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## FROM THE RANKS.

BY CAPTAIN CHARLES KING.

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### CHAPTER XX.

They were having a family conclave at Sablon. The furlough granted Sergeant McLeod on account of wounds received in action with hostile Indians would soon expire, and the question was, Should he ask an extension, apply for a discharge or go back and rejoin his troop? It was a matter on which there was much diversity of opinion. Mrs. Maynard should naturally be permitted first choice, and to her wish there was every reason for acceding deep and tender consideration. No words can tell of the rapture of that reunion with her long lost son. It was a scene over which the colonel could never ponder without deep emotion. The telegrams and letters by which he carefully prepared her for Frederick's coming were all insufficient. She knew well that her boy must have greatly changed and matured, but when this tall, bronzed, bearded, stalwart man sprang from the old red omnibus and threw his one serviceable arm around her trembling form the mother was utterly overcome.

Alice left them alone together a full hour before even she intruded, and little by little, as the days went by and Mrs. Maynard realized that it was really her Fred who was whistling about the cottage or booming trooper songs in his great basso profundo and glorying in his regiment and the cavalry life he had led, a wonderful content and joy shone in her handsome face. It was not until the colonel announced that it was about time for them to think of going back to Sibley that the cloud came. Fred said he couldn't go.

In fact, the colonel himself had been worrying a little over it. As Fred Renwick, the tall, distinguished young man in civilian costume, he would be welcome anywhere; but, though his garb was that of the sovereign citizen so long as his furlough lasted, there were but two weeks more of it left, and officially he was nothing more nor less than Sergeant McLeod, Troop B,—th cavalry, and there was no precedent for a colonel's entertaining as an honored guest and social equal one of the enlisted men of the army. He rather hoped that Fred would yield to his mother's entreaties and apply for a discharge. His wound and the latent trouble with his heart would probably render it an easy matter to obtain, and yet he was ashamed of himself for the feeling.

Then there was Alice. It was hardly to be supposed that so very high bred a young woman would relish the idea of being seen around Fort Sibley on the arm of her brother, the sergeant; but, wonderful to relate, Miss Alice took a radically different view of the whole situation. So far from wishing Fred out of the army, she impetuously hid day after day until he got into his best uniform, with its resplendent chevrons and stripes of vivid yellow and the yellow helmet cords, though they were but humble worsted, and when he came forth in that dress, with the bronze medal on his left breast and the sharpshooter's silver cross, his tall, athletic figure showing to such advantage, his dark, southern, manly features so enhanced by contrast with his yellow facings, she clasped her hands with a cry of delight and sprang into his one available arm and threw her own about his neck and kissed him again and again.

Even mamma had to admit he looked astonishingly well, but Alice declared she would never thereafter be reconciled to seeing him in anything but a cavalry uniform. The colonel found her not at all of her mother's way of thinking. She saw no reason why Fred should leave the service. Other sergeants had won their commissions every year. Why not he? Even if it were some time in coming, was there shame or degradation in being a cavalry sergeant? Not a bit of it! Fred himself was loath to quit. He was getting a little homesick, too—homesick for the boundless life and space and air of the broad frontier, homesick for the rapid movement and vigorous hours in the saddle and on the scout. His arm was healing, and such a delight of a letter had come from his captain, telling him that the adjutant had just been to see him about the new staff of the regiment. The gallant sergeant major, a young Prussian of marked ability, had been killed early in the campaign. The vacancy must soon be filled, and the colonel and the adjutant both thought at once of Sergeant McLeod. "I won't stand in your way, sergeant," wrote his troop commander, "but you know that old Ryan is to be discharged at the end of his sixth enlistment, the 10th of next month. There is no man I would sooner see in his place as first sergeant of my troop than yourself, and I hate to lose you. But, as it will be for the gain and the good of the whole regiment, you ought to accept the adjutant's offer. All the men rejoice to hear you are recovering so fast, and all will be glad to see Sergeant McLeod back again."

Even Mrs. Maynard could not but see the pride and comfort this letter gave her son. Her own longing was to have him established in some business in the east, but he said frankly he had no taste for it and would only pine for the old life in the saddle. There were other reasons, too, said he, why he felt that he could not go back to New York, and his voice trembled, and Mrs. Maynard said no more. It was the sole allusion he had made to the old, old sorrow, but it was plain that the recovery was incomplete.

The colonel and the doctor at Sibley believed that Fred could be carried past the medical board by a little management, and everything began to look as though he would have his way. All they were waiting for, said the colonel, was to hear from Armitage. He was still at Fort Russell with the headquarters and several troops of the—th cavalry. His wound was too severe for him to travel farther for weeks to come, but he could write, and he had been consulted. They were sitting under the broad piazza at Sablon, looking out at the lovely, placid lake and talking it over among themselves.

"I have always leaned on Armitage ever since I first came to the regiment and found him adjutant," said the colonel. "I always found his judgment clear, but since our last experience I have begun to look upon him as infallible."

Alice Renwick's face took on a flood of crimson as she sat there by her brother's side, silent and attentive. Only within the week that followed their return—the colonel's and her brother's—had the story of the strange complication been revealed to them. Twice had she heard from Fred's lips the story of Frank Armitage's greeting that frosty morning at the springs. Time and again had she made her mother go over the colonel's account of the confidence and faith he had expressed in there being a simple explanation of the whole mystery and of his indignant refusal to attach one moment's suspicion to her. Shocked, stunned, outraged as she felt at the mere fact that such a story had gained an instant's credence in garrison circles, she was overwhelmed by the weight of circumstantial evidence that had been arrayed against her.

Only little by little did her mother reveal it to her. Only after several days did Fred repeat the story of his night adventure and his theft of her picture, of his narrow escape and of his subsequent visit to the cottage. Only gradually had her mother revealed to her the circumstances of Jerrold's wager with Sloat and the direful consequences, of his double absences the very nights on which Fred had made his visits, of the suspicions that resulted, the accusations and his refusal to explain and clear her name. Mrs. Maynard felt vaguely relieved to see how slight an impression the young man had made on her daughter's heart. Alice seemed but little surprised to hear of the engagement to Nina Beaubien, of her rush to his rescue and their romantic parting. The tragedy of his death hushed all further talk on that subject. There was one of which she could not hear enough, and that was about the man who had been most instrumental in the rescue of her name and honor. Alice had only tender sorrow and no reproach for her stepfather when, after her mother told her the story of his sad experience 20 years before, she related his distress of mind and suspicion when he read Jerrold's letter. It was then that Alice said, "And against that piece of evidence no man, I suppose, would hold me guiltless?"

"You are wrong, dear," was her mother's answer. "It was powerless to move Captain Armitage. He scouted the idea of your guilt from the moment he set eyes on you and never rested until he had overturned the last atom of evidence. Even I had to explain," said her mother, "simply to confirm his theory of the light Captain Chester had seen and the shadows and the form at the window. It was just exactly as Armitage reasoned it out. I was wretched and wakeful, sleeping but fitfully that night. I arose and took some bromide about 3 o'clock and soon afterward heard a fall or a noise like one. I thought of you and got up and went in your room, and all was quiet there, but it seemed close and warm, so I raised your shade and then left both your door and mine open and went back to bed."

"I dozed away presently and then woke feeling all startled again, don't you know—the sensation one experiences when aroused from sleep, certain that there has been a strange and startling noise, and yet unable to tell what it was? I lay still a moment, but the colonel slept through it all, and I wondered at it. I knew there had been a shot or something, but could not bear to disturb him. At last I got up again and went to your room to be sure you were all right, and you were sleeping soundly still, but a breeze was beginning to blow and flap your shade to and fro, so I drew it and went out, taking my lamp with me this time and softly closing your door behind me. See how it all seemed to fit in with everything else that had happened. It took a man with a will of his own and an unshakable faith in woman to stand firm against such evidence."

And, though Alice Renwick was silent, she appreciated the fact none the less. Day after day she clung to her stalwart brother's side. She had ceased to ask questions about Captain Armitage and that strange greeting after the first day or two; but, oddly enough, she could never let him talk long of any subject but that campaign, of his ride with the captain to the front, of the long talk they had had, and then the stirring fight and the magnificent way in which Armitage had handled his long skirmish line. He was enthusiastic in his praise of the tall Saxon captain. He soon noted how silent and absorbed she sat when he was the theme of discourse. He incidentally mentioned little things

"he" had said about "her" that morning and marked how her color rose and her eyes flashed quick, joyful, questioning glances at his face, then fell in maiden shyness. He had speedily gauged the cause of that strange excitement displayed by Armitage at seeing him the morning he rode in with the scout. Now he was gauging with infinite delight the other side of the question. Then, brotherlike, he began to twist and tease her, and that was the last of the confidences.

All the same it was an eager group that surrounded the colonel the evening he came down with the captain's letter. "It settles the thing in my mind. We'll go back to Sibley tomorrow, and as for you, Sergeant Major Fred, your name has gone in for a commission, and I've no doubt a very deserving sergeant will be spoiled in making a very good for nothing second lieutenant. Get you back to your regiment, sir, and call on Captain Armitage as soon as you reach Fort Russell and tell him you are much obliged." He has been blowing your trumpet for you there, and as some of those cavalrymen have sense enough to appreciate the opinion of such a soldier as my ex-adjutant—some of them, mind you, I don't admit that all cavalrymen have sense enough to keep them out of perpetual trouble—you came in for a hearty endorsement, and you'll probably be up before the next board for examination. Go and bone your constitution and the rule of three, and who was the father of Zebedee's children, and the order of the Ptolemies and the Selencidae, and other such things that they'll be sure to ask you as indispensable to the mental outfit of an Indian fighter." It was evident that the colonel was in joyous mood, but Alice was silent. She wanted to hear the letter. He would have handed it to Frederick, but both Mrs. Maynard and Aunt Grace clamored to hear it read aloud, so he cleared his throat and began:

"Fred's chances for a commission are good, as the inclosed papers will show you, but even were this not the case I would have but one thing to say in answer to your letter—he should go back to his troop."

"Whatever our friends and fellow citizens may think on the subject, I hold that the profession of the soldier is to the full as honorable as any in civil life, and it is liable at any moment to be more useful. I do not mean the officer alone. I say and mean the soldier. As for me, I would rather be first sergeant of my troop or company or sergeant major of my regiment than any lieutenant in it except the adjutant. Hope of promotion is all that can make a subaltern's life endurable, but the staff sergeant or the first sergeant, honored and respected by his officers, decorated for bravery by congress and looked up to by his comrades, is a king among men. The pay has nothing to do with it. I say to Renwick, 'Come back as soon as your wound will let you,' and I envy him the welcome that will be his."

"As for me, I am even more eager to get back to you all, but things look very dubious. The doctors shake their heads at anything under a month and say I'll be lucky if I eat my Thanksgiving dinner with you. If trying to get well is going to help, October shall not be done with before B company will report me present again."

"I need not tell you, my dear old friend, how I rejoice with you in your—hum and haw and this is all about something else," goes on the colonel in malignant disregard of the longing looks in the eyes of three women, all of whom are eager to hear the rest of it, and one of whom wouldn't say so for worlds. "Write to me often. Remember me warmly to the ladies of your household. I fear Miss Alice would despise this wild, open prairie country. There is no goldenrod here, and I so often see her as—hum and hum, and all that sort of talk of no interest to anybody," says he, with a quizzical look over his "bows" at the lovely face and form bending forward with forgetful eagerness to hear how "he so often sees her." And there is a great bunch of goldenrod in her lap now and a vivid blush on her cheek. The colonel is waxing as frivolous as Fred and quite as great a tease.

And then October comes, and Fred has gone, and the colonel and his household are back at Sibley, where the garrison is enraptured at seeing them, and where the women precipitate themselves upon them in tumultuous welcome. If Alice cannot quite make up her mind to return the kisses and shrinks slightly from the rapturous embrace of some of the younger and more impulsive of the sisterhood, if Mrs. Maynard is a trifle more distant and stately than was the case before they went away, the garrison does not resent it. The ladies don't wonder they feel indignant at the way people behaved and talked, and each lady is sure that the behavior and the talk were all somebody else's—not by any possible chance could it be laid at the door of the speaker.

And Alice is the reigning belle beyond dispute, though there is only subdued gaiety at the fort, for the memory of their losses at the Spirit Wolf is still fresh in the minds of the regiment. But no man alludes to the events of the black August night; no woman is permitted to address either Mrs. Maynard or her daughter on the subject. There are some who seek to be confidential and who cautiously feel their way for an opening, but the mental sparring is vain. There is an indefinable something that tells the intruder, "Thus far and no farther." Mrs. Maynard is courteous, cordial and hospitable; Alice sweet and gracious and sympathetic even, but confidential never.

And then Captain Armitage, late in the month, comes home on crutches, and his men give him a welcome that

makes the rafters ring, and he rejoices in it and thanks them from his heart, but there is a welcome in his eyes that would mean to him far more than any other. How wistfully he studies her face! How unmistakable are the love and worship in every tone! How quickly the garrison sees it all, and how mad the garrison is to see whether or not 'tis welcome to her! But Alice Renwick is no maiden to be lightly won. The very thought that the garrison had so easily given her over to Jerrold is enough to mantle her cheek with indignant protest. She accepts his attentions as she does those of the younger officers, with consummate grace. She shows no preference; will grant no favors. She makes fair distribution of her dances at the hops at the fort and the parties in town. There are young civilians who begin to be devoted in society and to come out to the fort on every possible opportunity, and these, too, she welcomes with laughing grace and cordiality. She is a glowing, radiant, gorgeous beauty this cool autumn, and she rides and drives and dances, and the women say, flirts and looks handsomer every day, and poor Armitage is beginning to look very grave and depressed.

"He woos and wins not," is the cry. His wound has almost healed so far as the thigh is concerned, and his crutches are discarded, but his heart is bleeding, and it tells on his general condition. The doctors say he ought to be getting well faster, and so they tell Miss Renwick—at least somebody does—but still she relents not, and it is something beyond the garrison's power of conjecture to decide what the result will be. Into her pretty white and yellow room no one penetrates except at her invitation, even when the garrison ladies are spending the day at the colonel's, and even if they did there would be no visible sign by which they could judge whether his flowers were treasured or his picture honored above others. Into her brave and beautiful nature none can gaze and say with any confidence either "she loves" or "she loves not." Winter comes, with biting cold and blinding snow, and still there is no sign. The joyous holidays, the glad New Year, are almost at hand, and still there is no symptom of surrender. No one dreams of the depth and reverence and gratitude and loyalty and strength of the love that is burning in her heart until all of a sudden, in the most unexpected and astonishing way, it bursts forth in sight of all.

They had been down skating on the sloop, a number of the youngsters and the daughters of the garrison. Rollins was there doing the devoted to Mamie Gray, and already there were gossips whispering that she would soon forget she ever knew such a beau as Jerrold in the new found happiness of another one. Hall was there with the doctor's pretty daughter, and Mrs. Hoyt was matronizing the party, which would, of course, have been incomplete without Alice. She had been skating hand in hand with a devoted young subaltern in the artillery, and poor Armitage, whose leg was unequal to skating, had been ruefully admiring the scene. He had persuaded Sloat to go out and walk with him, and Sloat went, but the hollow mockery of the whole thing became apparent to him after they had been watching the skaters awhile, and he got chilled and wanted Armitage to push ahead. The captain said he believed his leg was too stiff for further tramping and would be the better for a rest, and Sloat left him.

Heavens, how beautiful she was, with her sparkling eyes and radiant color, glowing with the graceful exercise! He sat there on an old log watching the skaters as they flew by him and striving to keep up an impartial interest, or an appearance of it, for the other girls. But the red sun was going down, and twilight was on them all of a sudden, and he could see nothing but that face and form. He closed his eyes a moment to shut out the too eager glare of the glowing disk taking its last fierce peep at them over the western bluffs, and as he closed them the same vision came back—the picture that had haunted his every living, dreaming moment since the beautiful August Sunday in the woodland lane at Sablon. With undying love, with changeless passion, his life was given over to the fair, slender maiden he had seen in all the glory of the sunshine and the goldenrod, standing with uplifted head, with all her soul shining in her beautiful eyes and thrilling in her voice. Both worshipping and worshiped was Alice Renwick as she sang her hymn of praise in unison with the swelling chorus that floated through the trees from the little brown church upon the hill. From that day she was Queen Alice in every thought, and he her loyal, faithful knight for weal or woe.

Boom went the sunset gun far up on the parade above them. 'Twas dinner time, and the skaters were compelled to give up their pastime. Armitage set his teeth at the entirely too devotional attitude of the artilleryman as he slowly and lingeringly removed her skates and turned away in that utterly helpless frame of mind which will overtake the strongest men on similar occasions. He had been sitting too long in the cold and was chilled through and stiff, and his wounded leg seemed numb. Leaning heavily on his stout stick, he began slowly and painfully the ascent to the railway and chose for the purpose a winding path that was far less steep, though considerably longer, than the sharp climb the girls and their escorts made so light of.

One after another the glowing faces of the fair skaters appeared above the embankment, and their gallants carefully conveyed them across the icy and slippery track to the wooden platform beyond. Armitage, toiling slowly up his pathway, heard their blithe laughter

and thought with no little bitterness that it was a case of "out of sight, out of mind," with him as with better men. What sense was there in his long devotion to her? Why stand between her and the far more natural choice of a lover nearer her years? "Like unto like" was nature's law. It was flying in the face of Providence to expect to win the love of one so young and fair when others so young and comely craved it. The sweat was beaded on his forehead as he neared the top and came in sight of the platform. Yes, they had no thought of him. Already Mrs. Hoyt was half way up the wooden stairs, and the others were scattered more or less between that point and the platform at the station. Far down at the south end paced the fur clad sentry. There it was an easy step from the track to the boards, and there, with much laughter, but no difficulty, the young officers had lifted their fair charges to the walk. All were chatting gayly as they turned away to take the wooden causeway from the station to the stairs, and Miss Renwick was among the foremost at the point where it left the platform. Here, however, she glanced back and then about her, and then bending down began fumbling at the buttons of her boot.

"Oh, permit me, Miss Renwick," said her eager escort. "I will button it."

"Thanks, no. Please don't wait, good people. I'll be with you in an instant."

And so the other girls, absorbed in talk with their respective gallants, pass-



"Oh, permit me, Miss Renwick," said her eager escort. "I will button it."

ed her by, and then Alice Renwick again stood erect and looked anxiously but quickly back.

"Captain Armitage is not in sight, and we ought not to leave him. He may not find it easy to climb to that platform," she said.

"Armitage? Oh, he'll come on all right," answered the batteryman, with easy assurance. "Maybe he has gone round by the road. Even if he hasn't, I've seen him make that in one jump many a time. He's an active old buffer for his years."

"But his wound may prove too much for that jump now. Ah, there he comes," she answered, with evident relief, and just at the moment, too, the forage cap of the tall soldier rose slowly into view some distance up the track, and he came walking slowly down the sharp curve toward the platform, the same sharp curve continuing on out of sight behind him—behind the high and rocky bluff.

"He's taken the long way up," said the gunner. "Well, shall we go on?"

"Not yet," she said, with eyes that were glowing strangely and a voice that trembled. Her cheeks, too, were paling. "Mr. Stuart, I'm sure I heard the roar of a train echoed back from the other side."

"Nonsense, Miss Renwick! There's no train either way for two hours yet." But she had begun to edge her way back toward the platform, and he could not but follow. Looking across the intervening space, a rocky hollow 20 feet in depth, he could see that the captain had reached the platform and was seeking for a good place to step up; then that he lifted his right foot and placed it on the planking and with his cane and the stiff, wounded left leg strove to push himself on. Had there been a hand to help him, all would have been easy enough, but there was none, and the plan would not work. Absorbed in his efforts, he could not see Stuart. He did not see that Miss Renwick had left her companions and was retracing her steps to get back to the platform. He heard a sudden dull roar from the rocks across the stream, then a sharp, shrill whistle just around the bluff. My God! a train, and that man there alone, helpless, deserted! Stuart gave a shout of agony, "Back—roll back over the bank!"

Armitage glanced around, determined, gave one mighty effort, the iron feruled stick slipped on the icy track, and down he went, prone between two glistering rails even as the black, vomiting monster came thundering round the bend. He had struck his head upon the iron and was stunned, not senseless, but scrambled to his hands and knees and strove to crawl away. Even as he did so he heard a shriek of anguish in his ears, and with one wild leap Alice Renwick came flying from the platform in the very face of advancing death, and the next instant, her arm clasped about his neck, his strong arms tightly clasp her, they were lying side by side, bruised, stunned, but safe, in a welcoming snowdrift half way down the hither bank.

When Stuart reached the scene, as soon as the engine and some wrecking cars had thundered by, he looked down upon a picture that dispelled any lingering doubt in his mind. Armitage, clasping Queen Alice, to his heart, was half rising from the blessed mantle of the snow, and she, her head upon his

broad shoulder, was smiling faintly up into his face. Then the glorious eyes closed in a deathlike swoon.

Fort Sibley had its share of sensations that eventful year. Its crowning triumph in the one that followed was the wedding in the early spring. Of all the lovely women there assembled the bride by common consent stood unrivaled—Queen Alice indeed. There was some difference of opinion among authorities as to who was really the finest looking and most soldierly among the throng of officers in the conventional full dress uniform. Many there were who gave the palm to the tall, dark, slender lieutenant of cavalry who wore his shoulder knots for the first time on this occasion, and who for a man from the ranks seemed consummately at home in the manifold and trying duties of a groomsman. Mrs. Maynard, leaning on his arm at a later hour and looking up rapturously in his bronzed features, had no divided opinion. While others had by no means so readily forgotten or forgiven the mad freak that so nearly involved them all in wretched misunderstanding, she had nothing but rejoicing in his whole career. Proud of the gallant officer who had won the daughter whom she loved so tenderly, she still believes, in the depths of the boundless mother love, that no man can quite surpass her soldier son.

THE END

### HOW TO GET PROSPERITY.

Don't Leave It All to One Man; but Let All Birds Together.

Mr. D. R. Hird, of Pacolet, S. C., in a letter to The Manufacturers' Record, says:

I expect to build a 15-box dry-press oil mill at Gaffney during 1896. The capacity of the mill will be 15 tons every 24 hours. I have already bought the machinery from the Stillwell-Bierce & Smith-Vaile Co., of Dayton, Ohio. The machinery was bought to build at Blacksburg, S. C., but the stock could not be raised there; so I tried Gaffney, and have 88,000 subscribed. I want \$12,500, and I am told that the balance is assured.

It is quite probable that there is an abundance of money lying idle in Blacksburg, which could have been judiciously invested in such an enterprise as this, just as there is in hundreds of Southern towns; but the failure to realize the importance of investment in industrial enterprises, and the lack of a hustling spirit to encourage such undertakings often cause the loss of opportunities to secure a factory, and, once lost, these chances can never be regained. Blacksburg could easily have taken hold of this enterprise, and, to its lasting benefit, built a cottonseed-oil mill, just as it could easily build one or more cotton mills; but its local people are entirely too well satisfied, and, hence, make little effort to do some hustling and build up the industrial interests of their town. Admirably located as the place is, with excellent railroad facilities, with wonderful mineral resources surrounding it, it has left to one or two men the work of doing all the hustling which has been done in that town for the last four or five years. So far as an outsider can judge, its business people never seem to unite in pushing forward and carrying to success, enterprises which could easily be started, and which would quickly give life and prosperity to the town.

The Manufacturers' Record is not, however, criticising Blacksburg more than it would criticise hundreds of other places. All through the South there are towns having excellent natural advantages—towns in which money is lying practically idle, bringing little or no profit to its owners, and doing no good to the community. If every such town in the South could be inspired with some of the hustling qualities which have made Atlanta, and which are today bringing to the front Rome, Ga., now one of the most conspicuous places in the South because of its success in capturing great cotton mills, hundreds of towns throughout the South would quickly spring into life and activity. The South has the ability and the money to build up its own industrial interests. It ought to be more independent, more self-reliant, and its people ought to unite, and through active co-operation, gather into manufacturing enterprises its now unutilized capital, and thus cease to depend upon outside men and outside money. There is scarcely a town of 1,000 people in the South which could not raise \$25,000, \$50,000 or \$100,000 of local money for the purpose of starting industrial enterprises; but there is too much lack of public spirit and broadminded energy in many of these towns. The Manufacturers' Record wants to see Blacksburg and every other place, which has been waiting for outsiders to come in and create prosperity, go to work and create their own prosperity.

THEY SAY—That a fast man easily runs into debt; that a light heart cannot accompany a heavy head; that a man always feels cheap when he has been sold; that people who borrow trouble have to pay big interest; that a city is always called "she" because it has outskirts; that the people who influence you are they who believe in you; that a woman cannot drive a nail, but she can drive a bargain; that it is curious how a woman who screams at a mouse is not startled at a bill that makes a man tremble; that the fun that a man has in watching a woman sharpen a pencil is only equalled by the quiet amusement the woman experiences while the man is endeavoring to thread a needle.