

***CHARLES
KING***



***TO THE FRONT:
A SEQUEL
TO CADET
DAYS***

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To the Front: A Sequel to Cadet Days

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FROM THE GRAY TO THE BLUE

It was just after sunset of one of the longest days of the loveliest of our summer months. The roar of the evening gun had gone re-echoing through the Highlands of the Hudson. The great garrison flag was still slowly fluttering earthward, veiled partially from the view of the throng of spectators by the snowy cloud of sulphur smoke drifting lazily away upon the wing of the breeze. Afar over beyond the barren level of the cavalry plain the gilded hands of the tower-clock on "the old Academic" were blended into one in proclaiming to all whom it might concern that it was five minutes past the half-hour 'twixt seven and eight, and there were girls in every group, and many a young fellow in the rigid line of gray and white before them, resentful of the fact that dress parade was woefully late and long, with tattoo and taps only two hours or so away. The season for the regular summer "hops" had not yet begun, for this was away back in the eighties, when many another old West Point fashion still prevailed; but there was to be an informal dance in the dining-room of the hotel, and it couldn't come off until after supper, and supper had to be served to some people who were "pokey" enough to care to come by late boat, or later train, and were more eager to see the cadets on parade than to seek Mine Host Craney's once bountiful table.

What made it more exasperating was that rumors were afloat to the effect that the adjutant had long and important orders to publish, and this would still further prolong the parade. Cadet Private Frazier, First Class, one of the best dancers in the battalion, was heard to mutter to his next-door neighbor in the front rank of the color company: "It'll be nine o'clock before we get things going at the hotel, and we've got to quit at nine-thirty. *Confound the orders!*" And yet, peering from under the visor of his shako, Mr. Frazier could see without disturbing the requisite pose of his head, "up and straight to the front, chin drawn in," that over near the south end of the row of gayly attired visitors, seated or standing at the edge of the camp parade-ground, there was one group, at least, to whom, as Frazier knew, the orders meant much more than the dance. There, switching the short grass with his stocky cane, stood their grim senior surgeon, Doctor, or Major, Graham. There, close beside him and leaning on the arm of a slender but athletic, sun-tanned young fellow in trim civilian dress, stood the doctor's devoted wife. With them was a curly-headed youth, perhaps seventeen years of age, restless, eager, and impatient for the promised news. Making his way eagerly but gently through the dense throng of onlookers, a bronze-faced, keen-eyed, powerfully built officer in the uniform of the cavalry came up at the moment and joined them. "Have you heard anything yet?" he murmured to Mrs. Graham, whose kind and gentle eyes seemed to light at sound of his voice.

"Not yet," she answered, with a shake of the head. "All we learned just a few minutes ago was that the order was

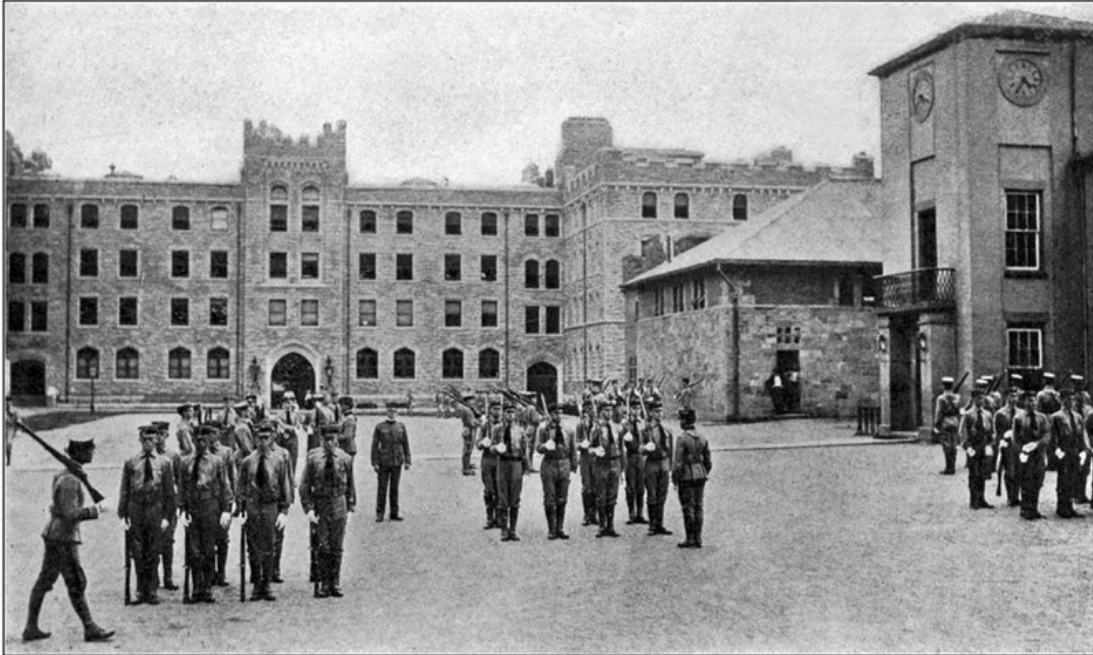
here and would be published on parade. The commandant returned only just in time."

"And there's been no telegram—no word from outside?"

"Not a thing, Mr. McCrea. It just so happened."

"Well, if that isn't odd! To begin with, it's most unusual to get out the order so early. They must be in a hurry to assign the graduates this year. Pops, old boy, if you don't get our regiment, I'll say the secretary of war is deaf to the wishes of every officer and most of the men. We told him when he came out to look over Fort Reynolds, and incidentally look into the mines—but that was last year—Oh, bother, Williams," he suddenly broke off, "what do you want to lose precious time for, putting 'em through the manual?"

This sudden outbreak was levelled at the unconscious officer commanding the parade (the "officer in charge," as he was termed), Mr. Williams having replied, "Take your post, sir," to the adjutant's stately salute in presenting the statuesque line. Whereupon the adjutant "recovered" sword, strode briskly up, passed beyond the plumed commander, and took his station to his left and rear. With much deliberation of manner, Mr. Williams drew sabre and easily gave the various orders for the showy manual of arms, the white-gloved hands moving like clockwork in response to his command until, with simultaneous thud, the battalion resumed the "order," certain spectators with difficulty repressing the impulse to applaud.



CADETS AT DRILL, WEST POINT [To List](#)

Then back to the centre stalked the young adjutant, Mrs. Graham unconsciously drawing unflattering comparison between the present incumbent, soldierly though he seemed, and her own boy's associate and friend, Claude Benton, adjutant of the class graduated barely a fortnight earlier, "her own boy," perhaps the most honored among them. She was clinging to his arm now, her pride and joy through all his years of sturdy boyhood and manly youth. She knew well that the hope and longing of his heart was to be assigned to the cavalry regiment of which Lieutenant McCrea was quartermaster, the regiment once stationed at old Fort Reynolds, in the Rockies, when Dr. Graham was there as post surgeon and Geordie was preparing for West Point. Indeed, Mr. McCrea had "coached" her son in mathematics, and had been most helpful in securing the appointment. And now here was the quartermaster on leave of absence, the first he had had in years, spending several

weeks of his three months' rest at the scene of his own soldier school-days.

But it was "Bud," her younger son, who had come rushing down to the surgeon's quarters only a few minutes before parade with the all-important news. "Mither!—Geordie!" he cried, "Captain Cross says the assignment order's come and will be published at parade. Hurry up!"

Dr. Graham could hardly believe it. As McCrea said, the War Department seldom issued the order before mid-July. "Mac" even hoped to be in Washington in time to say a word to the adjutant-general in Geordie's behalf. It was known that many would be assigned to the artillery, to which Cadet Graham had been recommended by the Academic Board. But all his boyhood had been spent on the frontier; his earliest recollections were of the adobe barracks and sun-dried, sun-cracked, sun-scorched parade of old Camp Sandy in Arizona. He had learned to ride an Indian pony in Wyoming before he was eight; he had learned to shoot in Montana before he was twelve; and he had ridden, hunted, fished, and shot all over the wide West before the happy days that sent him to the great cadet school of the nation. And now that he was graduated, with all his heart and hope and ambition he prayed that he might be commissioned in a cavalry regiment, if possible in McCrea's. Give him *that*, he said, and he would ask no favor from any man.

How his heart was beating as he watched the adjutant, whom he himself had schooled and drilled and almost made, for Graham had been famous in his cadet days as a most successful squad instructor, a model first sergeant, and a great "first captain." How odd it seemed that he, a

graduate, and that all these people, officers, and children, should now be hanging on the words that might fall from the younger soldier's lips! A telegram from Washington had told a veteran general visiting at the Point that his son had been assigned to the artillery, that the order would doubtless be published that evening. But it so happened that not until just before parade did the commandant return from a long ride, and so had no time to read it through. He had simply handed it, with others, to the silent young soldier, who had stood in full uniform full five minutes awaiting his coming. "Better order 'parade rest' part of time. It's a long read," he briefly said, and, stowing the orders under his sash, the adjutant had saluted, faced about, and hastened away.

And now that young official has received the reports of the first sergeants and sent them, high-headed, martial, and precise, back to their stations in the line. And now again he has faced the commanding officer, saluted, and announced, "All are present, sir." And now that deliberate functionary has at last said, "Publish the orders, sir." And silence seems to fall, even upon the chatting groups of girls, as, with brief "'Tentio-o-o-on to Orders," the adjutant drops the point of his sword, letting it dangle from the gold swordknot on his wrist, and in another moment the clear young voice is ringing over the attent and martial audience.

"War Department, Washington, D.C., June 25, 189—," he begins, and then briskly rattles away at the terse official paragraphs: "The following assignment of graduates of the United States Military Academy are hereby announced to take effect from June 14th." It begins with that highly scientific and enviable body, the Corps of Engineers, and Mr.

George Graham, up to this moment still officially known as cadet, touches his mother's arm at sound of the third name on the list—that of Connell, his chum, his chosen comrade, his much-loved classmate through the long four years. "Dear old Con," he murmurs into her ears. "I'll telegraph my congratulations to him, whatever comes to me."

There are eight in all assigned to the engineers, and then come the names of those gazetted to the artillery—five famous regiments, too, and Graham notes with joy that Beard, Conway, Foster, and Lawrence, all of whom were lower in general standing than himself, get their longed-for billet with the "red legs," and his name is not mentioned. That means he has not been assigned where he preferred not to go. But would the war secretary assign him where he longed to be? Yes, here it comes, first on the cavalry list, and his heart beats for joy.

"F——th Regiment of Cavalry.

"No. 15, Cadet George Montrose Graham to be Second Lieutenant, Troop 'E,' *vice* Fenton, promoted."

And though her eyes are brimming and her lips *will* quiver, Mrs. Graham clasps both her boy's hands in her own in speechless sympathy. It cannot all be joy, for this means miles and miles of separation that must come all too soon. Geordie can scarce believe his ears. Oh, it is too good! Not only the —th, but "E" Troop, Captain Lane's troop, the troop of which Feeny was first sergeant, the troop in which veteran Sergeant Nolan, two years ago at old Fort Reynolds, had said he and the men so hoped to see the day when Mr. Geordie might come back to them to be their lieutenant.

And now McCrea was grasping and wringing his hand, with a "Welcome to the old regiment, Geordie," and blue-eyed "Bud" was dancing rapturously about until the doctor sternly bade him cease. "Is that the way you think they behave at Columbia, sir?" having never seen the behavior of Columbiads, or other collegians, at a ball match or boat-race or any public occasion of undergraduate rejoicing. Even among the spectators were many who lost interest for the moment in what the adjutant was reading, and watched, with kindling eyes, the unexpected little scene. But when Colonel Hazzard himself, the soldierly commandant, with his silver-gray mustache and hair, came striding through the crowd and held forth his hand to the young soldier, who instantly and instinctively faced him at attention, everybody within hearing noted the cordiality in his hearty tones as he shook Geordie's hand: "Mr. Graham, I'm more than glad you got the regiment of your choice, and you're going to one of the best captains in the army. I was on duty in tactics when Lane was in the Corps. Well, Mrs. Graham, we think we are sending him the making of one of the best lieutenants," and with that the colonel bowed as he took the hand of Geordie's mother. "Good sons make good soldiers all the world over, Mrs. Graham, and we'll expect great things of yours," he added, then grasped the doctor's out-stretched hand and gave way to others who came crowding forward, among them a gentle, motherly woman in half-mourning, whose eyes were moist as she exchanged greeting with Mrs. Graham.

"Benny will be here the moment they break ranks," she said. "I know he, too, will want to congratulate George."

And so there was quite a little gathering, and what the papers call an "ovation," about the young graduate, who was blushing not a little through his healthy tan. He was quite unable to hear where his classmates had been distributed in the other regiments of cavalry and infantry, and he was anxious to know, but even when the line of cadet officers came marching to the front and stood at salute before the battalion commander, and then broke ranks, and as many as a dozen made a rush at their former first captain, eager to take him by the hand and say a word of congratulation before they went bounding away to doff dress hats, plumes, and sashes—even then Graham could not see the order, for Colonel Hazzard called for it to show to a bevy of bright-eyed girls, who knew the graduating class, now scattered all over the United States, knew almost every one of them better than they did this, their foremost cadet officer, for George Graham, though he could dance, had seemed to care little for hops and less for girls. His few leisure hours of the last year at the Point he had spent at the side of his mother.

But at last, leaving Mrs. Frazier and Benny at camp, the Grahams were walking slowly homeward in the wake of the brave young battalion, marching away with its quick, elastic stride to the spirited music of the fifes and drums. Lieutenant McCrea was still with them, while Lieutenant Wood, another family friend, had taken to the telegraph office Geordie's pencilled words of congratulation to his chum Connell, now lieutenant of engineers. Mrs. Graham leaned heavily on the arm of her sturdy son, thinking of all the joy that had been hers, after the years of separation. It

had been such a welcome, welcome order that took Major Graham to duty at West Point the last lap of their boy's cadet life. Every Saturday evening he had spent "at home" in the surgeon's quarters, and many a Sunday afternoon. How she had looked forward from week end to week end! How swiftly had the weeks slipped by! How would she miss him in the years to come! How lonely would be the Saturdays and Sundays without her boys, for "Buddy" too, was to leave the home nest. He had passed for Columbia and was to have some terms at what the doctor loved to call "the humanities" before taking up the study of medicine. Her heart had been full of rejoicing and thanksgiving when graduation came, barely a fortnight ago—yet when, for the last time in cadet uniform Geordie stood before her, so soldierly, so manly, so honored by his comrades in the Corps, and she followed him with brimming eyes when, leaving his diploma in her hand, he turned away to his room, in the tower of the old first division, to lay aside forever the plume and sash, the sword and chevrons of the first captaincy, to shed the academy uniform for good and all, she knew she wished the whole year could be lived over again; she knew she would rather the time were still far distant when her son should "change the gray for the blue."

But now, now, every hour of every day for three glorious and beautiful months, she was to have him by her side. She need not, she would not, think of the separation to come late in September, when he must join his regiment and be her boy no more. At least she would try not to think, but here was this cold, stern, business-like order to remind her that she had given her first-born to the service of his

country—that now he belonged to the general government and no longer to her. All too soon—oh, many weeks too soon—had the mandate appeared, for it would haunt her day and night until the hour for parting came. Ah, thank God, that at least would not be for weeks! Even Geordie now had become silent and serious. He was listening to McCrea's eager words to Dr. Graham, all about the regiment and Fort Reynolds, and how he wished they were back there again, the finest station the —th had ever had, he declared, and "so near the mines!"

"Just think, Geordie," he cried, "if we were all at Reynolds we could run up the range to the Silver Shield any day, and watch them dragging out gold."

"You haven't lost faith in the Shield, then?" asked Mrs. Graham, smilingly. She thought and cared so little herself. She knew that several officers at Reynolds, her husband and McCrea among them, had invested their scant savings in that most promising venture. She knew that McCrea had vowed it would make them all rich if not famous one of these days, and that her methodical, cautious "canny Scot" of a husband had figured, pondered, and consulted long before he, too, had become convinced. She knew their holdings had been quoted far above what was paid for them, but what of all that? She had her boys, her husband, her army home, her health, and high content. What was wealth to her?

"I own I was thinking more of the hunting and fishing, the scenery, and the splendid range," said Geordie, "but no matter where 'E' Troop goes, I want to be with it."

"If the Shield pans out according to promise," said McCrea, with a laugh, "the regiment won't see me for many a day after I realize. I'm going in for a year's leave—and Europe."

They had reached the front of Grant Hall by this time and were strolling slowly along, their voices hushed for the moment by the cheery hum of boyish talk and the clatter of mess furniture, as the Corps sat at their late supper. Then several officers, gathered about the steps of the club rooms in the south end, lifted their caps to Mrs. Graham and smiled greeting to the party.

"Come back, Geordie!" was the cheery hail. "We want to wet that assignment in cavalry fashion." But Graham laughed and shook his head.

"Can't break away just now," said he. "I'll look in later."

"What I can't understand," said McCrea, "is that we got no word. With Freeman and Blake both on duty in Washington, one would think they'd have wired if they knew."

"It's coming now," said the doctor, pointing to the telegraph orderly turning away from the steps of his quarters and coming swiftly toward them, brown envelope in hand. Just in front of the hospital gateway he met the party, saluted, and tendered the uppermost of two or three despatches to the doctor.

"Freeman, I'm betting," said McCrea, as the doctor tore it open and read. They walked on slowly, expectant, but he did not speak. Then Mrs. Graham turned, gave one look, dropped Geordie's arm and clasped that of her husband. The rugged, weather-beaten face had grown suddenly gray.

"George! husband!" she cried. "What's gone wrong?"
For answer he simply handed her the paper.

"Designate proxy; meeting Monday. Fear everything lost.
Come if possible."

"Mac," said the old doctor, solemnly, "it's Silver Shield
that's melted away. Everything we had in the world."

CHAPTER II

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THE FIRST CALL

Fort Reynolds, as has been told in the earlier story of George Graham's cadet days, lay among the eastward foothills of the Rocky Mountains, with a bustling little frontier city only six miles away down the winding valley of what was, in the early eighties, a clear, cold, and beautiful mountain stream that shone in the sun like molten silver.

Silver Run it was called when Uncle Sam built the picturesque frontier fort of hewn logs and unseasoned pine soon after the Civil War. Silver Run, cold, pure, and glistening, it remained when Fort Reynolds became an important military post. Then the —th Cavalry took station