

Lainer of the Cavalry

By
Gen. Chas. King
Author of "The Colonel's Daughter," "Foes in Ambush," etc.

"Well, the old man wants to see that young Rawdon forthwith, for many people believe he's skipped."
"You can track anything but a ghost in this new fallen snow."
Curbit lowered his voice. "That's exactly the trouble, doctor. Go to the back of the quarters and see for yourself. His trail starts and ends here."
In all its history Fort Cushing had never known such a day of bewilderment as that which followed. Guard mounting was held as usual at 8 a. m., and Colonel Burton, awaiting in his office the coming of the old and the new officers of the day, directed his adjutant to drop his own work at their entrance and give attention to what took place.

All eyes were on the two burly captains who entered at 8:30, fur-capped, fur-gloved, in huge overcoats and arctic. The wind had begun to whine and stir.
"Blizzard coming," said Scott as he glanced at the sullen skies.
"I report as old officer of the day, sir," said Curbit, with brief salute, tendering the guard report book.
The colonel went straight to business.

"No sign of Trooper Rawdon?"
"No, sir."
"His horse and kit all right?"
"All right, sir."
"Police notified to watch all trains—and stages?"
"Yes, sir."
There was impressive silence in the office.

Eight men had gone with Sergeant Stowell as escort to the paymaster when, nearly four weeks earlier, he had set forth on his trip. Then the little iron safe was full of money. Seven men had come back with him, when, as the safe was well nigh empty, the paymaster said he hardly needed an escort. Of the eight who started, four were "casuals" who belonged to companies stationed at Fort Frayne, well up in the Indian country, and there they remained when the duty was over. Of the seven who came with Stowell, three belonged to Fort Frayne, a corporal and two men of Captain Raymond's troop, and they came fortified with the orders of their post commander, a copy of which was now in Barker's hands.

"What I don't understand," said the colonel, whirling his chair to the right about and addressing the paymaster, "is how or why those men should be down here."

"It seems simple," answered Scott placidly, he being entirely independent of the post commander. "From Frayne I had to go to the cantonments up along the Big Horn, and we doubled the size of the escort accordingly. When we got back there these three were permitted to come all the way, whether to buy Christmas things for the Frayne folk or for affairs of their own I didn't inquire."

"To whom did you assign them for rations and quarters?" demanded the colonel of Barker.

"Captain Snaffle, sir, C troop."
"Are they there—the others, at least?"

"Corporal Watts and Trooper Ames are there, sir. Trooper Rawdon, as you know, is not. He has not been seen about the quarters since some time last evening."

Again a pause. Then presently, "You arrested Kelly, I see, the man who was on No. 5."

"Yes, sir. Both Dr. Schuchardt and the steward said his sickness was due to drink. I believe he was doped."

"That he could get whisky anywhere along back of the officers' quarters," said the colonel reflectively as well as reflecting, "is not improbable. That it should have been doped, judging from the way one or two have misbehaved, is not impossible. The usual orders for the present, captain," said he to the new incumbent. "And you are relieved, Captain Curbit," to the old. "But I shall need to see you later, so do not leave the post."

"The man that leaves the post this day," said Major Scott, with a squint through the upper and unincumbered panes of the nearest window, "may need a seven days' leave."

"And that, colonel," said a quiet voice at the commander's elbow, "is what I applied for earlier. Pardon me, sir, but I need to know your decision."

It was Captain Sumter who spoke, and the colonel flushed promptly at sound of his voice.

"I had intended sending for you, Sumter," said he, "but these rather engrossing matters had to be taken up first. I—have your application," he continued. "It is an awkward time, and these are awkward circumstances. It will leave your troop without an officer."

"Mr. Lanier will be here, colonel."

"Here, but in close arrest," frowned the colonel, "and you haven't had a first lieutenant since I have been in command."

"My misfortune, sir, but hardly my fault," answered Captain Sumter tersely, yet respectfully. "General Sheridan selects his aids-de-camp where he will, and last month you thought it a compliment to the regiment and to my troop. Our guest, Miss Arnold, is in no condition to travel alone," added Captain Sumter gravely. "My wife and I desire to accompany her to Chicago."

The colonel bit his lip and bowed.

"I see," said he. "Miss Arnold was very much shaken by what happened after she got home?"
"Rather by what happened before she got home," was the calm yet suggestive reply.
"Captain Sumter," said he, flushing angrily, for no one of his officers held him in higher esteem, "your attitude is that of opposition, if not of rebuke, to the official acts of the post commander."

"Then let me disclaim at once the faintest disrespect, Colonel Burton, but—as Mr. Lanier's troop commander and personal friend, I beg leave to say that, so far as I know, his offense is one which his comrades have often committed without rebuke."

"Which simply goes to show, sir," responded the colonel, with glittering eyes, "that you do not know the twentieth part of his offense."
"If that be true, Colonel Burton, of course I cannot think of going. I withdraw my application." And, turning slowly, he left the office.

Instead of carrying three enlisted men present as "casuals at post," the "return" of Troop C had but two. Trooper Rawdon, whose horse, horse equipments and field kit were safely



"YOU DO NOT KNOW THE TWENTIETH PART OF HIS OFFENSE."

stored in the troop stables since noon the previous day, was himself accounted for nowhere. In view of the fact that he had not been seen and could not be found there was nothing remarkable about that. With the morning report book, however, there was handed in a copy of an order duly submitted by Corporal Watts to Snaffle's first sergeant, and by him to his captain, which read in part as follows:
1. On arriving with his detachment at Fort Cushing and in compliance with the telegraphic instructions from department headquarters Trooper G. P. Rawdon, Troop L—th cavalry, is granted thirty days' furlough, at the expiration of which he will report to the commanding officer of Fort Cushing for transportation to his proper station.

(To Be Continued.)

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