

WHITE CHRYSANTHEMUMS

Born of the clouds and darkness. On the frosts and early snow. When the summer blooms have faded. The beautiful Christ flowers blow.

THE CORPORAL'S LAST CALL

"It's hard luck," growled the Corporal, as he settled back in the saddle on his horse's back, and clinched it tight by the dim light of the lantern held by the sergeant of the stable guard.

"Of all days in the whole bloomin' year, when me and Mary had laid all our plans for the kid's Christmas. God bless him! A soldier ain't got no call to get married, anyhow. So, whoa, pet! you'll have work enough before night, for the old man says we'll have to catch L. Troop by the time the boys go into camp. Jim, you go off guard this morning. Won't you stop at the shack when you're in town, and tell Mary she and the kid 'll have to eat Christmas pie by themselves? And bully mince pies are them of Mary's, too. Eat some for me, Jim, and cheer the old girl up a bit. Well, so long!"

The trumpets were sounding merrily, and the quick martial reveille gave glad greeting to the dawn of Christmas Day, as the Corporal rode out from the post. The soldier turned in the saddle for a moment, looking back beyond the buildings of thearrison towards the dark mass of houses of the little frontier town lying in the valley behind him, where the smoke of early fires, misty blue against the morning sky, rose straight up in the still air.

There, in a little house on the edge of the settlement, was the Corporal's humble home. There Mary and his one little child were already awake, looking forward to the coming of husband and rather and the Christmas feast, so much talked about and for which such grand preparations had been made. Only a day or two ago the package of toys from the east had arrived, and the Corporal and his wife, as they unpacked the parcel and exposed the treasures it contained to admiring friends and revelled in joyful anticipation of the delight of the little one at the wonderful things Santa Claus brings to all good little boys at the merry Christmas time.

And now, without warning, the hard exigencies of his service had called the soldier away. A "good man and true" was required for instant duty, and the Corporal had been aroused from his cot in barracks and ordered to ride hard with dispatches for the commanding officer of a detachment which had left the post on a scout a day or so before. Everything had been so quiet for months past that no one dreamed of a summons to take the field, and even now it was only the breaking away of half a dozen restless, thieving bucks from the reservation some miles distant that had caused troops to be sent out to head them off and prevent mischief.

iors had made somewhat of a philosopher of him, and, as mile after mile of the journey was laid behind them, his spirits rose, and he pictured to himself the joy of the meeting when, his task accomplished, he would once more be with his loved ones.

On he rode, now following the windings of some coelee, now loping over smooth-rounded buttes, where the wind had blown away the snow, exposing the wide, rough, deep-rutted trail he was following. Here a stream was crossed, the thin coating of ice on the edges cracking and breaking under the horse's hoofs; then scrambling up the steep bank on the opposite side, on they sped over some smooth plateau. Far above a hawk circled; occasionally a jack-rabbit would scurry away like a flash, scattering the light snow in little smoke-like puffs under its flying feet. Good cavalry soldier though he was, the corporal would halt once every hour or so to shift the heavy saddle, and to let his four-footed companion browse for a moment on the tops of such bunches of withered brown grass as came within his reach. Then to horse again, and away for another stretch on the road. Hour after hour passed; a gray mist gathered over the sky, shutting in the sun. Wild and desolate, scarred and seamed by gully and canon, and strewn with rock and boulder, the foothills now rose on every side, and the trail grew more and more indistinct, here entirely lost under the snow, then showing for a short distance on some steep hillside.

Intent only on accomplishing his mission the Corporal pushed gallantly onward, until, his journey already half-made, he pulled up by a little pool, and made some hasty preparations for the noonday meal. Secured by the long picket rope, with loosened girth, and heavy bit slipped from his mouth, his horse was soon crunching the grain spread before him from the canvas nose-bag, while a few twigs gathered near at hand furnished a small fire to heat the coffee from the Corporal's canteen. Save for their presence no sign of life broke the solitude of the wilderness, and no thought of danger disturbed the brave fellow's mind, as, sitting there by the fire, he looked long and lovingly at the portrait of his little child, which he brought forth from the inner pocket of his great coat.

Is there nothing to give him warning? Rouse, Corporal, rouse! Look about, you man! Danger is near, horribly near! Danger in those dark forms lying motionless as the black rocks about them, in the glitter of the savage eyes that have been watching the approach of the hated white man for an hour past!

"Well, kid, this ain't exactly the kind of a Christmas dinner we thought we was to have, is it, you little rascal? Anyway, I'm going to have a reminder of you, and your picture is to sit on them there stones while your daddy eats his dinner. Lord, Lord! but I did want to see that youngster when he found what Santa Claus brought him." And something blurs the Corporal's eyesight and he chokes as he swallows his hard-tack.

Rouse, Corporal, rouse! Look about you man! The dark forms by the black rocks are moving, slowly gliding, like snakes, nearer and nearer, but not a sound breaks the silence of winter brooding over the land, a silence as if of death.

"And Mary, too! She ain't a-goin' to have that brooch till I get back again. It's a dandy, and I wouldn't miss seeing the old girl wearing it for the first time for a colonel's commission, and don't you forget it! Lord! how I wish I was with them now. Darned if that picture don't look as if the dear little cuss was smiling at me! Are you thinking of your daddy, old fellow? Well, here's to you, Mary! here's to you, kid! God bless you!"

Corporal! Corporal! for the sake of all that life holds dear to you! Up, man, up! The sharp, vicious crack of a rifle, "one lightning stroke of agony," the wild, exultant yell of savage triumph, and then—the silence of winter brooding over the land. Poor Mary! Poor little kid!—Rufus Fairchild Zogbaum, in Harper's Weekly.

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