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## Evelyn Pierce

A Story of the Old U. S. Army  
By EDWIN THORNTON

The days of army posts on the western frontier, a garrison shut up by itself with no outsiders to see or talk with or even hear about, are over. Then, too, in those days—they are not so far distant—occasionally Indians must be driven back on to their reservations, and sometimes they would be too strong for the little garrison, and days and nights of agony would pass in expectation of their making a break in the walls and murdering every one inside the inclosure, including women and children.

Yet there was a pleasant side to the life. The garrison shut off from the world constituted a family consisting of two divisions, the one being composed of the officers and their families, the other of the men and their families. Between officers and men was a dividing line as to association on familiar terms, but there was a union of heart. The enlisted men understood that this line had from time immemorial been considered necessary to the discipline and efficiency of an army.

Years ago there was one of these army posts in what is now a sovereign state in the American Union. One day when a supply train arrived it brought something to stir the tireless life of the officers' division—a young lady. She came to visit Mrs. Major Bertrand, wife of the commandant, whose niece she was. Her coming had been talked about, but her appearance was disappointing. She was not especially pretty, though she possessed a soft dark eye which was very expressive, though of what no one could exactly determine.

Within four hours after her arrival she had divided the garrison into two sections, consisting of those who liked and those who distrusted her. However, it was not long before her friends were converted to the opposite side by the fact that she was caught talking with a private in the ranks named Conover. A few of those who had fancied her remonstrated with her, telling her that perhaps she didn't know that association with an enlisted man by the families of the officers was prohibited. She listened to them demurely with those singular eyes of hers fixed on them, but said nothing. Nevertheless only a few days had passed when she was again seen talking with the same man.

The matter now came to the ears of Mrs. Bertrand, who gave her niece a lecture and told her that if she was against catching noticing any one of the enlisted men as an equal she should be sent home. Then Evelyn—Evelyn Pierce was her name—asked with real interest if she could not be treated as an officer. Mrs. Bertrand could only say that it wasn't the custom and has been an unwritten law in the army. And so Miss Pierce was in a disfavor. Those who showed their condemnation most openly were the women of the garrison. The officers, whatever they thought of the young lady's action, though they refrained from showing her marked attention, always treated her with studied politeness. This was due the commandant's wife, whose niece and guest she was. But it was not long before several of the unmarried officers began to find it difficult to let Miss Pierce alone. There was something about her that the cloud hanging over her could not obscure. Furthermore, she had voluntarily brought that cloud upon herself and gave no evidence of being ashamed of it. Possibly an attraction in her was that no one could quite make her out. Some said she was a fool, others that she was very shrewd.

One day an Indian came into the fort and told the major commanding that those of his tribe on the reservation the fort was intended to keep in order were preparing for war. He said that he knew in the end an uprising would be disastrous to his red brothers and that the move would be a grievous error. At any rate, he had come to warn his white brother, and having come, he could not go back. He must remain in the fort or be killed. He was, of course, suffered to remain.

The coming of this redskin, who soon became known as Uncas, cast a deeper blot upon Miss Pierce. He was seen to look at her curiously, and she was seen chatting with him, as she had chatted with Private Conover. Soon after this conversation she went to the major and told him to look out for Uncas. The major asked her on what she based her distrust, and she replied that he had a wicked eye. The major told his wife what Evelyn had said, but as no one else had noticed any wickedness in the redskin's eye and as Mrs. Bertrand was very much troubled about Evelyn's actions she lost her equanimity and attributed her niece's accusation to a desire to hide the real cause of her treatment of him. The major did not entirely agree with his wife, but he couldn't send Uncas out on suspicion, so he took no action in the premises.

One evening when darkness had fallen Uncas met Evelyn just going into her aunt's quarters and beckoned her to follow him. "I show you something to prove me the white man's friend," she did as he desired, and he led her to the back of the magazine, which was hidden from view, and, removing some rubbish, exposed a hole through which, by stooping, one might pass.

"Go in," he said. "I show you what I mean."

Evelyn drew back. "I show you that somebody here is traitor; he goin' blow up magazine," Evelyn hesitated, but not for long. Possibly the man whom she knew had been captured by her appearance—for she had spoken to him but once and then to warn him not to trouble her—had a secret which he would give to her alone. Bending low, she went through the opening. She could see nothing for the darkness. On a shelf stood a lantern, which Uncas instantly lighted; then, after pretending to look for something, seeing her and clapping his hand over her mouth, he dragged her through another opening, and she found herself outside the fort.

What she had suspected was plain to her now, though so great was her terror that it only flashed through her mind. Uncas had come to the fort to effect an entrance for his comrades. He had secretly made the opening to the magazine, concealed it and made another through the wall of the fort. Desiring to possess her, he had arranged to take her with him when he went back to his people. Doubtless long before dawn he would lead them through the magazine into the fort and massacre the garrison before they could form to repel the attack.

Evelyn was very strong for a girl. She had not been captured long before she summoned all her strength for a supreme effort—it was enhanced by terror—she wrenched herself from the Indian, and before he could get his grip on her again she darted away for the fort. She ran in the dark, but took no thought of falling. Fortune favored her in this, while it deserted the Indian. He fell, and while he was getting on his feet again Evelyn gained sufficient advantage to reach the opening into the fort and pass through it. When Uncas entered through the same aperture she was standing by a barrel of gunpowder, from which the head had been removed, holding the lantern directly over it.

"Come a step farther," she said, "and I'll drop it."

She stood at bay ready to sacrifice herself and the Indian. Savage as he was, he at once began to look for some stratagem by which he could again get the advantage of her. Drawing away, he feigned fright, then penitence, telling her he had been tempted by his passion for her to take her to his own wigwam and make her his wife. He would rather die than hurt her.

This and other things he said, watching her like a cat for an opportunity to catch her off her guard and get her again in his power. Meanwhile she was thinking how to get out of his clutches. She could hear a sentry walking on the parapet, though his steps were only audible to her when he came to that end of the fort nearest the magazine. He had turned and gone to the other end when she formed a resolution. She listened till the sentry came back to the end of his beat nearest her, then gave a shriek so loud that had it not been inclosed would have awakened the garrison. Major Bertrand had given orders that a key to the magazine door should hang in the sentry box of the man who guarded it. Since the magazine was never unguarded the key was always within reach of a sentinel. The man, hearing the shriek, seized the key and, opening the door, saw Evelyn standing by a powder barrel. The moment she saw him she pointed to the hole in the wall leading from the magazine by which the Indian had beaten a retreat.

A hasty explanation ensued, and within a few minutes men on horseback started after Uncas. In his fall when chasing Evelyn he had received a sprain which deterred him in his flight. Hearing his pursuers near upon him, he crawled under a bush, but they had caught sight of him and, pressing on, dragged him out.

When they reached the fort with him they took him to the commandant's quarters, where Evelyn had gone and, after a fainting spell, had regained somewhat of her equanimity.

After a brief examination Uncas was taken out and shot.

So ended an attempt of the Indians to gain by stratagem possession of the fort, which doubtless would have been successful had not the man to put it in practice lost his head over a woman. Had he not attempted to take Evelyn with him he could easily have introduced his red brothers and caught the garrison napping.

A great chance came over those who had turned a cold shoulder upon Evelyn. She had warned them against the savage and by her heroism had saved them from being massacred. And not long afterward another matter was cleared up.

Private Conover was not Conover at all, but Eugene Werner, a gentleman's son, who had enlisted in the ranks for the life, the experience and a possible commission in the army. Evelyn had recognized him as such when the others had either failed to do so or had declined to take notice of the fact. After the episode which had nearly become a tragedy Evelyn openly associated with him, and Major Bertrand for her sake recommended the young man for a commission. Then he and Evelyn became engaged and were married at the fort.

It was then that a latent infatuation several of the officers had conceived for Evelyn flamed up, and they condemned themselves for not having made an effort to win her.

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