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they were desperately in love with one sisters, and it was not long before it began to dawn on Prime that pretty Nita was playing a double game—that even while assuring her guardian sister that she had only a mild interest in Latrobe, she was really losing or had lost her heart to him, and in every way in her power was striving to conceal the fact from Margaret, and yet meet her lover at hours when she thought it possible to do so without discovery. As the friendship strengthened between himself and Latrobe they began using him as Cupid's postman, and many little notes and some big ones found their way to and from the Fourth division of cadet barracks. Mrs. Frank was only moderately kind to her civilian adorer then, granting him only one dance at each hop, and going much with other men, but that dance was worth seeing. Prime's was the only black "claw-hammer" in the room, and therefore conspicuous, and cadets—who know a good thing when they see it—and many a pretty girl partner would draw aside to watch the perfection of their step and the exquisite ease with which they seemed to float through space, circling and reversing and winding among the other dancers, he ever alert, watchful, quick as a cat and lithe and strong as a panther—she all yielding, lissome, airy grace. That dance was "Gov" Prime's reward, and almost only reward, for hours of impatient waiting. Other women, charming and pretty and better women, would gladly have been his partners. Some two or three whom he met at the hotel even intimated as much. But not until Lady Garrison told him he must—to protect her from scandal—did he ask another to dance. At last came the end of the summer's encampment, the return of the corps to barracks and studies, one blissful week in which he was enabled to spend several uninterrupted hours each day at her side, and then a cataclysm. A letter intended only for Nita's hands fell into those of her sister. It was bulky. It was from Latrobe. She hesitated only a moment, then, with determination in her eyes, opened and read—all. Two days after Nita was whisked away to New York, and within another week, leaving two most disconsolate swains on the Hudson, the sisters, one of them bathed in tears, went spinning away to the west, where Frank Garrison was on duty at department headquarters. Prime was permitted to write once a fortnight (he sent a volume) and Latrobe forbidden, but already the poor boy owned a thick packet of precious missives, all breathing fond love and promising utter constancy though she had to wait for him for years. For a month Nita would hardly speak to her sister, but in October there were lovely drives, picnics and gayeties of all kinds. There were attractive young officers and assiduous old ones, and among these latter was Frost, with his handsome gray mustache and distinguished bearing, and that air of conscious success and possession which some men know so well how to assume even when their chances are slimmer than my lady's hand. The sisterly breach was healed before that beautiful month was over. Frost dined at the Garrisons' four times a week and drove Miss Nita behind his handsome bays every day or two. In November he asked a question. In December there was an announcement that called forth a score of congratulations around headquarters, and in January the wedding cards went all over the union—some to West Point, but to Latrobe, who had been looking ill and anxious for six weeks, said his classmates, and falling off fearfully in his studies, said his professors, only a brief note inclosing his letters and begging for hers. At reveille next morning there was no captain to receive the report of roll call from the first sergeant of company B. "Where's Latrobe?" sleepily asked the officer of the day of the cadet first lieutenant. "I dn' know," was the answer, and to the amaze of Latrobe's roommate, who had gone to bed and to sleep right after taps the night before, they found evidence that "Pat" had left the post. He had not even made down his bedding. His cadet uniforms were all there, but a suit of civilian clothes, usually in a snug package up the chimney, that had been used several times "running it" to the hotel after taps in August, was now, like its owner, missing. After three days' waiting and fruitless search, the superintendent wired Latrobe's uncle and best friend, old Gen. Drayton, and that was the last seen or heard of "Pat." In the spring and ahead of time his class was graduated without him, for the war with Spain was on. In the spring an irate and long-tried father was upbraiding another only son for persistent failures at college. "'Gov' Prime will get the sack,-not the 'sheepskin,'" prophesied his fellows. And then somehow, somewhere the father heard it was a married woman with whom his boy was so deeply in love, and there were bitter, bitter words on both sides—so bitter that when at last he flung himself out of his father's study "Gov" Prime went straight to Mildred's room, silently kissed her and walked out of the house. This was in April. The next heard of him he had enlisted for the war and was gone to San Francisco with his regiment with the prospect of service in the Philippines ahead of him, but that was full four months after his disappearance. Thither, late in July, the father followed, bringing Mildred with him and—the reader knows the rest.

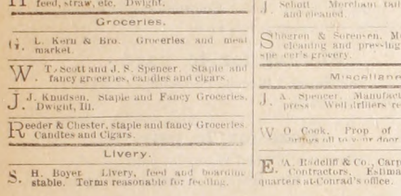
CHAPTER X.

One of Col. Frost's consuming ambitions was to be the head of his department, with the rank of brigadier general, but he had strong rivals and knew it. Wealth he had in abundance. It was rank and power that he craved. Four men—all with better war records and more experience—stood between him and that coveted star, and two of the four were popular and beloved men. Frost was cold, selfish, intensely self-willed, indomitably persevering, and though "close-fisted," to the scale of a Scotch landlord as a rule, he would loose his purse strings and pay well for services he considered essential. When Frost had a consuming desire he let no money consideration stand in the way, and for Nita Terriss he stood ready to spend a small fortune. Everybody knew Mrs. Frank Garrison could never dress and adorn herself as she did on poor Frank Garrison's pay, and when she appeared with a dazzling necklace and a superb new gown at the garrison ball not long after Frost and his shrinking bride left for their honeymoon, people looked at her and then at each other. Nita Terriss was sold to "Jack" Frost, was the verdict, and her shrewd elder sister was the dealer. Mrs. Frank knew what people were thinking and saying just as well as though they had said it to her, yet smiled sweetness and bliss on every side. Frankly she looked up into the faces of her sisters in arms: "I know you like my necklace. Isn't it lovely? Col. Frost's wedding present, you know. He said I shouldn't give Nita away without some recompense, and this is it."

But that could have been only a part of it, said the garrison. An honorarium in solid cash, it was believed, was far the greater portion of the consideration which the elder sister accepted for having successfully borne Nita away from the dangers and fascinations of the Point—having guarded her, drooping and languid, against the advance of good looking soldier lads at headquarters, and finally having, by dint of hours of argument, persuasion and skill, delivered her into the arms of the elderly but well preserved groom. All he demanded to know was that she was fancy free—that there was no previous attachment, and on this point Mrs. Frank had solemnly averred there was none. The child had had a foolish fancy for a cadet beau, but it amounted to absolutely nothing. There had been no vows, no pledge, no promise of any kind, and she was actually free as air. So Frost was satisfied.

They made an odd looking pair. Frost was bony built but sturdy, and Nita seemed like a fairy, indeed as unsubstantial as a wisp of vapor, as she came down the aisle on his arm. They were so far to the south on this honeymoon trip as almost to feel the shock and concussion when the Maine was blown to a mass of wreckage. They were in Washington when the congress demanded full satisfaction of Spain, and Col. Frost was told his leave was cut short—that he must return to his station at once. Going first to the Arlington and hurriedly entering the room, he almost stumbled over the body of his wife, lying close to the door in a swoon from which it took some time and the efforts of the house physician and the maids to restore her. Questioned later as to the cause she wept hysterically and wrung her hands. She didn't know. She had gone to the door to answer a knock, and got dizzy and remembered nothing more. What became of the knocker? She didn't know. Frost inquired at the office. A bellboy was found who said he had taken up a card in an envelope given him by a young feller who "seemed kind o' sick." Mrs. Frost took it and flopped," and a chambermaid ran in to her, and then hurried for the doctor. "What became of the letter or note or card?" asked Frost, with suspicion of jealousy in his heart. Two women, mistress and maid, and the bellboy swore they didn't know, but the maid did know. With the quick intuition of her sex and class she had seen that there was or had been a young lover, and sympathy for Nita and a dislike for Frost, who gave no tips, prompted her to hide it until she could slip it safely into Nita's hand. Nita who read, shuddered, tore it into minute scraps, and wept more, face downward, on the bed. They had reached their winter station before the cable flashed the stirring tidings of Dewey's great victory in Manila bay, and within half a week came telegraphic orders for Col. Frost to proceed at once to San Francisco, there to await instructions. The first expedition was organizing when he arrived, his pallid little wife by his side, and there were his instructions to proceed to Manila as chief of his department—an independent position, and yet it was a horrid blow. But there was no recourse. Nita begged that she might stay with her sister. She could not bear the idea of going. Frost knew that no women could accompany the expedition, and, shipping his chest and desks by the transport, he had secured passage for himself and wife to Hong-Kong on one of the splendid steamers of the English line from Vancouver, and so informed her. It dashed Nita's last hope. They were occupying fine rooms at the Palace hotel. The city was thronged with officers and rapidly arriving troops. Other army women, eager to accompany their husbands, were rallying at the fate that separated them, and Nita had been forced to conceal the joy with which she heard their lamentations. But she had yet to learn how exacting Frost could be. It had never occurred to her that he could obtain permission to go except by transport. It had not seemed possible that he would take her with him. "You should have known," said he, "that even if I had had to go by transport, you would have gone by the Empress of India. It is only 60 hours from Manila to Hong-Kong, and I could have joined you soon after your arrival. As it is I shall see you safely established there—I have letters to certain prominent English people—then shall go over to join the fleet when it arrives in Manila bay."

The U. S. Army and Navy, 1776-1899



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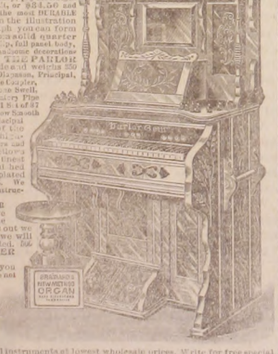

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