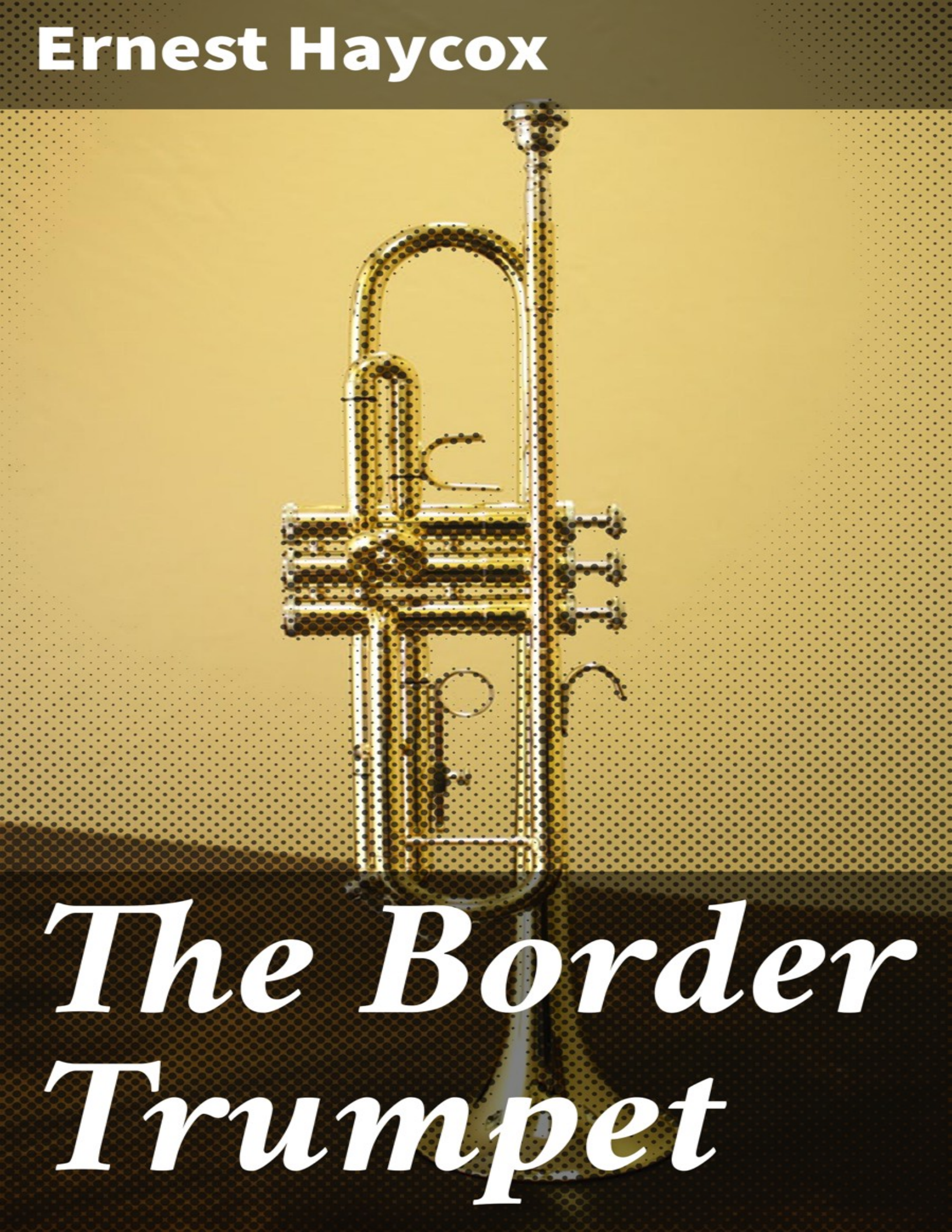
Ernest Haycox



The Border Trumpet

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CHAPTER 1

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TWO weeks from San Francisco the *Newbern* dropped anchor in the tangle of sandbars and willow banks at the mouth of the Colorado, transferring its freight and its sole passenger, Eleanor Warren, to the steamer *Cocopah*, Captain Jack Mellon commanding. Three days later, under a brass-colored midsummer's sun, they reached Fort Yuma, tarried briefly and went on.

"Ordinarily," Captain Mellon told her, "a military escort would have met you at Yuma. The direct way to Camp Grant is down the Gila, past the Pima villages and over the desert to the San Pedro. But there ain't any military posts along the route and the Indians are very bad, so you'll follow the supply line."

She stood in the useless shade of the *Cocopah*'s texas, with a parasol tilted against the beating glare of white earth and metal-yellow sky, and watched the low adobe outline of Fort Yuma fade behind a pulsing, iridescent haze. A little hat made its rakish angle on her auburn head and a dove-gray dress, meant for more modish travel than this, fitted itself tightly at neck and shoulders and waist. She was a slim girl and a straight one and carried the unmistakable army mark—for she had been born in a wagon bed ten miles short of Fort Snelling, Minnesota, army regulations and the laws of nature not concurring, and had spent all her twenty-one years, save the last three, following the guidon. Now with the genteel training of Mrs. De Launcey's Boston School for Young Ladies behind her, she was rejoining the regiment at

its most recent frontier. Twenty years ago that frontier was Minnesota and Kansas. Ten years ago it had been the Civil War and Texas; now it was Arizona.

Beneath her brows was the inquiring line of direct gray eyes. She had a long composed mouth and a temper that could at once charm a man or chill him to his bones; this was the competence a girl acquired on the frontier, this was the manner of a girl raised by men and taught by them. She was a little better than average woman in height, with the bony structure of her face making definite strong and pleasant contours. Two jade eardrops stirred when she turned her head and a cameo brooch, once her mother's, was clipped to her dress at the curve of her breast line. Her skin was smooth and fair and flushed now by the constant heat.

"For a fact," Captain Mellon admitted, "it is average warm. A hundred and nineteen in the wheelhouse. It will be hotter up the canyon but by then you will not mind it."

The canyon walls grew high and narrow as they chugged on. The river was the exact color of chocolate and, since this was late summer, at quite low stage. At night they tied up to any convenient boulder and by day had their troubles bumping over the tricky gravel bars. "One time," said Captain Mellon, "I was hung up fifty-seven days on a bar." Yuma squaws now and then pushed their short, copper-colored shapes out of the shore willows and stared at the boat through the disheveled fall of their hair. Sleeping, in such weather, was impossible. At mealtime the butter was an oily liquid on the plate and neither the beans nor boiled potatoes were palatable. On the eleventh day the *Cocopah*

whistled for Ehrenburg and pushed its nose against the gravel.

"Captain," said Eleanor Warren, "it has really been a nice trip."

Captain Mellon was young enough to pull at his mustaches and old enough to feel worried about her. She was a tall, fashionable girl who had made no single complaint on the trip and now was obviously eager to rejoin her regiment. But Mellon thought of the desert beyond, its scarifying heat, its stinging clouds of alkali powder, its discomfort and its danger, She was leaving the last semblance of comfort behind. "There's always something about an army girl," he told her. "Damned if there ain't. Would there be a young lieutenant in that outfit you're so anxious to reach?"

Her smile was long and soft, "Captain," she said, "you have a sharp eye."

"I wish you luck," he said, reversed the *Cocopah* from the gravel bar and steamed upriver. His farewell whistle blast slammed back and forth between the canyon walls.

Ehrenburg was a scatter of miserable dobe homes on a treeless bluff, one general store and the government warehouse which received army supplies from the river boats and shipped them out by freighting teams to the military posts scattered deep in the Territory. A young lieutenant with cheeks broiled lobster-red, and the lieutenant's exceedingly lonesome wife, welcomed Eleanor Warren.

"You are," said the lieutenant's wife, "the only white woman I've set eyes upon for eight weeks. Stay awhile. A

more cheerless camp does not exist and I think sometimes I shall lose my mind."

But a detachment of the Sixth was waiting to escort her on. She had hoped to see the men of the Third, her own beloved outfit, so that she might sooner get the common gossip so dear to her; nevertheless she was extraordinarily happy when, next morning, she set out westward in an army ambulance drawn by four service mules, flanked by eight sun-blackened raw-boned Irish troopers and a lieutenant with blue eyes and a tawny yellow mustache like Custer's. She was with her own kind once more and nothing else mattered; there was no feeling in the world like that of an army woman returning to her outfit.

Westward was the pure flare of the desert, broken by silhouetted cacti and the blue blur of Arizona mountains rising suddenly from the plain. The ambulance bounced along the stony soil and fine alkali dust rolled up solid as flour, stinging her eyes and skin. Within her small wall tent at night she listened to the drowsy talk of the troopers around the camp fire, hearing the names of Geronimo and Casadora and Antone, of Crook, of massacred wagon trains and ranch houses in ruins. The edge of San Francisco peak was a constant lodestar in the deep East. On the third day they passed Date Creek, on the fourth they pulled into Fort Whipple, hard by the little mining town of Prescott. This, the headquarters of the military district, was in the cooler hills. Two days later she crossed the hills to Camp Verde, and there was whirled away by still another escort, high up to the timbered Mogollon range, from the rim of which she had her views of the Tonto Basin, wild and dark and rugged. This

was slower travel and the elevation brought a breath of sweet wind at evening; but she noticed the escort rode with an aroused vigilance, throwing out flankers by day and guards by night. Five days from Verde the escort crossed Camp Apache's parade ground. Dropping out of the ambulance she confronted Major McClure's wife, the first familiar face of the old Third Cavalry.

"Why," said the major's wife, "you're a grown lady," and cried shamelessly as she embraced Eleanor Warren. "Has it been that long since I packed your trunk at Fort Stanton and watched you go? Three years! I guess I'm just another dried up, leather- skinned old army woman. What a pretty dress. Is that the Eastern style now? How long have you been from Ehrenburg?"

"Twelve days."

"Well, it is three more to your father at Grant. If you think the road so far is bad, wait till you see what lies ahead. The detail from Grant hasn't come yet. Meanwhile we'll have a party tonight and talk about the East. It's been three years since I last saw lace curtains or a hotel room. I hope you can stay a week."

But that night, sometime short of tattoo, a party of horsemen crossed the hard-baked parade with a sudden clatter of hoofs and a man's voice spoke from the porch of the McClure quarters. "Has Miss Warren arrived?"

The officers and ladies of the post were all in this room; suddenly they were smiling at Eleanor Warren as she rose and half turned from the door, There was a quick step in the hall and Major McClure drawled, "She's here, Phil," and then Eleanor Warren swung about, soberly disturbed and afraid of

the things that might at this moment be on her face. She said in a small uneven voice: "How are you, Phil?"

He stood before her, this Philip Castleton, his trousers and shirt turned gray from riding and his naturally dark face further colored by the intense Arizona sun. He was a big, black-eyed man, quick and solid, with a driving energy that came out of him even though he stood wholly still. He was straight-backed, physically hard. There was a blaze of feeling in his eyes, and change came to his face. He had presence enough to bow to the group of ladies, but he said "Eleanor," as he stepped toward her. Her soberness went away and regardless of propriety she walked into his arms. This was the man she had loved as a girl of eighteen at Fort Stanton. Now she returned to him as a woman, and all her intervening fears faded and she knew nothing had changed. At this moment she was happier than she could remember ever being.

The trumpets were blowing morning fatigue call, sunlight rushed yellow and hard over the world, and the ambulance and ten troopers of old K were waiting on the parade when she stepped from Major McClure's quartets. They waited at the heads of their horses, these bronzed rough men of her father's outfit. Most of them were old friends—Sergeant Tim Hanna, whose tough Irish lips were broadly asmile, and the Dutch sergeant, Conrad Reichert, and Corporal Oldbuck who had carried her on his saddle when, as a girl, she had visited behind the lines at Bull Run. She went along the rank, shaking hands. "Hanna," she said, "what happened to that Mexican girl at Stanton?"

Hanna brought a gauntlet up across the sweeping tips of his dragoon mustaches: "Ah, now, you remember her still? So do I, but I must be tellin' you about it in private someday. Nawt all the men in old K troop are the gentlemen they look." There was a low run of amusement along the line, and pleased approval. One last private of the detail cantered across the parade and joined the line. Lieutenant Castleton's voice hit him with a severity that surprised Eleanor. "Jackson, report to me as soon as we reach Grant. Eleanor, if you are ready—"

Eleanor Warren paid her respects to the gathered officers and ladies and accepted Castleton's hand into the ambulance. Major McClure's wife called, "Give my love to Harriet Mixler—and tell her to come up here as soon as she can!" Castleton spoke a quick command, the troopers mounted and wheeled as twos, the ambulance rolled over the parade, took something less than a road down a ravine, and soon left Apache behind.

Eastward lay the high rock rampart of the White mountains; in all other directions the domes and spires and ragged edges of hill country lay below the brilliant flash of sunlight. The ambulance rattled along the road, traversed a narrow valley and entered the rough ravines again. A cavalry detail passed them, homeward bound; the officer in command lifted his hat, showing Eleanor a face dull for want of sleep. Her own detail swung loose and straight-backed in saddle leather, each man dressed in blue pants, high boots and gray shirt opened against sunburned skin. Tim Hanna, K's top sergeant, rode at the column's head, his slouched hat turning constantly left and right in search for trouble

that might lie in these roundabout piney peaks. Low cactus and sage and catclaw and amber forage grass scattered the slopes. The way was windingly downward into a rougher country than she had ever seen, leading southwest through the smoky heat to Camp Grant on the San Pedro, a hundred and ten miles away.

Phil Castleton rode beside the ambulance wagon, now and then speaking to her, but always breaking off to watch the trail. This was a part of that same alertness she had noticed in previous escorts. Everybody in the command rode heads up; every man swept the rough contours and parapets of the surrounding hills, and some of this tight, uncertain feeling got into her until she too, found herself eyeing the catclaw clumps and the scattered rocks.

Phil Castleton said, "The detail we passed was from A Troop, out on night scout. Up this way the Coyotero Apaches are pretty tricky. But we've got it worse at Grant. The Chiricahuas drift up from the Dragoons and part of the Aravaipas are disaffected. We have been chasing a subchief by the name of Antone for six months."

"Phil," she said, "thanks for your letters. They were a comfort."

He said: "Sometimes I hoped they'd make you lonely enough to come back. Three years is a long time to wait, Eleanor."

She sat with her hands gripping the seat of the ambulance as it pitched over the rough road, watching him with a solemn sweetness: He was a man who seldom smiled, who was hard with himself because of ambition, and sometimes hard with others because of the wilful energy

that drove him. It showed in the uncompromising blackness of his eyes and in the set lines about his mouth. All the way westward on the new Pacific railroad, and on the boat and all across the wastes of Arizona she had been afraid of this meeting, afraid of what the three years' separation might have done to her as well as to him. But now, seeing him, she was no longer afraid and small excitement lifted her heart. Nothing was changed from that day when, as a girl of seventeen she had first seen him ride up to Fort Stanton, fresh from West Point and assigned to her father's troop, K.

"Phil," she murmured, "I wondered if it would be the same." and looked down at her gloved hands.

He said, swift and certain. "I could never change, Eleanor. But you have changed."

She was startled by his tone. "How, Phil?"

Sergeant Hanna called back: "Lieutenant." Castleton cantered ahead and for a while both men rode side by side, studying the trace of prior travel on the trail. They fell out of a low ravine into a level, narrow valley and pursued it briskly, through silver-gray clouds of fine-rising dust. Heat closed in strongly and the smell of arid earth and of sweaty horseflesh condensed around her. At noon they halted in the shadow of another narrow canyon for bacon sandwiches and cold water from a spring, and pressed forward into the black tangle of mountains. That night they made camp beside the shallow trickle of the San Carlos deep in the rugged wilderness of hills, near Natane's Butte.

Sitting before her little wall tent, Eleanor watched the blackness of an Arizona night close down, thick and solid and mysterious. Against it the yellow point of the campfire

burned with a motionless glow and the peaks of the range made faint silhouettes high up, and the sky was a cloudy wash of stars. Somewhere in this darkness part of the troopers lay on guard: in the shadows beyond the fire the rest were rolled in blankets, talking in drowsy, tired tones. Phil Castleton sat near her.

"Phil," she said, "how have I changed?"

He spoke with a dry, reluctant voice. "It is hard for me to explain. I never was very sentimental, was I? But you've grown up. I knew you would—and was afraid you'd not be the same. When I came into Major McClure's quarters last night and saw you standing there, it hit me very hard, You were tall and composed. You were a lady, Eleanor. Better than that, you were a woman a man gets to thinking about when he's out alone at night in these hills. For me it has been a difficult wait."

"Phil," she whispered, "here I am, and very glad."

She stood up and watched him rise and remain still before her; and was remotely disappointed that he let the distance remain between them. His voice was short, holding many things back, She heard the strain in him and wondered why he should seem to be fighting this moment, with all that it could mean, away from him; He had always been a man to hold himself in severe check, yet it was odd that he should let it be so now when her own answer had been clear enough.

He said: "Well, it changes a pretty drab world into a pretty pleasant one for me, Though I ought to tell you that Camp Grant is a hellhole for a white woman. Harriet Mixler has been the only one there for six months and I think it has

aged her five years. I don't believe you know her. She came out from Baltimore a year ago to marry George Mixler. She never did like the country, and now she's about to have a baby, and if you weren't coming along to keep her company I think she'd go crazy."

"Nothing could be that bad, Phil. I'm happier in an army post, no matter how drab it is, than anywhere else in the world—It gets in your blood, Phil!"

"Well," he said, "Grant is pretty bad," Then he was silent. She thought he was listening to the abrasive sounds running through the blanketing black. A coyote howled high on the ridge and nearer at hand an owl hooted and was still. Sergeant Hanna came into the firelight, listening to that sound; and later retreated from the fire.

"Might be an Apache's signal," Castleton said. "It's one of their favorite ways of calling." Then he added at once, "Nothing to fear. They don't attack at night." But the stillness of the camp was deep and indrawn and she knew every man was awake in his blankets, waiting for the call to repeat. "Eleanor," Castleton said, very abrupt, "I hope we do not have to wait too long."

She knew what he meant. But the abruptness of it surprised her, as other signs of his changeable temper had surprised her. He went on in the same strained and half-awkward voice. "I have never asked you. I thought it was something understood. Let's not make it too long, Eleanor. I'd be a happy man if we could be married within the month."

She was half listening and half controlled by the race of her own thoughts. Then she said, "Yes, Phil. Yes."

He came forward and brought her shoulders forward with his hands and kissed her and stepped back at once. "I'll apologize for that. I shouldn't have presumed—"

Her question was thoroughly puzzled, and a little forlorn; the sweetness of this moment was all lost. "But why not, Phil?"

"You're alone here. I should have waited until you reached Camp. Good night, Eleanor."

Lying on her cot later, she thought of him with a happiness broken only by faint wonder at the unbending streak he had displayed. He was a man with close-guarded emotions but it was strange that at the one moment when he must have felt the same upwhirl of tumultuous happiness she had experienced, he still could not break through his reserve. She thought about it through the long, still minutes. Nothing broke the camp silence, yet gradually as she lay there the intimations of this land's savageness and wildness and uncertainty began to color her thoughts until it was a relief to remember the troopers crouched out in that blackness, waiting and listening. This was the moment she realised that the security of the last three years was forever gone and that the deep safe sleep of those years was also gone. As long as she remained on this frontier she would be forever listening into the night mysteries. By day she would be watching the trail as the troopers watched, alert and never sure.

In the middle of the following morning Castleton dropped back to the ambulance and pointed to a high, black cone in

the near distance. Above the cone little wisps of smoke rose, one following another. "Indians signaling. They know we're on this road. Probably Antone's band."

They continued southward through the hills, the growing heat indicating descent. Now and then they reached a dry creek bed and rattled along it until some ravine closed about them and the sun disappeared and the sound of their progress bounced from wall to wall. This way they traveled, by steady marches and brief halts, leaving a gray wake behind. Once, on the high rim of one such narrow canyon a rock dislodged and fell and she heard it strike and fall and strike again until the sound of it was lost, though it still fell. That afternoon they rounded into a mountain- cramped meadow and came upon a dobe whose doors and oil-papered windows were ripped open. A horse lay warm-dead in the yard and the smell of smoke still clung to the air. Castleton and Hanna went into the dobe, soon reappearing. Castleton's eyes were quite black; he showed his anger this way. "God knows what happened to Bill Lay. This happened less than two hours ago. Hanna, throw flankers on that bluff." Short of dusk he came to the ambulance again, pointing to the tall column of a sahuaro cactus higher on the slope. An Indian arrow stuck there, imbedded as far as its feathered end.

They camped on a high roll of ground that evening; and in the blue last dusk of evening horses' feet slashed through the gravel of an adjoining ravine and a man called forward. The troopers suddenly rose to stand by their guns, remaining this way until a line of cavalrymen broke out of the canyon. Castleton walked out to meet the detachment a

few yards from the fire. She heard him say in a half-curt voice: "What luck, Benteen?"

He sat in the saddle with a weary looseness, this tall thin-flanked officer Castleton had called Benteen, He had no shoulder bar, which marked him as a second lieutenant; the insignia on the crossed swords of his campaign hat indicated I troop of her regiment. Being a thorough army girl, Eleanor noticed these details first and was afterwards compelled by a rising interest to study the man himself. Riding dust covered his blue uniform and sweat had caked this dust on cheeks deep-tanned by the sun. He had extraordinarily long legs and his hair showed a sandy red when he lifted his hat to release the sweat collected beneath it. His hands, quite large-knuckled, lay on the saddle swell, and a pair of gray, sleepy eyes lifted from Castleton and sent one direct glance toward her. Afterwards he spoke with a voice that was quite even, quite soft: "So far, just the ride. Antone's band came down this way and scattered."

"They fired Bill Lay's ranch not long ago," said Castleton. Eleanor, listening to Castleton's voice, believed she heard something unfriendly and condemning in it.

"We'll have a look," Benteen answered. He turned in the saddle and considered the half-dozen jaded troopers with him, and Eleanor knew he was calculating their endurance, as a good officer should. He raised his hand in signal, broke into a canter and came on with a loose swing of his shoulders, passing within a few yards of her. As he went by he raised his hat, gave her a direct, unsmiling glance, and was soon lost in the dusk.

When Castleton came back she said: "Who was that?" and watched the way his face remained in its set position.

"Tom Benteen, second lieutenant of I troop. He came to the outfit about a year ago." Castleton let the information stand a moment, later adding with some reluctance, "You'll meet him at Grant when he returns from scout."

It was quite clear to Eleanor Warren that he had no liking for Tom Benteen and since she was a wise girl in the ways of army jealousies she put the information back in her head, remaining silent. Darkness fell at once, black and complete beneath the cloudy glitter of the Arizona skies. The fire bombed its yellow brightness against the solid dark. Young trooper Jackson came into the light and stood there with his head down until Castleton called:

"Get away from that light."

The boy faded. Castleton said in a shorter, smaller voice: "He's mooning about a girl that lives down the San Pedro. Not much of a soldier. I think you must be tired. It has been a long ride, and tomorrow will be just as rough. Good night."

Lying in the tent, Eleanor Warren listened to the long, far wail of coyotes on the ridges until she found herself tense in the blankets, half waiting for the unexpected to strike. There was a picture before her, which was of Lieutenant Benteen swinging like an old trooper in his saddle, as though he were part of the saddle, lifting his hat as he ran by; not smiling, yet with his smoky gray eyes alive to her.

This was all she remembered before sleeping. At gray dawn they were on the road again, turning through one canyon and another on the last descent. They struck the San Pedro and followed its bone-dry bed down a flat,

cramped valley asmoke with the tinder heat, and at near dusk came to the junction of waterless Aravaipa Creek where Camp Grant's dobehouses and tents made a kind of square on the baked earth. Lights were shining through the blue fog of evening and men moved from quarters as the detail arrived. Paused by the brush-covered porch—the ramada—of the longest dobe, Phil Castleton saluted and said:

"Sir, Lieutenant Castleton reports back from Fort Apache. Your daughter is here."

Eleanor dropped from the ambulance seat, too eager to wait for assistance, and saw the heavy shape of her father in the thick shadows beneath the ramada. He didn't move and he didn't speak. As she walked toward him she saw the lines running across his plump cheeks, beneath the sweep of his white mustaches. He had removed his hat and she observed that he had turned completely gray in the three years of her absence. All he said was "Well, daughter—" and raised his arms.

She wasn't quite crying when she kissed him; but an emotion, so strong and so full, wouldn't let her speak; it was the feeling that she had once had long ago as a little girl running to him for shelter and comfort when her own resources failed her. This was what was in her now, its memory carrying her the long distance back to childhood. It lasted a moment, then left her completely, and she stepped away to smile at him through tears, sadly knowing her girlhood and her girlhood's sweet, irresponsible happiness was forever gone. She could never again go to him and be sheltered from trouble.

She said in a tone that had to be swift to be steady, "You haven't changed, Dad."

He was a plump elderly man watching her with a soft-smiling gentleness. "You look uncommonly like your mother did at twenty- one. I must say you've turned into a damned pretty woman, Eleanor."

CHAPTER 2

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A WOMAN came slowly forward beneath the black shadows cast by the ramada. Major Warren spoke with a quick courtesy. "Eleanor, this is Harriet, Mr. Mixler's wife. She has been the only white woman at the post."

Harriet Mixler's eyes were wide and round and unhappiness lay tightly across her face. She said in a low voice: "It is nice to have you here, Eleanor."

"If you will show Eleanor her quarters," said Major Warren and, by old habit, he stepped out to inspect the returned detail. The two women turned through the low door of the major's quarters into a room's stale, dense heat. Lamplight showed a rammed-earth floor and the flimsy partitions separating other small rooms. Harriet Mixler led the way into one of these and stood still. Her hand described a weary gesture toward an iron cot, a chair and a wardrobe made of packing-box boards. Two pieces of fresh chintz hung beside a single narrow window. "Your father wished me to make this presentable, Eleanor. It is the best I could contrive."

"You must remember," said Eleanor Warren, "I was born and raised in places like this one. I love it."

"I hate it," said Harriet Mixler. Her accent was softly Southern. She had been a slim and black-haired girl with sharp, responsive features, obviously the daughter of some old-line plantation owner; once lively and very gay and very quick- tempered. All this, Eleanor Warren saw, in profound

pity, was gone. "George is out on a scout detail. I think you know him."

"Yes," said Eleanor. "He was at Stanton before I left, and quite an eligible bachelor." She smiled at Harriet. "I think he was one of my first secret attachments."

Harriet Mixler touched Eleanor's traveling dress. Her mouth sagged at the corners. Her expression displayed bitterness. "That is such lovely material. In Norfolk I used to dance all night. We'd ride home by first daylight and eat johnnycake and oyster fries. Didn't you just die when you had to leave the East?"

"No. I counted every day until I could come. You'll like it here. You really will."

"Never," said Harriet Mixler, doggedly resisting the thought. "I hate everything about the army. I shall be an old woman with a leather skin and a ruined complexion in one more year. I sit in that unbearable hovel down the line and hate the sight of myself. I should have left here. Now it is too late. It is fifty-five miles to Tucson, and nothing there but mud huts. It is more than a hundred miles to Fort Apache, which is no better than here. It is like being buried alive." She stared at Eleanor Warren with those great, dark eyes so full of unhappiness. "Do you know what I fear most? Doctor Shiraz is gone three quarters of the time with the troops. When my baby's time comes he will be gone again. I shall die without him. My mother died with me. Even the Indians treat their women better than the Government treats its officers' ladies." Suddenly she put both her arms against Eleanor Warren and dropped her head. Her body trembled

and she cried in a choked whisper, "It's a blessed thing to have you here. I'm so afraid—so afraid."

Eleanor Warren placed her arms around this girl. She murmured, "Nothing will happen, Harriet." Men's voices ran through the still, deep night and boots tramped the hard earth. Harriet Mixler pulled back, smoothing her hair. She said in despair, "I'm such a sight," and turned into the main room with Eleanor. Major Warren came in with Captain Harrison of I troop. Harrison was a raw-boned man with a long red nose and a black beard cropped close. His taciturn eyes lighted up, which was rare for him. He said: "Dammit, Eleanor, maybe we'll have some fun around here now."

A voice in the other corner of the room spoke up. "We got beef croquettes, Miss Eleanor."

"Cowen!"

Cowen wore a black broadcloth suit and a white starched shirt. On his vest the huge links of his watch chain gently moved. His hair was carefully greased down against his head, his mustaches were shined and his face showed the nearest approach to pleasure its grave woodenness permitted. Cowen, the Warren's cook since '63, took unto himself most of the credit for raising Eleanor through the stage of long legs and bad grammar. Cowen shook her hand with the precise formality which was his idea of good manners in public. "I have things to tell you about this regiment," he said under his breath and left the room. The other officers of the two companies were coming in, Ray Lankerwell, Howell Ford, and Doctor Shiraz, who wore a set of flame-red burnsides. Shiraz said, "You're still an army child, Eleanor," and claimed his kiss. He turned at once to

Harriet Mixler, gently pulling her to a chair. "Harriet, I want you to take some wine tonight."

She held to the cloth of his coat sleeve. "Are you sure to be here during the next two or three weeks?"

He had a deep, patient voice. "I'll be here. Right here." Cowen brought in the supper and the group sat up to the table. Major Warren's face was round and ruddy and cheerful as he raised his wine glass, and for a moment all of them felt the emotion lying behind his silence. He tipped the glass at his daughter and said, "To a lady."

"To a lady," repeated Shiraz.

"And," said Major Warren with a gentler tone, "to Harriet."

They drank on that and suddenly the conversation was strong and pleasant even though dull heat smothered the room. Shiraz rapped on the table and pointed a finger at Eleanor.

"Let's see now how much you remember. The column is in fours, approaching a narrow defile. What do you do?"

"The command is by twos, march. Numbers one and two of first fours continue on. Number three and four oblique to right and follow in. Other sets repeat."

"Who carries the guidon?"

"Ranking corporal, sir. His place is left file of first platoon."

"Very good," said Shiraz. "Tomorrow I shall try you on a horse."

"Docter," said Eleanor sweetly, "do you remember falling off the big roan, at Stanton?"

The other officers except Castleton let out a tremendous hoot and even Harriet Mixler smiled. Eleanor noticed that

Castleton watched her and seemed untouched by the burst of amusement. He sat to the table with his shoulders straight, though the other men were slouched and easy, as though even then he could not quite let go, as though his fiery energy held him in a strict and dark and impatient mood. The campaign had thinned him and blackened him but it had made no change on the sharp, half- handsome detail of his features. He was as he had been at Stanton, a strict and ambitious officer who drove his men hard and himself harder.

"I hope," said Shiraz, "you don't learn the subsequent catastrophes I've had with horses."

"Cowen," said Eleanor, "will tell me all about it tomorrow."

"Ah," groaned Shiraz, "you always knew more about the regiment than anybody else."

She said: "Will you ride the hills with me in the morning?"

Major Warren put down his knife and spoke plainly. "This is not Stanton, Eleanor. That's the first thing you must know. Nobody leaves this post at any time except under escort. There are Apaches within ten feet of the sentries this minute. Tomorrow when you look beyond the picket line and see a clump of yucca it is exactly an even chance that there's an Apache's head underneath it. We lost a teamster two days ago. He only went forty yards beyond the stables. We found him with an arrow through his chest. No riding, Eleanor."

Castleton's searching glance brought Eleanor Warren's attention to him. There was a question on his face, plain and demanding. The yellow lamplight showed strong, sudden

color on her cheeks. She dropped her eyes, hearing him say in a voice brushed by excitement: "Major Warren, I should like—"

Out in the darkness a sentry's challenge rode the night and a slow sleepy answer came forward. The sentry called: "Corpr'l of the guard, post number one!" Major Warren excused himself and left the room, and on the parade was the arrival scuff of horses. There was a little silence, with the other officers curiously watching Phil Castleton. "What was that?" asked Captain Harrison in his blunt way.

"I think I should wait for Major Warren's return," said Castleton.

Quiet and quick-eyed, Eleanor Warren noticed the way they watched Castleton. With interest, but with reserve, as though something held them off. He had so little of their loose-muscled comfort, he had so strong a will to get on in his profession. It was an impetuous quality, it was his strength. Yet—and this she thought slowly and with a certain reluctant admission—it was a weakness too. Garrison life was a close- knit society; there had to be a good deal of give and take. She thought, "I shall have to warn him of that."

Her father's voice was hearty and cheerful in the yonder dark. Somebody spoke to him in soft-sprawling words; the dismissed troopers moved across the parade. Major Warren returned to the room with the long-legged lieutenant she had seen the previous night in the hills.

"Eleanor," said Warren, "I present Mr. Benteen of I troop. My daughter Eleanor, Mr. Benteen."

Benteen pulled his hat from a head of sandy-red hair. He was taller than any officer in the room. A day's growth of

red- glinting whiskers covered his face, chalked with alkali dust and the dry stain of sweat tracks. His eyes showed weariness clear down to the gray depths and his shoulders showed it, lying slack beneath the gray campaign shirt. He had heavy cheekbones, with a small scar making its white cut on the right side, and long lips that came definitely together.

Eleanor Warren put out her hand. "I'm glad you're in the regiment. Mr. Benteen."

Shiraz said to Benteen: "I give you warning, Tom. She's been in this army a long time and knows the regulations better than most officers."

His hand was extremely wide and heavy at the knuckles. There was a deliberateness about him and she knew, as the silence ran, on that he took his time about all things. This was the way he stood, steadily considering her, as though he meant to have his good look and find out what she was like; and for some odd reason she had the feeling that, behind those gray and indolent eyes, he was placing her against other women he had known and making comparison. In a way it put her on the defensive, it disturbed her. When he smiled, his lips spread back from heavy white teeth. His voice was effortlessly slow.

"You have been mentioned many times. I wish I had been at Stanton. As it is, I'm getting a late start."

It was a polite man's reply and yet the casual inflections of his voice stirred her strong curiosity.

Captain Harrison said: "Did you cut Antone's tracks?"

"He's eighty miles back in the Pinal Range by now. But I know something about his habits which will be useful on the

next chase." He moved over to Harriet Mixler, his long body bending a little. Eleanor saw his expression turn gentle. There was a definite affection in his voice. "I passed George's detail yesterday. He'll be back tomorrow."

She noticed the little glow of pleasure this man brought to Harriet Mixler's face. It was a way he had, it was some knowledge he possessed of women. Phil Castleton, she noticed at once, was seemingly disinterested in this scene. His glance touched Benteen and came away; and she realized again that he didn't like Benteen. It was a knowledge that strangely troubled her. Phil Castleton turned to her, the question again in his eyes; he moved beside her.

"Major Warren," he said with a kind of curt nervousness in his talk, "Eleanor and I wish your consent."

Warren had a black Mexican cigar in his mouth. The tip of it flew upward and he reached for it and withdrew it, sincerely astonished. Doctor Shiraz breathed a long "Well, I'm damned." and then this silence grew quite strange. Eleanor Warren took Castleton's arm, embarrassed by the combined scrutiny of these people. She felt the rigidness of Castleton's body, as though it resisted the room, as though he were prepared for trouble. Something here was very odd, something in the silence. Benteen moved around the group, his head riding over all of them. His glance drew her attention and again, as before, she knew he took her somewhere into his deep-lying thoughts.

Her father said in reflective tone: "It is a nice thing to know. Of course you have my consent." He offered his hand to Castleton and he looked at the younger officer in a way she never forgot—in a way she was never able to describe

to herself. Harriet Mixler came over. "Eleanor," she said. "Eleanor."

A sentry challenged across the darkness and a call ran back along the line for the corporal of the guard; boots trotted over the parade. She didn't realize until that moment how highly keyed this post was to the black mystery crowding down from the hills. All the men stirred, as though catching the scent of trouble. Howell Ford slipped from the door, but was soon back. "Nachee is here with something."

Warren turned out, followed at once by the other officers. Eleanor Warren started to go along, to be held back by Harriet Mixler's sudden-reaching arm. She was visibly shaking. "Don't go!" she said. "Stay here!"

From the doorway both women watched the forming scene on the parade ground. A man ran up with a lantern, holding it high. By this light Eleanor saw the Apache Indian half surrounded by officers. He was small and wiry, dressed in a shirt, breechclout and moccasins whose leggings were folded down. A headband held back jet hair, and his eyes, struck by the lantern light, had a distinct gleaming. He carried a sack over his back.

Her father called: "Where's Manuel Dura?"

A civilian brushed through the shadows of the parade and came to the group. Her father said: "Find out what he wants, Manuel."

Manuel Dura spoke in a soft, sliding, twisted tone, moving a finger back and forth in front of the Apache. The Apache's face was impassive, unstirred. He answered swiftly.

Manuel Dura said: "He won't talk unless Nantan with the Long Legs comes. He knows Mr. Benteen best."

Eleanor hadn't noticed until now that Benteen was at the corner of the house, well away from the parley. He stepped forward.

The Indian talked, Manuel Dura interpreting. "Major, he say you want the Indian that keel the teamster. Nachee is good Indian but the other wan was bad. So Nachee bring you the bad wan."

Benteen said something in the Apache tongue. The Apache lifted his chin and grunted "Enju," and threw the bag from his shoulder. Some object dully struck the earth, whereupon Castleton swiftly stepped forward, to hide it from the women, But he had not been quite quick enough. Eleanor wheeled against Harriet Mixler, turned cold and sick, trying to block Harriet's view. Out of the sack had rolled the severed head of an Apache.

"Dammit," grunted Warren, an involuntary break in his voice.

"What was it?" whispered Harriet Mixler.

"I didn't see," answered Eleanor. The Indian slipped into the darkness without another sound. Doctor Shiraz reached down, pushed the head into the sack and took up the sack. He said, coolly, "Very good specimen," and went along the parade toward his quarters. The other officers broke away. Major Warren returned with a most wry expression on his lips. He looked at Harriet Mixler and at once lied: "Brought me a broken jug. That's the Indian sign for punishment to one of its people." He went on into the room and poured a drink of wine. Castleton stood at the doorway, watching