

By Capt. Charles King, U. S. A.

Author of "DENVER RANCE," "THE COLONEL'S DAUGHTER," "MARRION'S FAITH," ETC.

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A little girl knelt sobbing and terrified.

Down in the valley south of the post a broad glare was already shooting upward and illuminating the sky. One among a dozen little shanties and log huts, the homes of the garrison and the garrison and collectively known as Sudville, was a mass of flames. There was a rush of officers across the parade, and the men, answering the alarm of the trumpet and the shouts and shouts of the sentries, came tearing from their quarters and plunging down the hill. Among the first on the spot came the young men who were of the party at Capt. Rayner's, and Mr. Graham was hardly of them all. It was plain to the most inexperienced eye that there was already anything left to save in or about the burning shanty. All efforts must be directed towards preventing the spread of the flames to those adjoining. Half clad women and children were rushing about, shrieking with fright and excitement, and a few men were engaged in dragging household goods and furniture from those tenements not yet reached by the flames. Fire apparatus were sent for to be none, the squads of men speedily appeared with ladders, axes and buckets, brought from the different company quarters, and the arriving officers quickly formed the bucket lines, and water dipped from the icy creek began to fly from hand to hand. Before any thing like this was fairly under way, a scene of semi-tragic, semi-comic intensity had been enacted in the presence of a rapidly gathering audience. "It was more than the price of admission to hear Blake tell it afterwards," said the officers, later.

A tall, angular woman, frantic with excitement and terror, was dancing about in the broad glare of the burning hut, leaving her hair, making wild rushes at the flames from time to time as though intent on dragging out some prized object that was being consumed before her eyes, and all the time keeping up a volley of maledictions and abuse in Jewish gibberish, apparently directed at a covering object who sat in limp helplessness upon a little heap of firewood, swaying from side to side and moaning stupidly through the scorched and grimy hands in which his face was hidden. His hair and beard were singed to the roots; he was evidently seriously injured, and the sympathizing soldiers who had gathered around him after deluging him with snow and water were striving to get him to arise and go with them to the hospital. A little girl, not ten years old, knelt sobbing and terrified by his side. She, too, was scorched and singed, and the soldiers had thrown rough blankets about her; but it was for her father, not herself, she seemed worried to distraction. Some of the women were striving to reassure and comfort her in their homely fashion, bidding her cheer up—the father was only stupid from drink, and would be all right as soon as "the liquor was off his mind." But the little one was beyond consolation so long as he could not or would not speak in answer to her entreaties.

All this time, never pausing for breath, shrieking anathemas on her drunken spouse, reproaches on her frightened child, and invocations to all the blessed saints in heaven to reward the gentleman who had saved her from the flames, she smoked a pipe as rapidly as she could, her breath—Mrs. Clancy, "the squire's landlady" of Company B, as she had long styled herself, was prancing up and down through the gathering crowd, her shrill voice overmastering all other clamor. The vigorous efforts of the men, directed by cool headed officers, soon beat back the flames that were threatening the neighboring shanties, and leveled to the ground what remained of Private Clancy's home. The fire extinguished almost as rapidly as it began, but the torrent of Mrs. Clancy's eloquence was still unstemmed. The adjurations of sympathetic sisters to "How'd yer whis," the authoritative admonition of some old sergeant to "Stop your infernal noise," and the half maudlin yet appealing glances of her suffering lord were all insufficient to check her.

It was not until the quiet tones of the colonel were heard that she began to cool down: "We've had enough of this, Mrs. Clancy; it's still, now, or we'll have to send you to the hospital in the coal cart." Mrs. Clancy knew that the colonel was a man of few words, and believed him to be one of less sentiment. She was afraid of him, and concluded it time to cease threats and abuse and come down to the more effective role of wronged and suffering womanhood—a feat which she accomplished with the consummate ease of long practice, for the rows in the Clancy household were matters of garrison notoriety. The surgeon, too, had come, and, after quick examination of Clancy's condition, had directed him to be taken at once to the hospital; and thither his little daughter insisted on following him, despite the efforts of some of the women to detain her and dress her properly.

Before returning to his quarters the colonel desired to know something of the origin of the fire. There was testimony enough and to spare. Every woman in Sudville had a theory to express and truly never to be heard at once and to the amusement of all others. It was not until he had summarily ordered them to go to their homes and not come near him that the colonel managed to get a clear statement from some of the men.

table, overturning the zerosene lamp, and the curtains were all aflame in an instant. It was just after ten or ten o'clock when Kate's shrieks aroused the inmates of Sudville and started the cry of "Fire." The flimsy structure of pine boards burned like so much tinder, and the child and her stupefied father had been dragged forth only in time to save their lives. The little one, after giving orders in a hoarse, hoarse, hoarse voice, had rushed again into the house and was tugging at his senseless form when rescue came for both—none too soon.

As for Mrs. Clancy, at the first note of danger she had rushed screaming to the spot, but only in time to see the whole interior ablaze and to howl frantically for some man to save her money—it was all in the green box under the bed. For husband and child she had for the moment no thought. They were safely out of the fire by the time she got there, and she screamed and fought like a fury against the men who held her back when she would have plunged into the midst of it. It took but a minute for one or two men to burst through the flimsy wall with axes, to rescue the burning box and knock off the lid. It was a sight to see when the contents were handed to her. She knelt, wept, prayed, counted over bill after bill of exchange, steaming greenbacks, until suddenly recalled to her senses by the eager curiosity and the remarks of some of her fellow women. That she kept money, and a good deal of it, in her quarters had long been suspected and as fiercely denied; but no one had dreamed of such a sum as was revealed.

In her frenzy she had shrieked that the savings of her lifetime were burning—she had the cause of it, she had the dollars in the box, but she hid her treasure and gasped and stammered and swore as she talked "wild like." "They were nothing but twos and wans," she vowed; yet there were women there who declared that they had seen tens and twenties as she hurried them through her trembling fingers, and Sudville gossiped and talked for two hours after she was led away, still moaning and shivering, to the bedside of poor Clancy, who was in a miserable case of it. The colonel listened to the stories with such patience as could be accorded to witnesses who desired to give prominence to their personal exploits in subduing the flames and rescuing life and property. It was not until he and the group of officers with him had been engaged some moments in taking testimony that something was elicited which caused a new sensation.

It was not by the united efforts of Sudville that Clancy and Kate had been dragged from the flames, but by the individual dash and determination of a single man; there was no discrepancy here, for the ten or a dozen who were wildly rushing about the house made no effort to burst into it until a young soldier leaped through their midst into the blazing doorway, was seen to throw a blanket over some object within, and the next minute appeared again, dragging a body through the flames. Then the colonel sprang to his aid, and between them Kate and "the old man" were lifted into the open air. A moment later he had handed Mrs. Clancy her packet of money, and they hadn't seen him since. He was an officer, said they—a new one. They thought it must be the new lieutenant of Company B, and the colonel looking quickly around and said a few words to his adjutant, who started up the hill forthwith. A group of officers and ladies were standing at the brow of the plateau east of the guard house, gazing down upon the scene below, and other ladies, with their escorts, had gathered on a little knoll close by the road that led to Prairie avenue. It was past three that the adjutant walked rapidly away, swinging his hurricane lamp in his hand.

"Which was now, Billings?" called one of the cavalry officers in the group. "Over to Mr. Hayne's quarters," he shouted back, never stopping at all. A silence fell upon the group at mention of the name. They were the ladies from Capt. Rayner's and a few of their immediate friends. All eyes followed the twinkling light as it danced away eastward towards the gloomy old sheds. Then there was sudden and intense interest. The lamp had come to a stand still, was positioned on the ground, and by its dim ray the adjutant could be seen bending over a dark object that was half sitting, half reclining at the platform of the shed. Then came a shout, "Come here, some of you." And most of the men ran to the spot.

For a moment not one word was spoken in the watching group; then Miss Travers' voice was heard:

"What can it be? Why do they stop there?"

She felt a sudden hand upon her wrist, and her sister's lips at her ear:

"Come away, Nellie. I want to go home. Come!"

"But, Kate, I must see what it means." "No; come! It's—it's only some other drunken man probably. Come!" And she strove to lead her.

But the other ladies were curious too, and all, insensibly, were edging over to the east as though eager to get in sight of the group. The recumbent object had been raised, and was seen to be the dark figure of a man, whom the others began slowly to lead away. One of the group came running back to them; it was Mr. Foster.

"Come, ladies; I will escort you home, as the others are busy."

"What is the matter, Mr. Foster?" was asked by half a dozen voices.

"It was Mr. Hayne—badly burned, I fear. He was trying to get home after having saved poor Clancy."

"You don't say so, Oh, isn't there something wrong here?" "Can't we go that way and be of some help to the eager petition of more than one of the ladies?"

"Not now. He has not inhaled flame; it is all external; and he was partly blinded and could not find his way. He called to Billings when he heard him coming. I will get you all home and then go back to him. Come!" And, offering his arm to Mrs. Rayner, who was foremost in the direction he wanted to go—the roadway across the parade—Mr. Foster led them on. Of course, there was eager talk and voluble sympathy, but Mrs. Rayner spoke not a word. The others crowded around him with questions, and her silence passed unnoted except by one.

The moment they were inside the door and alone Miss Travers turned to her sister: "Kate, what was this man's crime?"



"I mean the injuries at the fire."

An unusual state of affairs existed at the big hospital for several days. Mrs. Clancy had refused to leave the bedside of her beloved Mike, and was permitted to remain. The bleeding of all the saints be upon his beautiful head, and—"But who was it? What was his name, I say?" vehemently interrupted Clancy, half raising himself upon his elbow, and groaning with the effort. "What was his name? I didn't see him."

"Leut. Hayne, man." "Oh, my God!" gasped Clancy, and fell back as though struck a sudden blow. She sprang to his side. "It's faint he is. Don't answer his questions, sergeant! He's beside himself! Oh, will you never stop talking to him and leave him in peace? Go away, all of ye—go away, I say, or ye'll drive him crazy yet!" Be quiet, Mike! don't ye spake again. And she laid a broad, red hand upon his face. He only groaned again and threw his one untended arm across his daughter's eyes, as though to hide from sight all.

From that time on she made no mention of the name that so strangely excited her stricken husband, but the watchers in the hospital the next night declared that in his ravings Clancy kept calling for Lieut. Hayne. Stannard's battalion of the cavalry came marching into the post two days after the fire, and created a diversion in the garrison talk, which for one long day had been all that dramatic incident and its attendant circumstances. In social circles, among the officers and ladies, the main topic was the conduct of Mr. Hayne and the injuries he had sustained as a consequence of his gallant rescue. Among the enlisted men and the denizens of Sudville the talk was principally of the revelation of Mrs. Clancy's hoard of greenbacks. In both circles a singular story was beginning to creep around, and to the effect that Clancy had died, and that Mrs. Clancy had gone into hysterics when they were told that Lieut. Hayne was the man to whom the one owed his life and the other her money. Some one met Capt. Rayner on the sidewalk the morning Stannard came marching home and asked him if he had heard the queer story about Clancy. He had not, and it was told him then and there.

Rayner did not even attempt to laugh at it or turn it off in any way. He looked dazed, stunned, for a moment, turned very white and old looking, and, hardly saying good day to his informant, faced about and went straight to his quarters. He was not among the crowd that gathered to welcome the incoming cavalrymen that bright, crisp, winter day, and that evening Mrs. Rayner went to the hospital to ask what she could do for Clancy as he lay there. Rayner at once expected her to see that every care and attention was paid to the sick and needy of his company, she explained to the doctor, who could not recall having seen on a similar errand before, although sick and needy of Company B were not unknown in garrisons where he had served with them. She spent a good while with Mrs. Clancy, whom she had never noticed hitherto, much to the laundress' indignation, and concerning whose conduct she had been known to express herself in terms of extreme disapprobation. But in times of suffering such things are forgotten; Mrs. Rayner was full of sympathy and interest; there was nothing she was not eager to send them, and no thanks were necessary. She could never do too much for the men of her husband's company.

Yet there was a member of her husband's company on whom in his suffering milder she nor the captain saw fit to call. Mrs. Hayne's eyes were seriously injured by the flames and heat, and he was now blind in the doctor, before he could use his eyes again. "Only think of that poor fellow all alone out there on that ghastly prairie and unable to read!" was the exclamation of one of the cavalry ladies in Mrs. Rayner's presence; and, as there was an awkward silence and somebody had to break it, Mrs. Rayner responded:

"If I lived on Prairie avenue I should consider blindness a blessing." It was a strong sympathy developing for Hayne all through the garrison. Mrs. Rayner never meant that it should have any such significance, but inside of twenty-four hours, in course of which her language had been repeated some dozens of times and distorted quite as many, the generally accepted version of the story was that Mrs. Rayner, so far from expressing the faintest sympathy or sorrow for Mr. Hayne's misfortune, so far from expressing the faintest sympathy or sorrow for a lady should feel that it was an officer of her regiment who had reached the scene of danger ahead of the cavalry officer of the guard, had said in so many words that Mr. Hayne ought to be thankful that blindness was the worst thing that had come to him.

There was little chance for harmony after that. Many men and some women, of course, refused to believe it, and said they felt confident that she had been deceived. Still, as Rayner was bitter against Hayne, and had heard of her denunciation of the colonel's action. So, too, had the colonel heard that she openly declared that she would refuse any invitation extended to her or to her sister which might involve her accepting hospitality at his house. These things do get around in most astonishing ways.

Then another complication arose: Hayne, too, was mixing matters. The matter of his blindness and that of the no wise connected with his misfortune, had gone to him and urged, with the doctor's full consent, that he should be moved over into and become an inmate of his household in Garrison. He had a big, roomy house. His wife earnestly aided her entreaties to the major's, but all to no purpose: Mr. Hayne firmly declined. He thanked the major; he rose and bent over the lady's hand and thanked her with a voice that was full of gentleness and gratitude; but he said that he had learned to live in solitude. Sam was accustomed to all his ways, and he had every comfort he needed. His wants were few and simple. She would not be content, and urged him further. He loved reading; surely he would miss his books and would need some one to read aloud to him, and there were so many ladies in the garrison who would be glad to meet him and read to him. He would not. He loved music, she said, and there was her piano, and she knew several who would be delighted to come and play for him by the hour. I shook his head, and the bandages hid the tears that came to his smarting eyes. He had made arrangements to be read aloud to, he said; and as for music, that must wait awhile.

The kind woman retired dismayed—she could not understand this obstinacy, and her husband felt rebuffed. Stannard, of the cavalry, too, came in with his gentle wife. She was loved throughout the regiment for her kindness and serene of mind, as well as for her devo-

tion to the sick and suffering in the old days of the Indian war, and Stannard had made a similar proffer and been similarly refused, and he had gone away indignant. Mrs. Hayne too, had her own bluntness to live with her own malice, and his wrath was soon over. Many of the cavalry officers called in person and tendered their services, and were very civilly received, but all officers were positively declined. Just what the infantry officers should do was a momentous question. That they could no longer hold aloof was a matter that was quickly settled, and three of their number went through the chill gloaming of the winter eve and sent in their cards by Sam, who ushered them into the cheerless front room, while one of their number followed to the doorway which led to the room in rear, in which, still confined to his bed by the doctor's advice, the injured officer was lying. It was Mr. Ross who went to the door and cleared his throat and stood in the presence of the man to whom, more than five years before, he had refused his hand.

The others listened anxiously: "Mr. Hayne, this is Ross. I come with Foster and Graham to say how deeply we regret your injuries, and to tender our sympathy and our services." There was dead silence for a moment. Foster and Graham stood with hearts that beat unaccountably hard, looking at each other in perplexity. Would he never reply?

The answer came at last—a question: "To what injuries do you allude, Mr. Ross?" "Even in the twilight they could see the sudden flush of the Scotchman's cheek. He was a blunt fellow, but, as the senior, had been chosen spokesman for the three. The abrupt question staggered him. It was a second or two before he could collect himself.

"I mean the injuries at the fire," he replied. "This time no answer whatever. It was growing too dark to see his face, and again broke the silence: "We hope you won't deny us the right to be of service, Mr. Hayne. If there is anything we can do for you need or would like"—hesitatingly.

"You have nothing further to say?" asked the calm voice from the pillow. "I—don't know what else we can say," faltered Ross, after an instant's pause. The answer came, firm and prompt, but with a note of sternness: "Then there is nothing that you can do."

And the three took their departure, sore at heart. There were others of the infantry who had purposed going to see Hayne that evening, but the story of Ross's experience put an end to it all. It was plain that even now Mr. Hayne made the condition of the faintest advance from his regimental comrades a full confession of error. He would have no less.

That evening the colonel sat by his bedside and had an earnest talk. He ventured to expostulate with the invalid on his refusal to go to the major's or to Stannard's. He could have so many comforts and delicacies there that would be impossible here. He did not refer to edibles and drinkables alone, he said, with a smile; but Hayne's patient face gave no sign of relenting. He heard the colonel through, and then said slowly and firmly:

"I have not acted hastily, sir; I appreciate their kindness, and am not ungrateful. Five years ago my whole life was changed. From that time to this I have done without a host of things that used to be indispensable, and have abjured them one and all for a single luxury that I cannot live without—the luxury of utter independence—the joy of knowing that I owe no man anything—the blessing of being beholden to no one in earth for a single service I cannot pay for. It is the one luxury left me."

CHAPTER VII. "You shall not go!"

It was a clear winter's evening, sharply cold, about a week after the fire, when as Mrs. Rayner came down the stairway, equipped for a walk, and was passing the parlor door without stopping, Miss Travers caught sight of and called to her:

"Are you going walking, Kate? Do wait a moment, and I'll go with you." Any one in the hall could have shared the author's privilege and seen the expression of annoyance and confusion that appeared on Mrs. Rayner's face.

"I thought you were out. Did not Mr. Graham take you walking?" "He did; but we wandered into Mrs. Waldron's, and she and the major begged us to stay, and we had some music, and then the first call sounded for retreat and Mr. Graham had to go, so he brought me home. I've had no walk and need exercise."

"But I don't like you to be out after sunset. That cough of yours—" "Disappeared the day after I got here, Kate, and there hasn't been a vestige of it since. This high, dry climate put an end to it. No, it is ready in one minute more. Do wait."

Mrs. Rayner's hand was turning the knob while her sister was hurrying to the front door and drawing on her heavy jacket as she did so. The former faced her impatiently:

"I don't think you are at all courteous to your visitors. You know just as well as I do that Mr. Foster or Mr. Royce or some other of those young officers are sure to be in just at this hour. You really are very thoughtless, Nellie."

Miss Travers stopped short in her preparations. "Kate Rayner," she began, impressively, "it was only night before last that you rebuked me for sitting here with Mr. Blake at this very hour, and asked me how I supposed Mr. Van Antwerp would like it. Now you—"

"Fudge! I cannot stay and listen to such talk. If you must go, wait a few minutes until I get back. I want to make a short call. Then I'll take you."

"So do I want to make a short call—over at the doctor's; and you are going right to the hospital, are you not?" "How do you know I am?" asked Mrs. Rayner, reddening.

"You do go there every evening, it seems to me." "I don't. Who told you I did?" "Several people told me your kindness and propiety to the Clancys. I have heard it from many sources." "I wish people would mind their own affairs," wailed Mrs. Rayner, peevishly.

"So do I, Anne; but they never have, and never will, especially with an engaged girl. I have more to complain of than you, but it doesn't make me forlorn, whereas you look fearfully worried about nothing." "Who says I'm worried?" asked Mrs. Rayner, with sudden vehemence. "You look worried, Kate, and haven't been at all like yourself for several days. Now, why shouldn't I go to the hospital with you? Why do you try to hide your going from me? Don't you know that I must have heard the strange stories that are flitting about the garrison? Haven't I asked you to set me right? I have been told a wrong one, Kate, you are fretting yourself to death about something, and the captain looks worried and ill. I cannot but think it has some connection with the case of Mr. Hayne. Why shouldn't the Clancys?"

"You have no right to think any such thing," answered her sister, angrily. "We have suffered too much at his hands or on his account already, and I never want to hear such words from your lips. It would outrage Capt. Rayner to hear that his sister, to whom he has given a home and welcome, was linking herself with those who side with that—that thief."

"Kate! Oh, how can you use such words? How dare you speak so of an officer? You would not tell me what he was accused of; but I tell you that if it be theft I don't believe it, and no one else!"

There was a sudden flook on the porch without, and a quick, sharp, impatient knock at the door. Mrs. Rayner flew back along the hall towards the dining room. Miss Travers, hesitating but a second, opened the door.

It was the soldier telegraph operator with a dispatch envelope in his hand. "It is for Mrs. Rayner, miss, and an answer is expected. Shall I wait?"

Mrs. Rayner came hastily forward from her place of refuge within the dining room, took the envelope without a growing too pale as she looked in bewilderment at the bandaged face and again broke the silence: "We hope you won't deny us the right to be of service, Mr. Hayne. If there is anything we can do for you need or would like"—hesitatingly.

"You have nothing further to say?" asked the calm voice from the pillow. "I—don't know what else we can say," faltered Ross, after an instant's pause. The answer came, firm and prompt, but with a note of sternness: "Then there is nothing that you can do."

And the three took their departure, sore at heart. There were others of the infantry who had purposed going to see Hayne that evening, but the story of Ross's experience put an end to it all. It was plain that even now Mr. Hayne made the condition of the faintest advance from his regimental comrades a full confession of error. He would have no less.

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"But I don't like you to be out after sunset. That cough of yours—" "Disappeared the day after I got here, Kate, and there hasn't been a vestige of it since. This high, dry climate put an end to it. No, it is ready in one minute more. Do wait."

Mrs. Rayner's hand was turning the knob while her sister was hurrying to the front door and drawing on her heavy jacket as she did so. The former faced her impatiently:

"I don't think you are at all courteous to your visitors. You know just as well as I do that Mr. Foster or Mr. Royce or some other of those young officers are sure to be in just at this hour. You really are very thoughtless, Nellie."

Miss Travers stopped short in her preparations. "Kate Rayner," she began, impressively, "it was only night before last that you rebuked me for sitting here with Mr. Blake at this very hour, and asked me how I supposed Mr. Van Antwerp would like it. Now you—"

"Fudge! I cannot stay and listen to such talk. If you must go, wait a few minutes until I get back. I want to make a short call. Then I'll take you."

"So do I want to make a short call—over at the doctor's; and you are going right to the hospital, are you not?" "How do you know I am?" asked Mrs. Rayner, reddening.

"You do go there every evening, it seems to me." "I don't. Who told you I did?" "Several people told me your kindness and propiety to the Clancys. I have heard it from many sources." "I wish people would mind their own affairs," wailed Mrs. Rayner, peevishly.

CHAPTER VII. "You shall not go!"

It was a clear winter's evening, sharply cold, about a week after the fire, when as Mrs. Rayner came down the stairway, equipped for a walk, and was passing the parlor door without stopping, Miss Travers caught sight of and called to her:

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tion to the sick and suffering in the old days of the Indian war, and Stannard had made a similar proffer and been similarly refused, and he had gone away indignant. Mrs. Hayne too, had her own bluntness to live with her own malice, and his wrath was soon over. Many of the cavalry officers called in person and tendered their services, and were very civilly received, but all officers were positively declined. Just what the infantry officers should do was a momentous question. That they could no longer hold aloof was a matter that was quickly settled, and three of their number went through the chill gloaming of the winter eve and sent in their cards by Sam, who ushered them into the cheerless front room, while one of their number followed to the doorway which led to the room in rear, in which, still confined to his bed by the doctor's advice, the injured officer was lying. It was Mr. Ross who went to the door and cleared his throat and stood in the presence of the man to whom, more than five years before, he had refused his hand.

The others listened anxiously: "Mr. Hayne, this is Ross. I come with Foster and Graham to say how deeply we regret your injuries, and to tender our sympathy and our services." There was dead silence for a moment. Foster and Graham stood with hearts that beat unaccountably hard, looking at