

Ten Years' Trial

By Gen. CHARLES KING

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...and to take the 20 mile ride into the heart of the hills on the trail of his horse, and sitting in saddle at the edge of the glade, to look on at this pretty picture and then turn and curse the fellow that had led him thither. Others might welcome Langdon; he could and would not. Neither could he spend the night, as he had planned, in Melville's cabin. In bitterness of spirit he rode back a dozen miles to a miner's cabin, and Torrance was his confidant when at noon next day he returned to duty and reported what he had seen.



A tall young soldier bounded past her.

Five evenings later the whole command, six troops of horses and two field batteries, were grooming at the picket ropes along under the edge of the mesa, and Torrance, in military uniform, holding whip in hand, was counting up and down watching the work of his men, when he became aware of eager glances and muttering. The tap, tap of curricomb and brass went on as steadily, but heads kept bobbing up and gazing over the backs of his strong gun teams, and glancing about to see what it meant. Torrance became aware of a sight that sent him presently to the opposite side of his line. Strolling down the slope, talking volubly, came the colonel, his dogs tumbling about him as usual, his orderly following him at his allotted distance. Melville, calm, courteous and dignified as ever, listening with all outward appearance of serene interest on one side, and in the other, like a spare and erect, though marvelously unlike the sad, helpless man who left the night of the second year before, clad now in his campy garb, strode Eric Langdon. When D battery broke camp a half an hour later, three rousing cheers rang out on the evening air, and Torrance sent for his first sergeant.

"What made the men cheer?" he asked, and the sergeant was imperious. "I wouldn't say, sir. They just broke out when we broke ranks. Reckon they felt good, sir."

"I know, Sergeant Flynn," said Torrance, "men don't cheer in unison with somebody to give the word. Who gave it and what for?"

"Sergeant Ramsey gave it, sir. He didn't say what for."

"I didn't have to," was what the colonel was within an inch of saying. "It's his job to stop," said Torrance sternly. "You know as well as I do because of Mr. Langdon's being here, and such demonstrations are disrespectful to the colonel."

"The colonel didn't hear it, sir. He'd gone home."

"If I hear of it and hold me responsible," said Torrance angrily, "not only that, but I observed men shouting when they spoke to Mr. Langdon. That's all wrong."

"The battery sergeant ground his teeth together and his teeth, but held his peace."

"You know, a dismissed officer's entitles to no such honors," said Torrance. "Just order it stopped. You may go." And Flynn turned away, the fine things he could not say. Langdon spent that night at Melville's tent and was to leave for the railway breakfast in the morning. Before breakfast he and Ethel Grahame were strolling slowly up the shaded path way in the north ravine. The two came tumbling down the rocky ledge, a third, and half a mile out they met a little squad of battery men, the familiar "D" upon their hats, were carrying tempting little strings of trout. Two of them glanced at Langdon, reddened, half raised their hands, dropped them and gazed awkwardly away. They were his own old men. Then they met a third, who looked squarely at him and raised his hat so courteously as a Virginian and stood aside to let them by. A few rods farther on two others, fishing from the bank, turned and gazed, then glanced quickly at each other and exchanged glances. These last were strangers—men who had come into the battery after he had left it, a rather ill favored pair. There was no reason why they should salute; not were reasons why they should not. But, on the other hand, a decent salute and respectful demeanor should have been observed if for no other reason than the presence of a woman, a member of the major's household. But it pleased these two young fellows only recently from the streets of some eastern city, to titter audibly and flit by the pair with impudent glances. Langdon could not but see it, and his soul rose up in wrath. Miss Grahame, too, had not failed to notice a slight so utterly unlike the pleased, smiling manner of the veteran soldiers who ever the garrison ladies happened to pass their way. Eager to disengage, as though she had not seen, Ethel plunged instantly into enthusiastic conversation on the view before them. It was indeed a lovely scene, but Langdon's soul was hot within him. The indignity was as much to her as to him. He said turned, as though intending to step back and accept them. She read his purpose and with quick movement placed herself before him.

"Oh, just look at that vine!" she cried, pointing to a climbing plant among the rocks across the tumbling brook, then, all smiling confidence, beamed up on the fishing twain. "Oh, could you reach me a spray of that? I'll thank you so much."

"No answer. With broad, blue flannel back ostentatiously turned toward the speaker, the two young fellows lunged their heads, slyly glanced at each other and laughed again. It was more than Langdon could stand. Springing past her, standing stumped and aggrieved at such boorishness—the first and only evidence of ill will she ever saw among the soldiers—he was upon them in an instant.

"Out of the way, you bulking brute!" he ordered, low and stern, as he laid a heavy hand on the shoulder of the nearest.

"I don't have to," sneered the fellow. "You ain't givin' orders here," and went spinning backward at the kick, hurled by the force Langdon's arm could muster. It wasn't too good. His old training stood him in good stead, but practice had been stopped by the wound of the previous winter, and in another moment he realized that he had two ruffians to deal with and was alone, unarmed. Ethel Grahame's shriek of terror rang through the ravine as the two sprang at their helpless victim and bore him down among the rocks. The next instant a tall young soldier bounded past her and hurled himself upon the foremost assailant. It was the lad they rescued from the street blackguards that night at Brentwood. Then, from behind a screening ledge of rock stepped another figure. "This is no place for you, Miss Grahame," said a voice she recognized at once. "Let me escort you home." And Lieutenant Santley laid a hand upon her wrist. For answer she shook him off, sprang forward, dipped her handkerchief in the rushing waters and, quickly turning, placed it upon Langdon's temple, as, dizzy and somewhat dazed among the blood-trickling from the ground, the blood-trickling from a little gash in his forehead. One of the attacking party, furiously struggling, was being pinned to earth by Langdon's rescuer. The other, wet and bedraggled, stood abeying in the grasp of big Sergeant Ramsey, who shook him furiously and demanded was he drunk or crazy.

"I'm obeyin' orders," was the surly, sullen, abject answer.

"Whose order, you blackguard?" howled Ramsey, with another snarl.

For answer the woe-begone "rookie" dropped his eyes and writhed miserably in the grasp at his collar. "Whose orders, I say? Answer, or I'll shake the life out of you!" And in mingled appeal and reproach the fellow looked furiously about until his eyes rested upon his lieutenant.

"It's a lie!" cried Santley.

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Langdon was poring over some papers at the moment and turned in his revolving chair and looked up with a quizzical smile. Gray hairs were sprouting at his temples, and two or three appeared in the thick growth of his mustache; lines and crow's feet were digging underneath his fine, clear eyes, but he was looking the world in the face now. He had his start and sought no favors. "You are thinking of which case now?" he asked, and there were two of Langdon's eccentricities the senior never ceased to twit him about. One was the celebrated trial of the United States versus Santley, when that distinguished officer was brought to book by an irate colonel of cavalry because of sensational stories crowding out of the ravine episode; the other was the arraignment of a former assistant in the M. V. office at Brentwood as accessory in the safe robbery that had resulted in Langdon's discharge. Santley's trial came off long months after the occurrence that led to it, for that story at the time was known to but one woman and half a dozen men, but with a host of vivid embellishments was spread broadcast during the winter when one of the "toughs," whose fire had been made almost a burden to him when the story gradually made its way about the battery, concluded that desertion was better than persecution and turned up in Chicago with a pitiful tale of wrong and oppression, abuse and tyranny in the regular army. There was something at bottom as the fellow told it, for investigation developed that they had assaulted Langdon, that they had provoked his wrath and that they had insisted that they were obeying Santley's orders. They swore to it, in fact, and it might have gone hard with Santley, all things considered, had not Langdon himself journeyed to Pawnee, testified to the exact manner and language of the pair and then so aided Santley in his defense that the charges were confounded in open court. It was established that Santley had merely cautioned the members of the battery that they were to pay no more attention to Mr. Langdon than to any other civilian, and his accusers broke down when cross-examined as to the time, place and circumstances under which he had given them further and specific instructions. It spoiled a newspaper sensation and saved a commission. But Santley was sore hurt. Everybody knew he was deeply smitten with Ethel Grahame and had not prospered in his suit.

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...and in another moment he realized that he had two ruffians to deal with and was alone, unarmed. Ethel Grahame's shriek of terror rang through the ravine as the two sprang at their helpless victim and bore him down among the rocks. The next instant a tall young soldier bounded past her and hurled himself upon the foremost assailant. It was the lad they rescued from the street blackguards that night at Brentwood. Then, from behind a screening ledge of rock stepped another figure. "This is no place for you, Miss Grahame," said a voice she recognized at once. "Let me escort you home." And Lieutenant Santley laid a hand upon her wrist. For answer she shook him off, sprang forward, dipped her handkerchief in the rushing waters and, quickly turning, placed it upon Langdon's temple, as, dizzy and somewhat dazed among the blood-trickling from the ground, the blood-trickling from a little gash in his forehead. One of the attacking party, furiously struggling, was being pinned to earth by Langdon's rescuer. The other, wet and bedraggled, stood abeying in the grasp of big Sergeant Ramsey, who shook him furiously and demanded was he drunk or crazy.

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"I'm obeyin' orders," was the surly, sullen, abject answer.

"Whose order, you blackguard?" howled Ramsey, with another snarl.

For answer the woe-begone "rookie" dropped his eyes and writhed miserably in the grasp at his collar. "Whose orders, I say? Answer, or I'll shake the life out of you!" And in mingled appeal and reproach the fellow looked furiously about until his eyes rested upon his lieutenant.

"It's a lie!" cried Santley.

CHAPTER XVII.

The firm of Crosswell & Langdon, attorneys and counselors at law, to use the diction of the dramatic papers, "opened to good business" in Brentwood, and its fame spread beyond the Red Water valley. One thing about it was objectionable to the junior member from the start. The Seattle had by this time "subsidized" Crosswell and limited the sphere of usefulness of the concern. Langdon had no reason to love the management of either road, but that of the Seattle was especially obnoxious. Men with just claims against that company could not look to him for legal aid, and he would have been less than human had he not cared in such cases to appear rather for the plaintiff than the defendant. The road had its regular staff, of course, and kept it busy day and night. A railroad lawyer may be paid a salary no superintendent can aspire to, but he earns it and must see to it that local talent along the line is not too often arrayed against him. "You're too quixotic, Langdon," said even his big hearted, big framed, big voiced Kentucky friend, "You're too much given to kicking against the pricks. That's no way to get ahead in life!"

Langdon was poring over some papers at the moment and turned in his revolving chair and looked up with a quizzical smile. Gray hairs were sprouting at his temples, and two or three appeared in the thick growth of his mustache; lines and crow's feet were digging underneath his fine, clear eyes, but he was looking the world in the face now. He had his start and sought no favors. "You are thinking of which case now?" he asked, and there were two of Langdon's eccentricities the senior never ceased to twit him about. One was the celebrated trial of the United States versus Santley, when that distinguished officer was brought to book by an irate colonel of cavalry because of sensational stories crowding out of the ravine episode; the other was the arraignment of a former assistant in the M. V. office at Brentwood as accessory in the safe robbery that had resulted in Langdon's discharge. Santley's trial came off long months after the occurrence that led to it, for that story at the time was known to but one woman and half a dozen men, but with a host of vivid embellishments was spread broadcast during the winter when one of the "toughs," whose fire had been made almost a burden to him when the story gradually made its way about the battery, concluded that desertion was better than persecution and turned up in Chicago with a pitiful tale of wrong and oppression, abuse and tyranny in the regular army. There was something at bottom as the fellow told it, for investigation developed that they had assaulted Langdon, that they had provoked his wrath and that they had insisted that they were obeying Santley's orders. They swore to it, in fact, and it might have gone hard with Santley, all things considered, had not Langdon himself journeyed to Pawnee, testified to the exact manner and language of the pair and then so aided Santley in his defense that the charges were confounded in open court. It was established that Santley had merely cautioned the members of the battery that they were to pay no more attention to Mr. Langdon than to any other civilian, and his accusers broke down when cross-examined as to the time, place and circumstances under which he had given them further and specific instructions. It spoiled a newspaper sensation and saved a commission. But Santley was sore hurt. Everybody knew he was deeply smitten with Ethel Grahame and had not prospered in his suit.

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