

PRIVATE BROWN

BY CAPT. CRAWFORD.

(CONTINUED FROM LAST WEEK.)

CHAPTER III.

A few days after their first meeting, while the soldier artist was near the same spot making a sketch of Mount Soledad, a prominent peak of the San Andreas range, Alice came upon him again. Long before she reached the spot where he sat she had seen him bending over his work. With girlish impulsiveness she determined to endeavor to learn something of him, and rode directly up to him.

"If I disturb you, you must frankly tell me so and I will go away," she said. "I sketch a great deal myself, and naturally take a deep interest in an art I love so well."

"You do not disturb me in the least, Miss Sanford," he replied. "As but a private soldier I deem it an honor that the daughter of my commander should take an interest in my poor efforts. And you, also, are of artistic tastes? Do you not find rare subject matter for your pencil in this wildly beautiful country?"

"O, yes, indeed I do. I have many sketches I have made about the fort, and many more from rarely beautiful spots in the mountain ranges hereabouts. You are sketching Soledad, I see. May I look at it?"

"It is scarcely started yet," he replied, "but as you are an artist I need not point out to you what it lacks to complete it."

She gazed upon the picture with great interest, for every delicate stroke of the pencil and every bold shade proclaimed a master's hand. For some moments she stood in rapt admiration, her lips parted and her bright expressive eyes drinking in every detail of the young artist's work.

"Your work is that of the finished artist," she said. "Where did you learn this?"

"At my home in a far eastern state. I developed a taste for drawing when but a child, and every facility for advancement in the art was placed at my disposal. In both drawing and painting I had the best instructors to be found in the country."

"And now you are—"

"Now I am Private Brown, an enlisted man of D troop, Sixth cavalry," he replied, with a sad smile.

She looked into his eyes with a puzzled expression, followed by a shadow



SHE GAZED UPON THE PICTURE WITH GREAT INTEREST.

of pain, as her father's words were recalled, "the romance of crime."

"Mr. Brown, I cannot understand. I—I hope—"

He divined her thoughts in an instant and quickly responded:

"No, Miss Sanford, not that. I know what you would say. It is too true there are many soldiers in the army who enlisted to escape punishment for crime, but I can truthfully assure you that I never committed a crime in my life. I confess that the position in life in which I am placed is not of my own choosing, that my servile lot is distasteful to me, yet with uplifted hand I gave myself to my country for five years, and I will faithfully fulfill that obligation no matter how sorely the task may conflict with my own personal inclinations. In the ranks of life you occupy a sphere far above my present one, Miss Sanford, yet you need not fear being tainted by holding converse with Private Brown."

"I do sincerely crave your forgiveness," she warmly exclaimed. "It was but a passing thought, and even before you interrupted me your eyes told me the suspicion wronged you. But it surely could have been no ordinary cause that induced you to enter the army?"

"It was a result of youthful folly, Miss Sanford. I owe my present condition in life entirely to my own youthful folly."

"You excite my curiosity, Mr. Brown, and a woman's curiosity, when not gratified, is like a rankling thorn in her side, you know. Will you not trust me with your story? Perhaps I may be able to assist you. My father is the commanding officer, you know, and will grant any reasonable request I may ask of him. I might be able to secure your discharge from the service and enable you to return to a life for which you are better fitted than you are to perform the duties of a private soldier."

"In seeking to learn my history I am sure you are actuated only by pure womanly sympathy. I thank you for this, thank you most sincerely, but I cannot consent to your making an effort to secure my discharge. I have accepted the condition in which I am placed as a deserved punishment for

wrong doing and as a severe school to teach me the right, and under no circumstances would I have my term of enlistment shortened one single day."

Alice looked into his eyes for a moment, and then began a new scrutiny of the sketch. Her thoughts were not upon the picture, however. She was debating in her own mind the propriety of pushing her inquiries further. She was burning with curiosity not unmixed with sympathy to learn why a man of his acquirements and unmistakable refinement should be found in such a humble position. After a few moments' reflection, during which he watched her face with growing interest, she sprang from her saddle to the ground, and requested him to tighten the girth. While he was doing so she said:

"It may be presumptuous for me to do so, Mr. Brown, but I must ask you a question even at the risk of being thought impertinent. When I tell you I am greatly astonished to find one of your qualifications among men so far beneath you in intellect and refined tastes, I feel that you will see in my interest some palliation for my action. May I venture to ask if there is a secret connected with the cause of your thus banishing yourself from the ranks of life in which you are fitted to move?"

"I fully appreciate the spirit of curiosity which prompts the question, Miss Sanford, and I really regret that my reply may deface any romantic mental picture you may have drawn of me. I have, nothing to conceal from the world."

"Then will you not tell me something of yourself, if your story be one you can properly intrust with a stranger? I ask for no confidence, Mr. Brown, and assure you that curiosity alone feeds my nature—with, perhaps, a feeling of friendly sympathy for a fellow artist."

He reflected a moment with downcast eyes, then looking in her face replied:

"I will tell you my story, though it may lessen me in your esteem, and undermine any good opinion you may have formed of me. It can be told in a very few words. In the first place, my name is not Brown."

"I was very sure of that," she said with a sunny smile. "Brown is too common a name for such an uncommon man."

"And yet illustrious men have borne it. I recall one long since dead whose tireless soul was yet reported to be on an extended march. My true name is Edward Thornton. I assumed the name I now bear when I enlisted."

"My mother died when I was but a year old and a few months later my father followed her, leaving me in the care of a very wealthy aunt in the city of Brooklyn, N. Y. She was my father's only sister, and took me to her own luxurious home and reared me as her own child, lavishing upon me her deepest love. I was all she had to love, and from childhood the dear, good woman fairly idolized me and gratified my every wish. When I reached a proper age competent teachers were secured for me, and, developing a love for study, I progressed so rapidly that at the early age of seventeen I was the possessor of a liberal education and fitted to fill a responsible position in the business world. As I before told you, I acquired a deep love for drawing and painting, for which I am now truly thankful, for the only real pleasure I now derive from life I find amid these western solitudes with my sketch book and pencils."

"When my education was completed my good aunt supplied me liberally with money, and in her solicitude for my pleasure and enjoyment paid little attention to my moral training. I was of a lively, fun-loving disposition, and in choosing my companions I selected kindred spirits who would join me in any wild lark that promised sport."

"One night at a banquet given in honor of the birthday of a young lady friend of my aunt I listened to the smiling entreaties of the fair hostess to drink her health, and accepted from her hand my first glass of wine. Ah! Miss Sanford, the first downward step toward the depths of drunken degradation is often taken at the invitation of a thoughtless fair woman with a glass of sparkling wine in her jeweled hand, when she little dreams that what she regards as but a trifling act of hospitality is the seal of doom upon a life that might otherwise be bright and useful. The wine seemed to flood my soul with its rosy warmth and to quicken my senses, and other draughts of the ruby liquid followed until I was taken home in a carriage supported in my aunt's arms, in a state of stupid intoxication."

"When I came down from my chamber the next morning feeling as guilty as a felon approaching the bar of justice, my aunt met me with a smile, playfully chided me for having taken just a drop too much, and cautioned me to be careful and not in future overestimate my bibulous powers. That same night I again sought the false cheer of the wine cup."

"Lower and lower I went in my downward course, the demon of drink sinking its poisonous talons deeper and deeper into my soul. No word of rebuke ever fell from my aunt's lips. She continued to keep my purse well filled, the good creature believing my crop of wild oats would soon be sown and I would then settle down into respectable, sober manhood."

"Two years ago this very day—the date is a notable one to me, for it is the second anniversary of my enlistment—I went on a carouse with a couple of my boon companions. In a saloon in New York we met a sergeant of artillery, then attached to a recruiting office in that city. He was a handsome, dashing young fellow and I at once took a great fancy to him and asked him to join us in our revels. Retiring to a private room in the rear of the saloon I ordered wine, and we were soon deeply under the influence of the seductive liquor. Our potations grew deeper and deeper until my two companions fell into a drunken sleep in their chairs."

"The sergeant then suggested a walk, but I told him that gentlemen of our

standing should ride, and I ordered a carriage and we drove away. We stopped at various drinking places about the city, and I became wild with my frequent potations and ready to second any proposition that the sergeant might make."

"Come and enlist with me, old fellow," he said. "You will have nothing to do but wear a uniform and hang around with me looking for recruits, and we will have a glorious time in this gay city."

"In my irresponsible state I agreed to his proposition and ordered the driver to take us to the street and the number he named. I have a dim, indistinct recollection of ascending a stairway supported by the sergeant, of him telling me to give the name of Richard Brown, of replying to some questions propounded by an officer, and then of raising my hand and taking an oath. A few moments later, with a lot of men, I was taken to a boat and helped on board, and there I fell into a drunken sleep."

CHAPTER IV.

"I awoke the next morning in a long room filled with men, and in answer to my queries was told that I was on Governor's island and was an enlisted man in the United States army. You can imagine my amazement at this startling revelation. I walked about the room in a half-dazed condition, my brain being yet prostrate from the carouse of the previous day. During the forenoon I was supplied with the uniform and necessary outfit of the private soldier, and was notified that I had been assigned to B troop, Sixth cavalry, and would start for the far western frontier on the following morning."

"After donning my uniform I walked down to the water's edge and sat down on a dismantled cannon to reflect on my mad action. My brain seemed to have shaken off the grip of the liquor which had been the cause of placing me in such a distressing position, and I thank God that I was able to take a philosophic view of the matter. Ere I left the spot I began to look upon my enlistment as a blessing. I reasoned that had I continued to pursue the downward course into which I had fallen I would sink lower and lower and one day fill a drunkard's grave. In the United States service I would be under restraint and be far removed from the temptations of a great city and from the companions who were fast leading me toward utter ruin. In the service I could reform, and by contact with hardships and priv-

ations fit myself to cope with the rougher aspects of life should fortune ever desert me. Then and there I firmly resolved to serve faithfully for the term of my enlistment."

"I did more, Miss Sanford. I swore in the presence of Almighty God and of the spirit of my angel mother in Heaven that as long as I should live not another drop of intoxicating liquor should ever pass my lips."

"The impulsive girl reached forward and grasped his hand, the tears streaming down her cheeks. She essayed to speak, but could not, and dashing the tears from his own eyes he continued:

"With these resolutions firmly implanted in my mind I returned to the barracks with a lighter heart, and wrote a long letter to my aunt in which I called into requisition all my powers of eloquence to convince her that it was all for the best, and that my moral salvation was the stake for which I was playing. I consoled the dear old woman as best I could, and promised her that if God spared our lives I would return to her at the expiration of my term of enlistment as a man of whom she could be proud. I did not tell her of my assumed name nor of my destination, for I well knew she would spend her entire fortune, if necessary, to secure my release."

"I was sent to the west with other recruits, and the experiences of my two years' service have been but the same as those of other cavalry soldiers at a frontier post. I have tried to faithfully perform every duty assigned me, and from the fact that I have never received a reprimand from those in authority I am led to believe I have been a good soldier."

"That is my story, Miss Sanford. You may now understand my motive when I repeat to you that under no circumstances would I have you make an effort to secure my discharge."

Alice had listened to his recital with the deepest interest, and at its conclusion she again extended her hand and said:

"Mr. Thornton, I respect and honor you. Your determination to do your duty faithfully and to bury your inclination to lead a dissolute life in the hardships and rigors of service in the army is a noble one. I pray God that your future may shine out all the more resplendent from such a dark background. There is, I hope, no shadow of deceit in my nature, and I frankly tell you that I believe you to be a true, honest and upright man whose heart is swayed by the most noble impulses, even though you may wear the garb of a private soldier. I am glad I met you, and I shall highly prize your friendship and will do all I can to lighten the dark hours of your service. You must

call upon me at my home and—"

"Pardon the interruption, Miss Sanford, but you have forgotten my station in life in your sympathy for the unfortunate man. In your kindness of heart you lose sight of the fact that Col. Sanford would never permit a private soldier to enter his house, unless in the line of military duty."

A shadow flitted over her bright young face, and in a tender tone of voice she replied:

"Yes, I had forgotten. In contemplating the man my eyes were closed to his station in life. What you say is but too true. Papa is undeniably firm in his ideas of the imprugnability of the social barrier which separates the men in the ranks from those in official life. Yet I hope to see you frequently when you are out sketching. I feel a very deep interest in you, Mr. Thornton, and I do trust unclouded happiness may dawn upon you and ever remain with you at the close of your army life."

"God bless you for your cheering words," he warmly responded. "They touch my heart with thrilling tenderness, and the knowledge that I possess one friend above the ranks of the rough soldiers will be a cheering reflection as I plod on in submission to my self-imposed penance. I shall look up to your sympathy as a bright star illumining the dreary days of my term of service, and the knowledge that you are watching me with friendly interest will lighten every uncongenial duty imposed upon me."

"Your term of service will soon pass, and it must be a cheering reflection to you that you will then return to the enjoyments of civil life and to the society for which you are so well fitted. I feel that a bright future lies before you, Mr. Thornton, and you will appreciate the blessings of life all the more with this experience to look back upon. But I must go now. Papa will become uneasy at my long absence. Will you kindly assist me to mount my pony?"

With his aid she sprang lightly into the saddle, and once more extending her hand said:

"Good-by. I thank you for the pleasure your sketch afforded me. You must let me see it when it is completed."

"I would be only too happy if you would accept it as a gift. Good-by, and may the Master above bless you for the light you have brought into my distasteful life."

With a smile and a farewell wave of the hand she was off at a brisk gallop, but soon drew in her pony and permitted him to walk leisurely toward the fort.

Private Brown had strangely impressed her, and as she rode along she endeavored to analyze her feelings toward him and determine what it was that caused her to feel such a deep interest in the handsome young soldier. In her garrison life she had met but few young men, and these were mostly officers of the army. True, they were polished gentlemen and studiously polite in their demeanor toward her, yet in the actions of each she could observe an air of disciplined dignity that seemed to cast a chill over his social qualities, and even impart an icy ring to his laughter when called upon to do honor to a refined joke or sally of wit. In Private Brown she read a noble nature, unselfish and devoid of aught but manly pride, a nature luminous with the gold of self-sacrificing heroism in his battle with life. She saw in him a gentleman of culture—a man as greatly out of place in his present position as a diamond in the filth of the gutter. She recognized in his every action a courtly man which could not be hidden beneath the blue blouse of the lower ranks. She found herself drawing comparisons between this man of the ranks and the gaudily uniformed officers whom her father had taught her were true gentlemen, and Private Brown did not suffer in the least by the comparison. By the time she had reached her home the fact had fixed itself in her mind that she had never before met a man who had so favorably impressed her as this private in the ranks. She dismounted from her pony and entered the house breathing the fervent wish that military rank were blown away by the winds, so she could meet her new friend on terms of equality.

As for Brown, his heart went away with the fair equestrienne. He thought her the most winsome creature he had ever met, and as he gathered up his sketching material and started toward his cheerless quarters the bonds of army servitude cut yet deeper into his soul.

CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

WITH THE WIND.

Mexican Miners Separated the Gold from the Sand.

Riding near the little placer mining settlement Dolores, in New Mexico, said a returned tourist, according to the New York Sun, I saw two Mexicans dry washing for gold, and their proceeding struck me as novel and interesting. They were at work in a dry gulch, without a sign of water in sight, and had brought the auriferous sand in baskets to the mouth of the ravine, where the wind blew strongly down the valley. Their washing apparatus consisted of a heavy army blanket, in the center of which they placed about a peck of the sand; then, each Mexican taking hold of the blanket by the corners, they tossed the sand high aloft again and again.

The wind blew away the fine sand, while the heavier particles with the gold fell straight back into the blanket. When at last they paused there remained in the blanket a double handful of gravel and heavy sand, in which glittered a few yellow specks of gold. As we rode on my Mexican driver told me that the two men were probably making three or four dollars a day during the time they worked, but that as soon as they had made their "clean up" they would go into Santa Fe or Cerrillos, sell their gold dust and squander the last nickel they had in whisky and monte before they would go back to the gulch to work.



I SAT DOWN ON A DISMANTLED CANNON.

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