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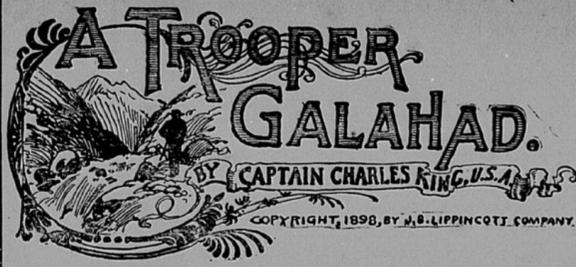
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"Good God, do you mean that a man who has served 15 years in the army, fought all through the war and served as I have served, must step down from the squadron captaincy to ride behind the boys just out of the Point? Beranked out of quarters by my own son-in-law the next thing I know! I'll see the army in a—first," was his furious reply. "No, Ned, not hell, but Texas. Take it. Go back to the line, and once you're back in the army in any grade we'll legislate you up to the majority you deserve. See if we don't." But Lawrence had lost all faith in promises, or in congressional action. He turned in contempt from the proposition, and in early April came the tidings to San Antonio that he was desperately ill.

Meanwhile Mr. Hodge had lost the prestige of his first appearance at Worth and fell into the customary rut of the subaltern. People found him as monotonous as did the martyrs of the upper Platte, and from having been the most sought after of second lieutenants he dropped back to the plane of semi-obscure. This was galling. Hodge's stock in trade had been the facts or fables in his possession concerning the absent Captain Barclay, whose present whereabouts and plans were shrouded in mystery. A rumor came that he had decided not to join at all; that he was in Washington striving to arrange a transfer; that his assignment to the regiment and to the post where he must meet the woman who had jilted him for a cavalry subaltern was something unforgotten and not to be tolerated. The muster roll couldn't account for him other than as permitted to delay three months by special orders No. so-and-so, war department, A. G. O., Jan. 25, 1871. This gave Hodge unlooked for reinforcements. A fortnight passed in March without a bid to dinner anywhere without a request for further particulars as to Sir Galahad. So long as that interesting personage was expected any day to appear and answer for himself it behooved Hodge to be measurably guarded in his statements, to keep within the limits of his authorities, but one day there came a letter from a lady at department headquarters to Mrs. Brooks, and before Brooks himself was made aware of the contents, he being at the clubroom playing "pitch" and therefore beyond the pale of feminine consideration, the news was going the round of the garrison.

Mrs. Pelham, who was spending the winter in Washington, had written to an old and devoted friend of Major Waite's some very interesting news about Captain Barclay. The captain was in Washington a whole week, but had not called on Mrs. Pelham, though she had done everything she could think of for him when he was wounded. The Pelhams were then at McPherson and near old Waite's summer camp, but no one ever heard of her ladyship's ever taking the faintest interest in Barclay until after he developed into a mine owner and had been jilted by Laura Waite. But let Mrs. Pelham talk for herself, as she usually did, as well as for every one else. "He spent the first week in February here, leaving just before poor Lawrence came. No wonder he didn't wish to meet him! And Mrs. Waite was there, but nothing everybody to get her pension increased and wearing the costliest crape you ever saw, my dear, and—think of it!—solitaire diamond earrings with it. She had a room in a house where several prominent congressmen boarded and was known as 'the fascinating widow.' She sent to Barclay—would you believe it?—and begged him to come to see her, and he actually did, and Mrs. Cutts, who lives in the same house, told me that you ought to have seen her that day—no solitaire earrings or handsome crape, mind you, but tears and bombazine, and Mrs. Cutts vows that he gave her money. That woman is angling for another husband and has been ever since poor Waite's death, and if anything were to happen to Mr. Winn it's just what Laura would be doing too. It runs in the blood, my dear. You know, and I know, that all the time she was at Omaha barracks and the major in the field she—a woman with a grown son and a graduating daughter—was dancing with the boys at the hops and riding—yes, and buggy riding—with bachelors like those wretches Gates and Hagadorn." Buggy riding was the unpardonable sin in Mrs. Pelham's eyes, she being "too massive to sit in anything short of the side seat of an ambulance," as said a regimental wit, and Mrs. Pelham looked with eyes of disfavor on women who managed to "keep their waists" as Mrs. Waite did.

"But let me tell you about Captain Barclay," continued the letter. "General Corliss called to see me two evenings ago and said he heard that Barclay was actually a millionaire; that he had large interests in Nevada mines that were proving fabulously rich. You can understand that I wasn't at all surprised to hear that the general had intimated to Mr. Ray of his staff that it would be much better for him to go and serve with his regiment awhile. Ray would not be an acceptable son-in-law. He has no money and too many fascinations, and there are both the Corliss girls, you know, to be provided for, and Miranda is already passed, and Ray has resigned the place, and the place is vacant, for—would you believe it?—they say the general tendered it to Barclay.



"I love to live over those dear old days when I was a girl," she said.

Feating over the post that very day. She had planned to drop in at the colonel's, where the Fraziers entertained at dinner and music that very evening, in hopes of hearing accidentally something definite, for Winn was one of those useless husbands who never hear anything of current gossip. But women might not talk if they thought she wished to hear, and fate had provided her a better means. She saw here and now the opportunity and the man. It was Hodge who had told so much that was of vivid interest to her; it was Hodge she had been longing to meet for days, but Winn had held him aloof, and now here she had this ingenious repository of Barclaysisms all to herself until Winn should return. The chance was not to be lost.

"I love to live over those dear old days when I was a girl," she said. "Friends seemed so real then, men so true, life so buoyant. Sometimes I find myself wishing there were more of the old friends, the old set, here. We seem—so much more to each other, don't you know, Mr. Hodge?" And Hodge felt sure "we" did and hitched his chair a foot nearer the fire.

"Of course I was younger then, and knew so little of the world, and yet, knowing it as I do now—I can say this to you, you know, Mr. Hodge—I could not to another soul here, for you were of us, you served with father's column." (Hodge's service was limited to play poker with "those wretches Gates and Hagadorn" and others of Waite's command on one or two memorable occasions, and the resultant hole in his purse was neither as broad as a church nor deep as a well, but 'twould serve.) "I've often felt here as though I would give anything to see some of the dear old crowd; not that people are not very, very lovely here, but you know, we army friends cling so to the old associations." And now the beautiful eyes seemed almost suffused, and Hodge waxed eloquent.

"I am thrice fortunate," said he, recalling the lines of his Maltravers, "in that I am numbered among them." And now, like Laura, he looked upon Worth as cold and dormant as compared with the kindling friendships of the distant Platte. "Indeed you are!" said she. "You bring back the sweetest days of my life, and some of the saddest. I have no one to speak to me, you know—of course—until you did a moment ago. Tell me, is—is his life so changed as—they say it is?"

"I never saw a man so broke up," he responded. "He never smiled after you—after—after it was broken off, you know." Barclay's smile was as rare as a straight flush anyhow, he admitted to himself, but the assertion sounded well. "And—of—late—what have you heard of him?" she asked, and Hodge poured forth his latest news and added more. He, too, he said, had had a letter from an intimate friend. Captain Barclay had declared that the assignment to the Twelfth cavalry was impossible; Texas was impossible. His business interests would necessitate his declining, if indeed there were no other reasons. General Corliss had tendered him the position of aid-de-camp and made Billy Ray of the—th resign to make way for him, and the moment Barclay found that out he went to Ray and told him the whole business was without his (Barclay's) knowledge and sooner than displace him he would refuse. "Yes," said Hodge, "that's the way my friend heard it from Ray himself. Now, if Barclay could only get a detail on McDowell's staff in California it would have suited him to a tee. Then he could have looked after his Nevada interests and his Wyoming pensioners too."

"Did Mr. Hodge know surely about Mr. Barclay's wealth? Was it all true?" he was asked.

"Oh, yes, there wasn't a doubt of it," said Hodge. It was just another of those cases where a man had money in abundance and yet would have given it all, he added sentimentally, but here she uplifted rebukingly her white, slim hand—or was it warningly, for there came a quick footfall on the porch without? The hall door opened sharply, letting in a gust of cold night wind, and, throwing off his cavalry cap, with its faded yellow lining, Lieutenant Winn strode through the hallway into his little den at the rear.

"You will come and see me again," she murmured low while yet the footsteps resounded; "it has been so good to see you—so like old times. We'll have to talk of other things now. Mr. Winn doesn't like old times too well."

But Mr. Winn never so much as looked in the parlor door until she called to him. Then, as she saw his face, the young wife arose with anxiety in her own.

"What is it? Where are you going—with your revolver, too, Mr. Hodge, dear?"

"Oh, beg pardon, Mr. Hodge! Glad to see you!" was Winn's distraught acknowledgment of the presence of the visitor as he extended a reluctant hand. "My sergeant can't be found," he went on hurriedly. "They say he's gone to Fuller's ranch, and it may be all right, but the colonel has ordered out a patrol

to fetch him back. Don't worry, Laurie. I may have to ride out with it."

And hurriedly he kissed her and bounded down the steps.

For a moment she stood in the doorway, the light from the hall lamp shining on her dusky hair and proud, beautiful face, forgetful of the man who stood gazing at her. Then, with a shiver, she suddenly turned.

"It's the second time that Sergeant Marsden has been missed in just this way when he was most needed, and—it's so imprudent, so—and my husband is so imprudent, so unsuspecting. Mr. Hodge," she cried impulsively, "if you've heard anything or if you do hear anything about him or Mr. Winn, be a friend to me and tell me, won't you?" And there was nothing Hodge would not have told, but the door of the adjoining quarters slammed, an officer came striding along the porch common to the double set, and the clank of a saber was heard as he neared them.

"Winn gone?" he asked. "Don't worry, Mrs. Winn. We'll overhaul that scoundrel before he can reach the settlements unless!"

"But what is wrong? What has happened, Mr. Brayton?" she asked, her face white with dread, her heart fluttering.

"My Lord, Mrs. Winn, I beg your pardon! I supposed, of course, he had told you. Marsden's bolted. Colonel Riggs, the inspector general, got here tonight with Captain Barclay, instead of coming by regular stage Saturday, and Marsden lit out the moment he heard of their arrival. Of course we hope Winn isn't badly bitten."

But her thoughts were of another matter now. "Captain Barclay," she faltered, "here? Why, I—I heard."

"Yes," shouted the young officer, as he went clattering down the steps. "Scuse me—I've got to mount at once," as an orderly came running up at the moment with his horse. "Riggs has come, posthaste, only Barclay and one man with him besides the driver. It's lucky that Friday gang never got wind of it."

CHAPTER IV.

For 48 hours Fort Worth was in turmoil. To begin with, the sudden, unheralded advent of a department inspector in those days meant something ominous, and from Frazier down to the drum boys the garrison scented mischief the moment that familiar old black hooded, dust covered spring wagon, drawn by the famous six mule team, came spinning in across the mesa just after retreat, no escort whatever being in sight. Cavalrymen had trotted alongside, said Riggs, from two of the camps on the way, but they had made that long day's drive from Crockett Springs all alone, trusting to luck that the Friday gang, so called, would not get wind of it. Just who and how many constituted that array of outlaws no man, including its own membership, could accurately say. Two paymasters, two wagon trains and no end of mail stages had been "jumped" by those enterprising road agents in the course of the five years that followed the war, and not once had a conviction occurred. Arrests had been made by marshals, sheriffs and officers in command of detachments, but a more innocent lot of victims, according to the testimony of friends and fellow citizens, never dwelt in Dixie. Three only of their number had been killed and left for recognition in the course of those three years. One only of these was known, and the so called Friday gang managed to surround its haunts, its movements and its membership with a mystery that defied civil officials and baffled the military. Escorts the size of a cavalry platoon had been needed every time a disbursing officer went to and fro, and a sizable squad accompanied the stage whenever it carried even a moderate amount of treasure. At three points along the road from the old Mexican capital to the outlying posts strong detachments of cavalry had been placed in camp, so that relays of escorts might be on hand when needed.

At three different times within the past two years strong posses had gone with the civil officials far into the foothills in search of the haunts of the band, but no occupied haunt was ever found, no band of any size or consequence ever encountered, yet depredations were incessant. The mail stage came and went with guarded deliberation. The quartermaster's trains were accompanied by at least a company of infantry. The sutler's wagons traveled with the quartermaster's train, and the sutler's money went to San Antonio only when the quartermaster and commissary sent theirs, and then a whole squadron had been known to ride in charge. Anything from a wagon train down to a buckboard was game for the gang, and soldiers, ranchmen and prospectors told stories of having been halted, overhauled and searched by its masked members at various times and whether found plithoric or poor having been hospitalily entertained as soon as robbed of all they possessed. Only four days before Riggs made his venturesome dash three discharged soldiers, filled with impatience and whiskey, had sought to run the gamut to the camp at Crockett's and came back in the robbers' cast, off clothing to "take on" for another term, having parted with their uniforms, the savings of several years at the licitation of courteous strangers met along the route. Nothing but emergency could have brought R. full tilt, for he was getting along years and loved the comforts of his own home.

Emergency it was, as he explained to Frazier instantly on his arrival. The general had indubitable information that ranches to the south had long been buying government stores, bacon, feed, flour, coffee, etc. The source of their supply could only be the warehouses at Worth, and Marsden was a "swell" sergeant, whose airs and affluence had made him the object of suspicion. Those were the days when cavalry regiments had a commissary, but congress-