rayner says there are a lot of frozen cavalrymen forward in the baggage car. Run ahead and see what is necessary, will you? I'll be there in a minute, as soon as we've got these ladies off the train."

Two of the young gentlemen who had been hovering around Miss Travers took themselves off without a moment's delay. The others remained to help their senior officer. Out into the whirling eddies of snow, bundling them up in the big, warm capes of their regulation overcoats, the officers half led, half carried their precious charges. The captain bore his son and heir; Lieut. Ross escorted Mrs. Rayner; two others devoted themselves exclusively to Miss Travers; a fourth picked up the Maltese kitten. Two or three smart, trim looking infantry soldiers cleared the section of bags and bundles of shawls, and the entire party was soon within the doorway of the waiting room, where a red hot coal stove glowed fierce welcome. Here the ladies were left for a moment, while all the officers again bustled out into the storm and fought their way against the northwest gale until they reached the little crowd gathered about the doorway of the freight sheds. A stout, short, burly man in beaver overcoat and cap pushed through the knot of half numbed spectators and approached their leader:

"We have only two ambulances, captain—that is all there was at the post when the dispatch came—and there are a dozen of these men, besides Dr. Grimes, all more or less crippled, and Grimes has both hands frozen. We must get them out at once. Can we take your wagon?"

"Certainly, doctor. Take anything we have. If the storm holds, tell the driver not to try to come back for us. We can make the ladies comfortable here at the hotel for the night. Some of the officers have to get back for duties this evening. The rest will have to stay. How did they happen to get caught in such a freeze?"

"They couldn't help it. Stannard had chased the Cheyennes across the range, and was ordered to get back to the railway. It was twenty below when they started, and they made three days' chase in that weather; but no one seemed to care so long as they were on the trail. Then came the change of wind, and a driving snow storm, in which they lost the trail as a matter of course; and then this blizzard struck them on the back track. Grimes is so exhausted that he could barely hold out until he got here. He says he never could have brought them through from Buff Siding but for Mr. Hayne: he did everything."

"Mr. Hayne! Was he with them?"

"He was on the train, and came in at once to offer his services. Grimes says he was invaluable."

"But Mr. Hayne was east on leave; I know he was. He was promoted to my company last month—confound the luck—and was to have six months' leave before joining. I wish it was six years. Where is he now?" And the captain peered excitedly around from under his shaggy cap. Oddly, too, his face was paling.

"He left as soon as I took charge. I don't know where he's gone; but it's God's mercy he was with these poor fellows. His skill and care have done everything for them. Where did he get his knowledge?"

"I have no idea," said Capt. Rayner, gruffly, and in evident ill humor. "He is the last man I expected to see this day or for days to come. Is there anything else I can do, doctor?"

"Nothing, thank you, captain." And the little surgeon hastened back to his charges, followed by some of the younger officers, eager to be of assistance in caring for their disabled comrades. Rayner himself hesitated a moment, then turned about and trudged heavily back along the wind swept platform. The train had pulled away and was out of sight in the whirl of snow over the western prairies. He went to his own substantial wagon and shouted to the driver, who sat muffled in buffalo fur on the box:

"Get around there to the freight house and report to the doctor. There is a lot of frozen cavalrymen to be taken out to the hospital. Don't try to come back for us to-night; we'll stay here in town. Send the quartermaster's team in for the trunks as soon as the storm is over and the road clear. That's all."

Then he rejoined the party at the waiting room of the station, and Mrs. Rayner noted instantly that all the cheeriness had gone and that a cloud had settled on his face. She was a shrewd observer, and she knew him well. Something more serious than a mishap to a squad of soldiers had brought about the sudden change. He was all gladness, all rejoicing and delight, when he clasped her and his baby boy in his arms but ten minutes before, and now—something had occurred to bring him serious discomfort. She rested her hand on his arm and looked questioningly in his face. He avoided her glance and quickly began to talk. She saw that he desired to answer no questions just then, and wisely refrained.

Meantime, Miss Travers was chatting blithely with two young gallants, who had returned to her side, and who had thrown off their heavy furs and stood revealed in their becoming undress uniforms. Mr. Ross had gone to look over the rooms which the host of the railway hotel had offered for the use of the party; the baby was yielding to the inevitable and gradually condescending to notice the efforts of Mr. Foster to scrape acquaintance; the kitten, with dainty step, and ears and tail erect, was making a leisurely inspection of the premises, sniffing about the few benches and chairs with which the bare room was burdened, and reconnoitering the door leading to the hallway with evident desire to extend her researches in that direction. Presently that very door opened, and in came two or three bundles of fur in masculine shape, and with them two shaggy deer hounds, who darted straight at the kitten. There was a sudden flurry and scatter, a fury of spits and scratching, a yelp of pain from one brute with lacerated nose, a sudden recoil of bush hounds, and then a fiery rush through the open doorway in pursuit of puss. After the first gallant instinct of battle her nerve had given out, and she had sought safety in flight.

"Oh, don't let them hurt her!" cried Miss Travers, as she darted into the hall and gazed desparingly up the stairway to the second story, whither the dogs had vanished like a flash. Two of the young officers sped to the rescue and turned the wrong way. Mrs. Rayner and the captain followed her into the hall. A rush of canine feet and an excited chorus of barks and yelps were heard aloft; then a stern voice ordering, "Down, you brutes!" a sudden howl as though in response to a vigorous kick, and an instant later, bearing the kitten, ruffled, terrified and wildly excited, yet unharmed, there came springing lightly down the steps the young man in civilian dress who was their fellow traveler on the Pullman. Without a word he gave his prize into the dainty hands outstretched to receive it, and never stopping an instant, never listening to the eager words of thanks from her pretty lips, he darted back as quickly as he came, leaving Miss Travers suddenly stricken dumb.

Capt. Rayner turned sharply on his heel and stepped back into the waiting room. Mr. Ross nudged his brother lieutenant and whispered: "By gad! that's awkward for Midas!" The two subalterns who had taken the wrong turn at the top of the stairs reappeared there just as the rescuer shot past them on his way back, and stood staring, first after his disappearing form, and then at each other. Miss Travers, with wonder and relief curiously mingled in her sweet face, clung to her restored kitten and gazed vacantly up the stairs.

Mrs. Rayner looked confusedly from one to the other, quickly noting the constraint in the manner of every officer present and the sudden disappearance of her husband. There was an odd silence for a moment; then she spoke:

"Mr. Ross, do you know that gentleman?"

"I know who he is. Yes."

"Who is he, then?"

"He is your husband's new first lieutenant, Mrs. Rayner. That is Mr. Hayne."

"That!—Mr. Hayne?" she exclaimed, growing suddenly pale.

"Certainly, madam. Had you never seen him before?"

"Never; and I expected—I didn't expect to see such a"— And she broke short off, confused and plainly distressed, turned abruptly, and left the hall as had her husband.

Continued next Saturday

SUN DANCE OF THE SIOUX.

A GREAT RELIGIOUS CELEBRATION BY AMERICAN INDIANS.

The Ceremony Described in the March Century—Barbarous Rites of Cruelty and Self Torture—They Sometimes Lead to Fainting and Prove the Warrior's Nerve.

The March number of The Century Magazine has an article by Lieut. Schwatka, describing the great sun dance held a few years ago by Sioux Indians at the Spotted Tail agency on Beaver creek, Nebraska.

White men are rarely permitted to view the ceremony, and it was only through the influence of Spotted Tail, the chief, and Standing Elk, the head warrior, that Lieut. Schwatka was permitted to be present at this dance, the celebration of which occupied eight or nine days.

In the magazine the ceremony is fully described. We quote from advance sheets but two incidents of the dance.

The charge upon the sun pole, which Mr. Frederic Remington has made the subject of a spirited illustration, is described as follows:

WAVED HIS BLANKETED ARM ABOVE HIM.
[After Frederic Remington in the March Century.]

"Long before sunrise the eager participants in the next great step were preparing themselves for the ordeal, and a quarter of an hour before the sun rose above the broken hills of white clay a long line of naked young warriors, in gorgeous war paint and feathers, with rifles, bows and arrows, and war lances in hand, faced the east and the sun pole, which was from 500 to 600 yards away. Ordinarily this group of warriors numbers from 50 to 200 men. An interpreter near me estimated the line I beheld as from 1,000 to 1,200 strong. Not far away, on a high hill overlooking the barbaric scene, was an old warrior, a medicine man of the tribe, I think, whose solemn duty it was to announce by a shout that could be heard by every one of the expectant throng the exact moment when the tip of the morning sun appeared above the eastern hills.

"Perfect quiet rested upon the line of young warriors and upon the great throng of savage spectators that blacked the green hills overlooking the arena. Suddenly the old warrior, who had been kneeling on one knee, with his extended palm shading his scraggy eyebrows, arose to his full height, and in a slow, dignified manner waved his blanketed arm above his head. The few warriors who were still unmounted now jumped hurriedly upon their ponies; the broken, wavering line rapidly took on a more regular appearance, and then the old man, who had gathered himself for the great effort, hurled forth a yell that could be heard to the uttermost limits of the great throng. The morning sun had sent its commands to its warriors on earth to charge.

"The shout from the hill was re-echoed by the thousand men in the valley; it was caught up by the spectators on the hills as the long line of warriors hurled themselves forward towards the sun pole, the objective point of every armed and naked savage in the yelling line. As they converged towards it the slower ponies dropped out and the weaker ones were crushed to the rear. Nearer and nearer they came, the long line becoming massed until it was but a surging crowd of plunging horses and yelling, gesticulating riders.

"When the leading warriors had reached a point within a hundred yards of the sun pole, a sharp report of rifles sounded along the line, and a moment later the rushing mass was a sheet of flame, and the rattle of rifle shots was like the rapid beat of a drum resounding among the hills. Every shot, every arrow and every lance was directed at the pole, and bark and chips were flying from its sides like shavings from the rotary bit of a planer. When every bullet had been discharged, and every arrow and lance had been hurled, the riders crowded around the pole and shouted as only excited savages can shout."

Several days following the consecration of the sun pole were devoted to sun worship, fasting, dancing and various other rites. The final ordeal is thus described by Lieut. Schwatka:

"The row of dancers took their places promptly at sunrise, but it was not before 9 or 10 that the tortures began.

"Then each of the young men presented himself to a medicine man, who took between his thumb and forefinger a fold of the loose skin of the breast, about half way between the nipple and the collar bone, lifted it as high as possible and then ran a very sharp knife through it near the base. In the aperture thus made, and before the knife was withdrawn, a stronger sliver of bone about the size of a carpenter's pencil was inserted. Then the knife blade was taken out and over the projections of the sliver backwards and forwards, alternately right and left, was thrown a figure of eight noose with a strong thong of dressed skin. This was tied to a long skin rope fastened at the other extremity to the top of the sun pole in the center of the arena. Both breasts being similarly punctured, the thongs from each converging and joining the rope which hung from the pole. The whole object of the devotee is to break loose from these fetters. To liberate himself he must tear the skewers through the skin, a horrible task that even with the most resolute may require many hours of torture. The first attempts are very easy, and seem intended to get him used to the horrible pain he must yet endure before he breaks loose from the thongs.

"As he increases his efforts and shouts increase, he drops down his head, and the muscles stand out on his body in tortuous ridges, his swaying frame as he throws his whole weight wildly against the fearful fetters, being convulsed with anguish. All the while the beating of the tomtoms and the wild, weird chanting of the singers never ceases continuous. The wonderful strength and extensibility of the human skin is most forcibly and painfully displayed in the strong straining efforts of these strong victims. I have seen those bloody pieces of hide stretched to such a length from the devotees that his outstretched arm in front of him would barely allow me fingers to touch them.

"I know it is not pleasant to dwell long upon this cruel spectacle. Generally, in two or three hours the victim is free, but there are many cases where double and even triple that time is required. Oftentimes there are half a dozen swinging wildly from the pole, running towards it and then swinging backward, with the swiftness of a race horse and the fearlessness of police in their attempts to tear the accursed skewers from the wounded flesh. Occasionally some over ambitious youth will have four stakes within the arena, one fastening skewers to both breasts and to each shoulder, will throw himself backward and forward against the four ropes to hold the skewers to the pole.

"Fainting was not uncommon even among these hardy savages, but no fear, felt, opprobrium, censure or loss of respect in no way seemed to follow. The victim is cut loose and placed on the floor of some lodge near by and left in charge of his nurse. The only attempt I saw to revive him was a dash of water in front and behind administered in this manner. Whether the men ever afterwards entertained the cruel contest for having thus failed I do not know. It may be possible that [illegible] ambitious warriors may try it again after years of preparation, but I understand that it is supposed to be done but once in a lifetime. It is a fact of history, and by far the greater number grow up without absolutely from such savage barbarities. When the day is almost over, and the sun dancers have danced down in the west, the self tortured warriors file from the inclosed arena, one by one, and just outside the doors, deeply covered with handsomely painted buffalo robes, the head and with arms crossed over their bloody breasts and with bowed heads face the setting sun, and rise only when it has disappeared.

"Many other barbarous variations have been reported in connection with the buffalo or a buffalo skull at the end of the long rope fastened to the skewer and running over the prairie or through the timber, the victim dragging after the buffalo or skull until he liberates himself; or, when fainting, to drag the tortured man through the ground by the ropes until the victim overcomes the strength of the distended skin. My informants told me that in one of the ceremonies which I saw, the self torture in some form being the main common trait in all. The consecration of the sun pole, much of the dancing and singing, the double efforts of individual youths and other ceremonies [illegible] entirely or other substitutes [illegible] only as I saw it."

Salt Lake's First Mayor.

George [illegible] goes into history as the first Gentile non mayor of Salt Lake City. Forty-two years ago last July the city was founded, three years later it was incorporated and early in 1870 the Mormons made their first regular fight—Jews, Gentiles and apostate Mormons combining in the [illegible] party. This year they have carried both Salt Lake City, Provo and Ogden, yet their total vote in the territory is but 6,500, while that of the Mormons is 4,600, even after all the "polygs" are disfranchised.

GEORGE [illegible]

Mr. Scott is a native of Clinton county, N. Y., 54 years old. He went to California in 1852, and thence in 1871 to Utah, where he has been active in business and has prospered. There is great rejoicing over this long deferred triumph, and sanguine Gentiles think they see the overthrow of theocracy and redemption of Utah now at hand.

A Railroad Romance.

A railroad in Ireland, running from Carrickmacross to Kingscourt, is the object of a boycott which has been successfully maintained for many years. The Monaghan tradesmen are getting their goods carted more cheaply now than formerly by rail, and say the boycott is putting money in their pocket.