

FROM THE RANKS BY CAPT. CHARLES KING

CHAPTER IX.

When Captain Armitage left the cottage that night, he did not go to once to his own room. Brief as was the conversation he had enjoyed with Miss Renwick, it was all that fate vouchsafed him for that date at least. The entire party went to tea together at the hotel, but immediately thereafter the colonel carried Armitage away, and for two long hours they were closeted over some letters that had come from Sibley, and when the conference broke up and the wondering ladies saw the two men come forth it was late—almost 10 o'clock—and the captain did not venture beyond the threshold of the sitting room. He bowed and bade them a somewhat ceremonious good night. His eyes rested—lingered—on Miss Renwick's uplifted face, and it was the picture he took with him into the stillness of the summer night.

The colonel accompanied him to the steps and rested his hand upon the broad gray shoulder.

"God only knows how I have needed you, Armitage. This trouble has nearly crushed me, and it seems as though I were utterly alone. I had the haunting fear that it was only weakness on my part and my love for my wife that made me stand out against Chester's propositions. He can only see guilt and conviction in every new phase of the case, and though you see how he tries to spare me his letters give no hope of any other conclusion.

Armitage pondered a moment before he answered, then he slowly spoke: "Chester has lived a lonely and an unhappy life. His first experience after graduation was that wretched affair of which you have told me. Of course I knew much of the particulars before, but not all. I respect Chester as a soldier and a gentleman, and I like him and trust him as a friend; but Colonel Maynard, in a matter of such vital importance as this, and one of such delicacy, I distrust not his motives, but his judgment. All his life, practically, he has been brooding over the sorrow that came to him when your trouble came to you, and his mind is grooved. He believes he sees mystery and intrigue in matters that others might explain in an instant."

"But think of all the array of evidence he has."

"Enough and more than enough, I admit, to warrant everything he has thought or said of the man, but—" "He simply puts it this way. If he be guilty, can she be less? Is it possible, Armitage, that you are unconvinced?" "Certainly I am unconvinced. The matter has not yet been sifted. As I understand it, you have forbidden his confronting Jerrold with the proofs of his rascality until I get there. Admitting the evidence of the ladder, the picture and the form at the window—aye, the letter, too—I am yet to be convinced of one thing. You must remember that his judgment is biased by his early experiences. He fancies that no woman is proof against such fascinations as Jerrold's."

"And your belief?"

"Is that some woman—many women—are utterly above such a possibility." "Old Maynard wrung his comrade's hand. 'You make me hope in spite of myself, my past experiences, my very senses, Armitage. I have leaned on you so many years that I missed you sorely when this trial came. If you had been there, things might not have taken this shape. He looks upon Chester—and it's one thing Chester hasn't forgiven in him—as a meddling old granny. You remember the time he spoke of him last year, but he holds you in respect or is afraid of you, which in a man of his caliber is about the same thing. It may not be too late for you to act. Then, when he is disposed of once and for all, I can know what must be done, where she is concerned."

"And under no circumstances can you question Mrs. Maynard?"

"No, no! If she suspected anything of this, it would kill her. In any event, she must have no suspicion of it now."

"But does she not ask? Has she no theory about the missing photograph? Surely she must marvel over its disappearance."

"She does, at least she did, but—I'm ashamed to own it, Armitage—we had to quiet her natural suspicions in some way, and I told her that it was my doing; that I took it to tease Alice, put the photograph in the drawer of my desk and hid the frame behind her sofa pillow. Chester knows of the arrangement, and we had settled that when the picture was recovered from Mr. Jerrold he would send it to me."

Armitage was silent. A frown settled on his forehead, and it was evident that the statement was far from welcome to him. Presently he held forth his hand. "Well, good night, sir. I must go and have a quiet night over this. I hope you will rest well. You need it, colonel."

But Maynard only shook his head. His heart was too troubled for rest of any kind. He stood gazing out toward the park, where the tall figure of his ex-adjutant had disappeared among the trees. He heard the low toned, pleasant chat of the ladies in the sitting room, but he was in no mood to join them. He wished that Armitage had not gone, he felt such strength and comparative hope in his presence, but it was plain that even Armitage was confounded by the array of facts and circumstances that he had so painfully and slowly communicated to him. The colonel went drearily back to the room in which they had had their long conference. His wife and sister both hailed him as he passed the sitting room door and urged him to come and join them—they wanted to ask about Captain Armitage, with whom it was evident they were much impressed—but he answered that he had some letters to put away, and he must attend first to that.

Among those that had been shown to

the captain, mainly letters from Chester telling of the daily events at the fort and of his surveillance in the case of Jerrold, was one which Alice had brought him two days before. This had seemed to him of unusual importance, as the others contained nothing that tended to throw new light on the case. It said:

"I am glad you have telegraphed for Armitage and heartily approve your decision to lay the whole case before him. I presume he can reach you by Sunday, and that by Tuesday he will be here at the fort and ready to act. This will be a great relief to me, for, do what I could to allay it, there is no concealing the fact that much speculation and gossip is afloat concerning the events of that unhappy night. Leary declared he has been close mouthed. The other men on guard know absolutely nothing, and Captain Wilton is the only officer to whom in my distress of mind I betrayed that there was a mystery, and he has pledged himself to me to say nothing. Sloat, too, has an inkling, and a big one, that Jerrold is the suspected party, but I never dreamed that anything had been seen or heard which in the faintest way connected your household with the matter until yesterday. Then Leary admitted to me that two women, Mrs. Clifford's cook and the doctor's nursery maid, had asked him whether it wasn't Lieutenant Jerrold he fired at, and if it was true that he was trying to get in the colonel's back door. Twice Mrs. Clifford has asked me very significant questions, and three times today have officers made remarks to me that indicated their knowledge of the existence of some grave trouble. What makes matters worse is that Jerrold, when twitted about his absence from reveille, loses his temper, and gets confused. There came near being a quarrel between him and Rollins at the mess a day or two since. He was saying that the reason he slept through roll call was the fact that he had been kept up very late at the doctor's party, and Rollins happened to come in at the moment and blurted out that if he was up at all it must have been after he left the party and reminded him that he had left before midnight with Miss Renwick. This completely staggered Jerrold, who grew confused and tried to cover it with a display of anger. Now, two weeks ago Rollins was most friendly to Jerrold and stood up for him when I assailed him, but ever since that night he has no word to say for him. When Jerrold played wrathful and accused Rollins of mixing in other men's business, Rollins bounced up to him like a young bull terrier, and I believe there would have been a row had not Sloat and Hoyt promptly interfered. Jerrold apologized, and Rollins accepted the apology, but has avoided him ever since—won't speak of him to me now that I have reason to want to draw him out. As soon as Armitage gets here he can do what I cannot—find out just what and who is suspected and talked about."

"Mr. Jerrold, of course, avoids me. He has been attending strictly to his duty and is evidently confounded that I did not press the matter of his going to town as he did the day I forbade it. Mr. Hoyt's being too late to see him personally gave me sufficient grounds on which to excuse it, but he seems to understand that something is impending and is looking nervous and harassed. He has not renewed his request for leave of absence to run down to Sablon. I told him curtly it was out of the question."

The colonel took a few strides up and down the room. It had come then. The good name of those he loved was already besmirched by garrison gossip, and he knew that nothing but heroic measures could ever silence scandal. Impulse and the innate sense of "fight" urged him to go at once to the scene, leaving his wife and her fair daughter here under his sister's roof, but Armitage and common sense said no. He had placed his burden on those broad gray shoulders, and though ill content to wait he felt that he was bound. Stowing away the letters, too nervous to sleep, too worried to talk, he stole from the cottage, and, with his head clasped behind his back, with his bowed head, he strolled forth into the broad vista of moonlit road.

There were bright lights still burning at the hotel, and gay voices came floating through the summer air. The piano, too, was trumming a waltz in the parlor, and two or three couples were throwing embracing, slowly twirling shadows on the windows. Over in the ball and billiard rooms the click of the balls and the refreshing rattle of cracked ice told suggestively of the occupation of the inmates. Keeping on beyond these distracting sounds, he slowly climbed a long, gradual ascent to the "bench," or plateau above the wooded point on which were grouped the glistening white buildings of the pretty summer resort, and having reached the crest turned silently to gaze at the beauty of the scene—the broad, flowless bosom of a summer lake all sheen and silver from the unclouded moon. Far to the southeast it wound among the bold and rock ribbed bluffs rising from the forest growth at their base to shorn and rounded summits.

Miles away to the southward twinkled the lights of one busy little town. Others gleamed and sparkled over toward the northern shore, close under the pole star, while directly opposite frowned a massive wall of palisaded rock that threw, deep and heavy and far from shore, its long reflection in the mirror of water. There was not a breath of air stirring in the heavens, not a ripple on the face of the waters beneath, save where, close under the bold headland down on the other side, the signal lights, white and crimson and green, creeping slowly along in the shadows, revealed one of the packets plowing her steady way to the great marts below. Nearer at hand, just shading the long strip of sandy, wooded point that jutted far out into the lake, a broad raft of timber, pushed by a hard-

working, black funneled stern wheeler, was slowly forging its way to the outlet of the lake, its shadowy edge sprukled here and there with little sparks of lurid red—the pilot lights that gave warning of its slow and silent coming. Far down along the southern shore, under that black bluff line, close to the silver water edge, a glowing meter seemed whirling through the night, and the low, distant rumbles told of the Atlantic express thundering on its journey. Here, along with him on the level plateau, were other roomy cottages, some dark, some still sending forth a guiding ray, while long lines of white-washed fence gleamed ghostly in the moonlight and were finally lost in the shadow of the great bluff that abruptly shent in the entire point and plateau and shut out all further sight of lake or land in that direction. Far beneath he could hear the soft splash upon the sandy shore of the little vaulets that came sweeping in the wake of the raftboat and spending their tiny strength upon the strand; far down on the hotel point he could still hear the soft melody of the waltz. He remembered how the band used to play that same air and wondered why it was he used to like it. It jangled him now.

Presently the distant crack of a whip and the low rumble of wheels were heard, the omnibus coming back from the station with passengers for the night train. He was in no mood to see any one. He turned away and walked northward along the edge of the bench, toward the deep shadow of the great shoulder of the bluff, and presently he came to a long flight of wooden stairs, leading from the plateau down to the hotel, and here he stopped and seated himself awhile. He did not want to go home yet. He wanted to be by himself, to think and brood over his trouble. He saw the omnibus go round the bend and roll up to the hotel doorway with its load of pleasure seekers and heard the joyous welcome with which some of their number were received by waiting friends, but life had little of joy to him this night. He longed to go away, anywhere, anywhere, could he only leave this haunting misery behind. He was so proud of his regiment. He had been so happy in bringing home to it his accomplished and gracious wife. He had been so joyous in planning for the lovely times Alice was to have, the social success, the girlish triumphs, the garrison gaieties, of which she was to be the queen, and now, so very, very soon, all had turned to ashes and desolation! She was so beautiful, so sweet, winning, graceful. Oh, God! could it be that one so gifted could possibly be so base? He rose in nervous misery and clinched his hands high in air, then sat down again with hiding, hopeless face, rocking to and fro as sways a man in mortal pain. It was long before he rallied, and again he wearily arose. Most of the lights were gone. Silence had settled down upon the sleeping point. He was chilled with the night air and the dew and stiff and heavy as he tried to walk.

Down at the foot of the stairs he could see the night watchman making his rounds. He did not want to explain matters and talk with him. He would go around. There was a steep pathway down into the ravine that gave into the lake just beyond his sister's cottage, and this he sought and followed, moving stowly and painfully, but finally reaching the grassy level of the pathway that connected the cottages with the wood road up the bluff. Trees and shrubbery were thick on both sides, and the path was shaded. He turned to his right and came down until once more he was in sight of the white walls of the hotel standing out there on the point, until close at hand he could see the light of his own cottage glimmering like a faithful beacon through the trees, and then he stopped short.

A tall, slender figure—a man in dark, snug fitting clothing—was creeping stealthily up to the cottage window. The colonel held his breath. He waited—watched. He saw the dark figure reach the blinds. He saw the slowly, softly turned, and the faint light gleaming from within. He saw the figure peering in between the slats, and then—



He saw the figure peering in between the slats.

God, was it possible—a low voice, a man's voice, whispering or hoarsely murmuring a name. He heard a sudden movement within the room, as though the occupant had heard and were replying, "Coming." His blood froze. It was not Alice's room. It was his—his and hers—his wife's—and that was surely her step approaching the window. Yes, the blind was quickly opened. A white robed figure stood at the casement. He could see, hear, bear no more. With one mad rush he sprang from his lair and hurled himself upon the shadowy stranger.

"You hoard! Who are you?"

But 'twas no shadow that he grasped. A muscular arm was round him in a trice, a brawny hand at his throat, a twisting, sinewy leg was curled in his, and he went reeling back upon the springy turf, stunned and well nigh breathless.

When he could regain his feet and reach the casement, the stranger had vanished, but Mrs. Maynard lay there on the floor within, a white and senseless heap.

CHAPTER X.

Perhaps it was as well for all parties that Frank Armitage concluded that he must have another whiff of tobacco that night as an incentive to the "think" he had promised himself. He had strolled through the park to the grove of trees out on the point and seated himself in the shadows. Here his reflections were speedily interrupted by the animated flirtations of a few couples, who, tiring of the dance, came out into the coolness of the night and the seclusion of the grove, where their murmured words and soft laughter soon gave the captain's nerves a strain they could not bear. He broke over and betook himself to the very edge of the stone retaining wall out on the point.

He wanted to think calmly and dispassionately. He meant to weigh all he had read and heard and form his estimate of the gravity of the case before going to bed. He meant to be impartial, to judge her as he would judge any other woman so compromised, but for the life of him he could not. He bore with him the mute image of her lovely face, with its clear, truthful, trustful dark eyes. He saw her as she stood before him on the little porch when they shook hands on their laughing—or his laughing—compact, for she would not laugh. How perfect she was! Her radiant beauty, her uplifted eyes, so full of their self reproach and regret at the speech she had made at his expense! How exquisite was the grace of her slender, rounded form as she stood there before him, one slim hand half shyly extended to meet the cordial clasp of his own! He wanted to judge and be just, but that image dismayed him. How could he look on this picture and then on that, the one portrayed in the chain of circumstantial evidence which the colonel had laid before him? It was monstrous! It was treason to womanhood! One look in her eyes, super in their innocence, was too much for his determined impartiality. Armitage gave himself a mental kick for what he termed his imbecility and went back to the hotel.

"It's no use," he muttered. "I'm a slave of the weed and can't be philosopher without my pipe."

Up to his little box of a room he climbed, found his pipecase and tobacco pouch, and in five minutes was strolling out to the point once more, when he came suddenly upon the night watchman, a personage of whose functions and authority he was entirely ignorant. The man eyed him narrowly and essayed to speak. Not knowing him, and desiring to be alone, Armitage pushed past and was surprised to find that a hand was on his shoulder and the man at his side before he had gone a rod.

"Beg pardon, sir," said the watchman gruffly, "but I don't know you. Are you stopping at the hotel?"

"I am," said Armitage coolly, taking his pipe from his lips and blowing a cloud over his other shoulder. "And who may you be?"

"I am the watchman, and I do not remember seeing you come today."

"Nevertheless I did."

"On what train, sir?"

"This afternoon's up train."

"You certainly were not on the omnibus when it got here."

"Very true. I walked over from beyond the schoolhouse."

"You must excuse me, sir. I did not think of that, and the manager requires me to know everybody. Is this Major Armitage?"

"Armitage is my name, but I'm not a major."

"Yes, sir; I'm glad to be set right. And the other gentleman—him as was inquiring for Colonel Maynard tonight? He's in the army, too, but his name don't seem to be on the book. He only came in on the late train."

"Another man to see Colonel Maynard?" asked the captain, with sudden interest. "Just come in, you say? I'm sure I've no idea. What was he like?"

"I don't know, sir. At first I thought you was him. The driver told me he brought a gentleman over who asked some questions about Colonel Maynard, but he didn't get aboard at the depot, and he didn't come down to the hotel—got off somewhere up there on the bench, and Jim didn't see him."

"Where's Jim?" said Armitage.

"Come with me, watchman. I want to interview him."

Together they walked over to the barn, which the driver was just locking up after making everything secure for the night.

"Who was it inquiring for Colonel Maynard?" asked Armitage.

"I don't know, sir," was the slow answer. "There was a man got aboard as I was coming across the common there in the village at the station. There were several passengers from the train and some baggage, so he may have started ahead on foot, but afterward concluded to ride. As soon as I saw him get in I reined up and asked where he was going. He had no baggage nor nuthin, and my orders are not to haul anybody except people of the hotel, so he came right forward through the bus and took the seat behind me and said 'twas all right, he was going to the hotel, and he passed up a half dollar. I told him that I couldn't take the money—that bus fares were paid at the office—and drove ahead. Then he handed me a cigar, and pretty soon he asked me if there were many people, and who had the cottages, and when I told him he asked which was Colonel Maynard's, but he didn't say he knew him, and the next thing I knew was when we got here to the hotel he wasn't in the bus. He must have stepped back through all those passengers and slipped off up there on the bench. He was in it when we passed the little brown church up on the hill."

"What was he like?"

"I couldn't see him plain. He stepped out from behind a tree as we drove into the bus. It was dark in there, and all I know is he was tall and had on dark clothes. Some of the people inside must have seen him better, but they are all gone to bed, I suppose."

"I will go over to the hotel and inquire anyway," said Armitage, and did so. The lights were turned down, and no one was there, but he could hear voices chattering in quiet tones on the broad, sheltered veranda without, and going thither found three or four men enjoying a quiet smoke. Armitage was a man of action. He stepped at once to the group:

"Pardon me, gentlemen, but did any of you come over in the omnibus from the station tonight?"

"I did, sir," replied one of the party, removing his cigar and twitching off the ashes with his little finger, then looking up with the air of a man expectant of question.

"The watchman tells me a man came over who was making inquiries for Colonel Maynard. May I ask if you saw or heard of such a person?"

"A gentleman got in soon after we left the station, and when the driver halted him he went forward and took a seat near him. They had some conversation, but I did not hear it. I only know that he got out again a little while before we reached the hotel."

"Could you see him and describe him? I am a friend of Colonel Maynard's, an officer of his regiment, which will account for my inquiry."

"Well, yes, sir. I noticed he was very tall and slim, was dressed in dark

clothes and wore a dark slouched hat well down over his forehead. He was what I would call a military looking man, for I noticed his walk as he got off, but he wore big spectacles, like brown glass, I should say, and had a heavy beard."

"Which way did he go when he left the bus?"

"He walked northward along the road at the edge of the bluff, right up toward the cottages on the upper level," was the answer.

Armitage thanked him for his courtesy, explained that he had left the colony only a short time before and that he was then expecting no visitor, and if one had come it was perhaps necessary that he should be hunted up and brought to the hotel; then he left the porch and walked hurriedly through the park toward its northernmost limit. There to his left stood the broad roadway along which, nestling under shelter of the bluff, was ranged the line of cottages, some two storied, with balconies and verandas, others low, single storied affairs, with a broad hallway in the middle of each and rooms on both north and south sides. Farthest north on the row, almost hidden in the trees and nearest the ravine, stood Aunt Grace's cottage, where were domiciled the colonel's household. It was in the big bay windowed north room that he and the colonel had had their long conference earlier in the evening. The south room, nearly opposite, was used as their parlor and sitting room. Aunt Grace and Miss Renwick slept in the little front rooms north and south of the hallway, and the lights in their rooms were extinguished; so, too, was that in the parlor. All was darkness on the south and east. All was silence and peace as Armitage approached, but just as he reached the shadow of the stunted oak tree growing in front of the house his ears were startled by an agonized cry, a woman's half stifled shriek. He bounded up the steps, seized the knob of the door and threw his weight against it. It was firmly bolted within. Loud he thundered on the panels.

"'Tis I—Armitage!" he called. He heard the quick patter of little feet, the bolt was slid, and he rushed in, almost stumbling against a trembling, terror-stricken, yet welcoming white robed form—Alice Renwick, barefooted, with her glorious wealth of hair tumbling in dark luxuriance all down over the dainty nightdress—Alice Renwick, with pallid face and wild, imploring eyes.

"What is wrong?" he asked in haste.

"It's mother—her room—and it's locked and she won't answer," was the gasping reply.

Armitage sprang to the rear of the hall, leaned one second against the opposite wall, sent his foot with mighty impulse and muscled impact against the opposing lock, and the door flew open with a crash. The next instant Alice was bending over her senseless mother, and the captain was giving a hand in much bewilderment to the panting colonel, who was striving to clamber in at the window. The ministrations of Aunt Grace and Alice were speedily sufficient to restore Mrs. Maynard. A teaspoonful of brandy administered by the colonel's trembling hand helped matters materially. Then he turned to Armitage.

"Come outside," he said.

Once again in the moonlight the two men faced each other.

"Armitage, can you get a horse?"

"Certainly. What then?"

"Go to the station, get men, if possible, and head this fellow off. He was here again tonight, and it was not Alice he called, but my—but Mrs. Maynard. I saw him. I grappled with him right here at the bay window where she met him, and he hurled me to grass as though I'd been a child. I want a horse! I want that man tonight. How did he get away from Sibley?"

"Do you mean—do you think it was Jerrold?"

"Good God, yes! Who else could it be? Disguised, of course, and bearded, but the figure, the carriage, were just the same, and he came to this window—to her window—and called, and she answered. My God, Armitage, think of it!"

"Come with me, colonel. You are all unstrung," was the captain's answer as he led his broken friend away. At the front door he stopped one moment, then ran up the steps and into the hall, where he tapped lightly at the casement.

"What is it?" was the low response from an invisible source.

"Miss Alice?"

"Yes."

"The watchman is here now. I will send him around to the window to keep guard until our return. The colonel is a little upset by the shock, and I want to attend to him. We are going to the hotel a moment before I bring him home. You are not afraid to have him leave you?"

"Not now, captain."

"Is Mrs. Maynard better?"

"Yes. She hardly seems to know what has happened. Indeed none of us does. What was it?"

"A tramp, looking for something to eat, tried to open the blinds, and the colonel was out here and made a jump at him. They had a scuffle in the shrubbery, and the tramp got away. It frightened your mother. That's the sum of it, I think."

"Is papa hurt?"

"No; a little bruised and shaken and mad as a hornet. I think perhaps I'll get him quieted down and sleep in a few minutes if you and Mrs. Maynard will be content to let him stay with me. I can talk almost any man drowsy."

"Mamma seems to worry for fear he is hurt."

"Assure her solemnly that he hasn't a scratch. He is simply fighting mad, and I'm going to try to find the tramp. Does Mrs. Maynard remember how he looked?"

"She could not see the face at all. She heard some one at the shutters and a voice and supposed, of course, it was papa and threw open the blind."

"Oh, I see! That's all, Miss Alice. I'll go back to the colonel. Good night!" And Armitage went forth with a lighter step.

"One sensation knocked endwise, colonel. I have it on the best of authority that Mrs. Maynard so fearlessly went to the window in answer to the voice and noise at the shutters simply because she knew you were out there somewhere, and she supposed it was you. How simple these mysteries become when a little daylight is let in on them, after all! Come, I'm going to take you over to my room for a stiff glass of grog, and then after his tramping while you go back to bed."

"Armitage, you seem to make very light of this night's doings. What is

under than to connect it all with the trouble at Sibley?"

"Nothing was ever more easily explained than this thing, colonel, and all I want now is a chance to get that tramp. Then I'll go to Sibley, and 'pon my word I believe that mystery can be made as commonplace a piece of

petty larceny as this was of vagrancy. Come."

But when Armitage left the colonel at a later hour and sought his own room for a brief rest he was in no such buoyant mood. A night search for a tramp in the dense thickets among the bluffs and woods of Sablon could hardly be successful. It was useless to make the attempt. He slept but little during the cool August night and early in the morning mounted a horse and trotted over to the railway station.

"Has any train gone northward since last night?" he inquired at the office.

"None that stop here," was the answer. "The first train up comes along at 11:56."

"I want to send a dispatch to Fort Sibley and get an answer without delay. Can you work it for me?"

The agent nodded and pushed over a package of blanks. Armitage wrote rapidly as follows:

Captain Chester, Commanding Fort Sibley; Is Jerrold there? Tell him I will arrive Tuesday. Answer. F. ARMITAGE.

It was along toward 9 o'clock when the return message came clicking in on the wires, was written out and handed to the tall soldier with the tired blue eyes.

He read, started, crushed the paper in his hand and turned from the office. The answer was significant:

Lieutenant Jerrold left Sibley yesterday afternoon. Not yet returned. Absent without leave this morning. CHESTER.

CHAPTER XI.

Nature never vouchsafed to wearied man a lovelier day of rest than the still Sunday on which Frank Armitage rode slowly back from the station. The soft, mellow tone of the church bell, tolling the summons for morning service, floated out from the brown tower and was echoed back from the rocky cliff glistening in the August sunshine on the northern bluff. Groups of villagers hung about the steps of the little sanctuary and gazed with mild curiosity at the arriving parties from the cottages and the hotel. The big red omnibus came up with a load of worshippers, and farther away, down the vista of the road, Armitage could see others on foot and in carriages, all wending their way to church. He was in no mood to meet them. The story that he had been out pursuing a tramp during the night was pretty thoroughly circulated by this time, he felt assured, and every one would connect his early ride to the station, in some way, with the adventure that the grooms, hostlers, cooks and kitchen maids had all been dilating upon ever since daybreak. He dreaded to meet the curious glances of the women and the questions of the few men who had taken so far into his confidence as to ask about the mysterious person who came over in the stage with them.

He reined up his horse, and then, seeing a little pathway leading into the thick wood to his right, he turned in thither and followed it some 50 yards among bordering treasures of coropsis and goldenrod and wild luxuriance of vine and foliage. Dismounting in the shade, he threw the reins over his arm and let his horse crop the juicy grasses, while he seated himself on a little stump and fell to thinking again. He could hear the reverent voices of one or two visitors strolling about among the peaceful, flower decked graves behind the little church and only a short stone's throw away through the shrubbery. He could hear the low solemn voluntary of the organ and presently the glad outburst of young voices in the opening hymn, but he knew that belated ones would still be coming to church, and he would not come forth from his covert until all were out of the way. Then, too, he was glad of a little longer time to think. He did not want to tell the colonel the result of his morning investigations.

To begin with, the watchman, the driver and the two men whom he had questioned were all of an opinion as to the character of the stranger—"he was a military man." The passengers described his voice as that of a man of education and social position; the driver and passengers declared his walk and carriage to be that of a soldier. He was taller, they said, than the tall, stalwart Saxon captain, but by no means so heavily built. As to age, they could not tell. His beard was black and only—no gray hairs. His movements were quick and elastic, but his eyes were hidden by those colored glasses, and his forehead by the slouch of that broad brimmed felt hat.

At the station, while awaiting the answer to his dispatch, Armitage had questioned the agent as to whether any man of that description had arrived by the night train from the north. He had seen none, he said, but there was Larsen over at the postoffice store, who came down on that train. Perhaps he could tell. Oddly enough, Mr. Larsen recalled just such a party—tall, slim, dark, dark bearded, with blue glasses and dark hat and clothes—but he was bound for Lakeville, the station beyond, and he remained in the car when he (Larsen) got off. Larsen remembered the man well, because he sat in the rear corner of the smoker and had nothing to say to anybody, but kept reading a newspaper, and the way he came to take note of him was that while standing with two friends at that end of the car

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