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"Much hurt, Billy, old man? No? Thank God for that! Look at who? Where? Why, God in Heaven, it's Pat Latrobe! Oh, Pat! Pat! dear old boy —has it come to this!"

CHAPTER XVII.

In the fortnight of incessant action that followed the mad attack of that starlit Sunday morning, there was no place for Billy Gray. Sorely wounded, yet envied by many a fellow soldier for the glowing words in which the brigade commander praised his conduct and urged his brevet, the boy had been carried back to the great reserve hospital at Malate. The breezy wards were filled with sick and wounded, and certain of the rooms of the old convent once used for study and recitation had been set apart for officers. There were three cots in the one to which they bore him, and two were already occupied. Even in his pain and weakness he could hardly suppress a cry of dismay; for there, with his arm bandaged and in splints, his face white from loss of blood, lay Stanley Armstrong. Time and again the boy's heart and conscience had rebuked him for the estrangement that had arisen between him and this man who had proved his best friend. Time and again he had promised himself that he would strive to win back that friendship; but well he knew that first he must reinstate himself in Armstrong's respect; and how could he hope for that so long as he surrendered to the fascinations that kept him dangling about the dainty skirts of Witchie Garrison? Oddly enough, the boy had hardly bothered his head with any thought of what Frank Garrison might think of his attentions or devotions, whatever they could be called, to this very captivating and capricious helpmate. When a husband is so overwhelmed with other cares or considerations that he never sees his wife from morn till night, society seems to correspondingly lose sight of him. Down in the depths of

"Give to—Gen. Drayton—promise"

his heart the boy was ashamed of himself. He never heard Armstrong mentioned that he did not wince. He knew and she knew that, coming suddenly upon them as Armstrong had that tropic night on the Queen, he must have heard her words, must have realized that some compact or understanding existed between them, which neither Gray nor Mrs. Frank could palliate or explain. It had not needed that episode to tell her that Armstrong held her in contempt; and yet, when they chanced to meet, she could smile up into his eyes as beamingly, as guilelessly, as though no shadow of sin had ever darkened her winsome face. But not so Gray. He moaned in secret over the loss of a strong man's confidence and esteem. He longed to find a way to win it back. He had even thought to go to the colonel with his trouble, make a clean breast of it, tell him the truth—that he had failed deeply, as it was possible for him to fail, in love with Amy Lawrence; had hoped his love was returned; had found it was not—that she had only a frank, friendly, kindly interest in him; and that, wounded and stung, he had fretted himself into a fever at Honolulu, aided by Canker's aspersions, and then—well—any man is liable, said Billy to himself, to get smitten with a woman who tenderly and skilfully nurses him day after day; and that's just what Witchie Garrison did. But somehow the opportunity to tell him never seemed to come; and now, now that Armstrong and himself were thus thrown together with the prospect of being in the same room day and night for the best of the month, a third officer, a stranger, lay there, too, and in his presence or hearing any confidences would be impossible, even if Armstrong encouraged them, which he probably would not. In this embarrassment Billy's wish was that the colonel were fifty miles away. It was fate and a hard one, thought he, that brought him there—an ever-present reproach. It was luck of the worst kind that they should be confronted under such circumstances, since neither could retreat. He submitted in anxious silence to the keen, quick examination of the skillful surgeon in charge and to the redressing of his wound. He could have been proud and happy but for that shadow on his life, of which Armstrong's presence would so constantly remind him. He could not even think how his dear old dragoon daddy would rejoice in the congratulations that would surely greet him when the story of the brave dash of the —teenth, Billy among the foremost, should reach the states. He could not even dream how it might affect her—Amy Lawrence. He was beginning to be ashamed now in this presence to think how that other—how Margaret Garrison might be impressed, forgetting that, to the army girl who has lived long years on the frontier, tales of heroism are the rule, not the exception. He wondered how long it could be before she would come to him to bring him comfort. Surely by this time she knew that he had been seriously, painfully wounded. He did not know, however, that at the very first sound of battle Frost had bundled the sisters aboard his launch and steamed away to the transports. Yet, what comfort could her visit bring to him with that stern censor lying there, seeing and hearing all? Billy Gray that Monday night could almost have wished that Armstrong's slumber might be eternal, never dreaming that before a second Monday should come he would thank heaven with grateful heart for Armstrong's presence, vigilance and intervention.

In three days the colonel was able to sit up. Within the week he was permitted to take air and exercise in the spacious court of the old college, his sword arm in its sling. But Gray and the young officer of volunteers were too seriously wounded to leave their pillows. The —teenth had occupied a new line far south of the old one; but, at one time, several of Billy's brother officers had dropped in to see him and tell him regimental news; and one of them, the young West Pointer who had broken down at sight of the dying face that stirring Sunday morning, told him of Latrobe's soldier funeral and of Gen. Drayton's presence and speechless grief; and Billy's hand groped beneath the pillow for that little blood-stained packet still undelivered. He had promptly caused the information to be conveyed to the veteran commander that it was his own lost nephew who had died in his soldier death in front of the firing line; but the packet still remained in his hands; and even before the tiny thermometer confirmed his views, the keen eye of the surgeon saw that something had heightened Billy's fever that day; and so, when just at sunset there came driving into the court the most stylish equipage in all Manila, and Mrs. Garrison fluttered up the broad stairway and confidently asked to be announced to Mr. Gray, the steward in charge of the door was very, very sorry, but—the doctor had given instructions that no more visitors should see the young gentleman that day. Mrs. Frank smiled indulgently, and asked for the doctor himself, and beamed on him with all her witchery and begged for just a few words; but the suave, placid, yet impenetrable doctor said he, too, was sorry—sorry that Mr. Gray was not able to see anyone else, but such was the case. Mrs. Garrison said she thought if Mr. Gray knew that it was—but perhaps Dr. Frank didn't know it was she who had nursed Mr. Gray so assiduously at Honolulu, Dr. Frank did know that and more; but he did not say so; neither did he yield. There were tears in her eyes as she sprang into her carriage again; but they were tears of anger and defeat. She dashed them away the very next instant and smiled joy and congratulation, even adulation, at sight of the tall, stalwart officer, his arm in a sling, who stood the center of a staring group as her carriage flashed by. She would have ordered stop; but while the rest of the party had gazed as they lifted their caps, Armstrong's uninjured hand performed its duty, his cap had been lifted with the others, but not so much as a glance went her way; and Margaret Garrison, bitter in spirit, drove on down past the old cuartel to her luxurious quarters where Nita, a piteous shadow of the "sweet girl graduate" of the year before, was awaiting her coming. With the insurgents' retreat and the advance of the American lines there had been a gradual return of the refugees among the transports; and Frost had finally brought his birdling back to shore; but Nita dare not drive, she said, for fear of again seeing those stern, reproachful eyes. The guard at the gate had received orders to admit no more of the rank and file, even when they came as messengers; and so the child was safe, said Margaret. As for herself, she must drive, she must see Will Gray.

But the instant she reentered the house Mrs. Garrison knew that during her brief absence some new trouble had come. Good heavens, could she never leave Nita's side that harm did not befall her! At the head of the broad flight of stairs stood her brother-in-law, a black frown on his brow.

"Go in and do what you can for her," he briefly said. "I thought—she'd be glad to know that—that—fellow would trouble her no more."

"That fellow?" she gasped. "You mean—"

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"And you told her!" she cried clinching her little hands in impotent wrath. "You—brute!"

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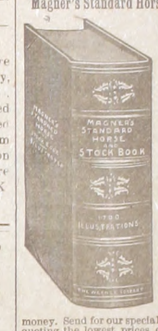

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