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The Lost Bridegroom.

BY MARGUERITE TRACY.

'You and Craig will look after them," said the captain.

After the boat had gone ashore, Craig and Howell wig-wagged to a certain Lieutenant Pratt to come over, and Pratt wig-wagged that he would. Then Craig and Howell found themselves suddenly shy, as men feel who have long been strangers to men of the world, women and newspapers.

A whole boatload of fellows came over, and exclaimed, and interrupted one another, and confused and delighted the Outcasts, and Pratt got down on the deck and chalked the position of Sampson's fleet, as they had gathered the news from the dispatches. Newspapers a month old were passed around eagerly, the wondrous scare-heads commented on, and names of line and staff officers tossed back and forth until everybody was shouting.

"Hobson?" cried Craig. "The chap that used the long words? No, I didn't know him—Bagley is killed—I can't get over that! He was in my class. Say, Pratt, did you hear about Colton, the fellow in our class that bilged at the Academy?"

"Colton?" cried Howell.

"Yes, he was in the merchant marine, you know. He got chartered along with the ship, and did a stunt transferring provisions to insurgents and heading off some Spaniards that attacked him solus; he captured some prisoners and covered himself with glory and the opprobrium of his messmates, and he's got a step. They are retaining him in the regular service and he's on his way to Manila, I believe."

Howell listened, understanding why he had gotten no word from Colton two years before when he wanted him for best man.

"And he's engaged to that girl who threw him down at the academy," someone added. "Now, that his luck's turned, she has come back, evidently."

"I don't know—I wouldn't say that," Pratt began. "I'd stake anything on Madeline Langworthy. The old commander is the right sort, and I believe his daughter is."

Howell felt a thrill of sympathy for Colton. The world parted them from their sweethearts, perhaps, but they were both engaged men, and it was a toss-up, after all, which would be the other's best man. Then the news engrossed him, and he lighted another cigarette, with a hand that quivered.

"We want to follow this thing right up," he declared. "We want to take the 'Texas' and the 'Oregon' and a few auxiliary cruisers, and step right over to Spain and finish things. Jove—I wish I were in Washington!"

"But everything's over but the shouting!" said Pratt. "There's not a shred of Spanish navy left and we don't want to take Spain. The war's over, man."

The Outcasts looked at one another and their faces fell. "There's no chance anywhere?"

"Why," said one of the others, "we're ordered to Manila to join Dewey's squadron. There may be something doing over there."

"What's the commodore up to?"

The man from the "Mimtonomoh" gazed pityingly at the men from the "Outcast," and unfolded their story anew. The sun blistered the deck and many regiments of ginger bottles were vanquished, but they talked on until the ship's bell stopped at the seventh stroke. Then Pratt sprang up.

"I must get back," he said. "I go on at four. Come, fellows. See you tonight, Craig?"

"Say," interrupted Howell, "where is this 'ub ordered? Don't anybody know?"

"Last I heard," said Pratt as he started over the side, "you were ordered to Callao."

Someone grabbed his collar.

"Pratt, you monkey-faced, sawed-off, red-headed son of Erin, come back here! Do you mean it?"

"On my word," said Pratt soberly. "That is no sugar-coated joke, is it boys?"

Howell faced the chief engineer of the 'Outcast" as the visiting boat cast off with many speedings. "If we're ordered to that hole in the ground," he said, "I'll kick the whole outfit. Callao, in war time! Think of what we're missing! Oh, our luck, our luck, our luck!" He almost sang it as he danced about on the hot deck, the perspiration dripping unnoticed dow his face.

The captain returned taciturn. His face told plainly enough that they were headed away from war.

"It will be Sitka, next," Howell said, as he took his great bundle of dusty letters and a few telegrams. "What's the matter, Craig? Bad news?"

Craig nodded. After a while he folded the letter and slipped it back into its envelope. He looked out across the dazzling water until his eyes were dim. Then he said slowly:

"I'm glad he got a chance to fight."

"Who, Craig?"

"My older brother, Robert. He was a second lieutenant in the Ninth Infantry, you know. He was killed in the charge up San Juan Hill!"

He looked down at the letter with its broad black border. "Mother writes that so many are dying of sickness in the camps at home. I'm glad he got a chance to fight. But it's hard on the mothers," he added.

Howell could say nothing as he watched Craig opening the rest of his mail. No one but a sailor knows the heart-sick dread of opening the dingy, travel-worn messages that have lain waiting for him from home. He nervously opened his own telegrams.

"You have good news," said Craig, smiling.

"I kind of hate to talk about it," said Howell, controlling a quiver of joy in his voice. The "Texas" is ordered to Manila, and I am to join her at San Francisco. I shall see fighting, perhaps."

"I'm glad for you," said Craig."

"And you remember Miss Grace Dunlap? The daughter of Captain Dunlap of the army? He's ordered to Manila with the Fifty-ninth, and of course Miss Dunlap and I will be married over there."

"Of course," said Craig, smiling. He was heartily glad for Howell. There was nothing selfish about Craig. "By the way, you had a full-dress uniform made before you left San Francisco, that will come in well for the wedding." he said.

Howell nodded. His heart was too full to speak. But after a moment he cleared his throat and began:

"You know it was all arranged—the wedding, I mean, when I was ordered to this thing. We were only waiting to hear from Colton, who was to be best man. And he'll be in Manila."

Craig shrugged his shoulders kindly but dubiously. He had not been in the service eight years without learning something.

"God knows," he said. His own sad home letters were still in his hand, and he was thinking that if Grace Dunlap's father was ordered to Manila it might not be the best thing in the world. When Howell reached Manila, her father would have been ordered somewhere else, for that was the way it all looked to him in his trouble. But Howell, in his new happiness, could not be cast down.

And yet Craig's fears were to be partly justified, for when Howell arrived in Manila, Grace was living in the nurse's home at Santa Mesa—or rather her trunk was there while the girl herself was at her father's bedside in the hospital at the Deposito, straining every nerve to keep him from the brink over which he tottered.

Howell, asking about her before he fairly got ashore, learned how Captain Dunlap had been trapped while making a reconnoissance near Mayong, in Samar; accompanied by an orderly, a sergeant and two privates, and how he had sent the uninjured orderly back to camp while he stood off a hundred bolomen across the bodies of his wounded men. When the party led by the returning orderly reached him late in the afternoon his men were doing fairly well, but the captain was crazed by thirst and burning with fever.

Howell heard everything without much thought about the captain. Men all around him had been doing men's-sized jobs, as he counted things like these. It was the picture of Grace watching over her father's bedside, wearing herself into a state of collapse, in which all the ills of the country might assail her, which filled his heart.

How he got himself to the Deposito, with a number of marines whom he had taken to Zumboanga, was a mere matter of luck. He had fallen a victim to fever and was in sore straits.

Grace bent over him with a stifled cry, when they put him in the cot next to her father's at his own request, "but I couldn't have hoped for such luck as this."

Grace had not even known that he was in Manila. Her heart ached at the sight of him, lying limp and wasted and helpless bedside her, and she reproached the "old man," who had sent him up to get hurt, and in the same moment a great joy filled her heart that the two people whom she loved best in the world were with her, and that she could care for them.

Her father raised himself on his elbow and smiled over at Howell. "Sorry to see you, old man," he said.

Howell looked from the wan and weatherbeaten face of the captain back to Grace standing between them, not worn and pale, as he had feared to find her, but fearlessly, adequate and strong, as became a daughter of the service.

"Oh, I don't know," he said; "this gives us a sort of chance to get caught up with our engagements. You're laid up and I'm laid up, and I don't see but what the department's got to let us enjoy our little holiday before it orders us off somewhere else. I don't see what's the matter with having the chaplain in to marry us. Grace is here, and I'm here,

[Continued on Third Page.]

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