

The Toy Grenadier

BY ROY ROLFE GILSON

IT was a misnomer. He was not a Captain at all, nor was he of the Horse Marines. He was a mere private in the Grenadier Guards, with his musket at a carry and his heels together and his little fingers touching the seams of his pantaloons. Still, Captain Jinks was the name he went by when he first came to Our House, years ago, and Captain Jinks he will be always in your memory—the only original Captain Jinks, the ballad to the contrary notwithstanding.

It was Christmas eve when you first saw him. He was stationed on sentry duty beneath a fir-tree, guarding a pile of commissary stores. He looked neither to the left nor to the right, but straight before him, and not a tremor or blink or sigh disturbed his military bearing. His bearskin was glossy as a pussy-cat's fur; his scarlet coat, with the cross of honor on his heart, fitted him like a glove, and every gilt button of it shone in the candle-light; and oh, the loveliness, the spotless loveliness, of his sky-blue pantaloons!

"My boy," said Father, "allow me to present Captain Jinks. Captain Jinks, my son."

"Oh!" you cried, the moment you clapped eyes on him. "Oh, Father! What a beautiful soldier!"

And at your praise the Captain's cheeks were scarlet. He would have saluted, no doubt, had you been a military man, but you were only a civilian then, and in kilts at that.

"Take him," said Father, "and give him some rations. He's about starved, I guess, guarding those chocolates."

So you relieved the Captain of his stern vigil—or, rather, the Captain and his gun, for he refused to lay down his arms even for mess call, without orders from the officer of the guard, though he did desert his post, which was inconsistent from a military point of view, and deserved court martial. And

while he was gone the commissary stores were plundered by ruthless, sticky hands.

Lizbeth brought a new Wax Doll to mess with the Captain. A beautiful blonde, she was, and the Captain was gallantry itself, but she was a little stiff with him, in her silks and laces, preferring, no doubt, a messmate with epaulets and sword. So the chat lagged till the Rag Doll came—an unassuming brunette creature—and the Captain got on very well with her. Indeed, when the Wax Doll flounced away, the Captain leaned and whispered in the Rag Doll's ear. What he said you did not hear, but the Rag Doll drew away, shyly—

"Very sudden," she seemed to say. But the Captain leaned nearer, at an angle perilous to both, and—kissed her! The Rag Doll fainted to the floor. The Captain was at his wits' end. Without orders he could not lay aside his gun, for he was a sentry, albeit off his post. Yet here was a lady in distress. The gun or the lady? The lady or the gun? The Captain struggled betwixt his honor and his love. In the very stress of his contending emotions he tottered, and would have fallen to the Rag Doll's side, but you caught him just in time. Lizbeth applied the smelling-bottle to the Rag Doll's nose, and she revived. Pale, but every inch a rag lady, she rose, leaning on Lizbeth. She gave the Captain a withering glance, and swept toward the open door. The Captain did not flinch. Proudly he drew himself to his full height; his heels clicked together; his gun fell smartly to his side; and as the lady passed he looked her squarely in her scornful eyes, and bore their *congé* like a soldier.

Next morning—Christmas morning—in the trenches before the Coal Scuttle, the Captain fought with reckless bravery. The earth-works of building-blocks reached barely to his cartridge-belt, yet he stood erect in a hail of marble balls.

"Jinks, you're clean daft," cried Grandfather. "Lie down, man!"

But the Captain would not budge. Commies and glassies crashed around him. They ploughed up the earth-works before him; they did great execution on the legs of chairs and tables and other non-combatants behind. Yet there he stood, unmoved in the midst of the carnage, his heels together, his little fingers just touching the seams of his pantaloons. It was for all the world as though he were on dress parade. Perhaps he was—for while he stood there, valorous in that Christmas fight, his eyes were on the heights of the Rocking Chair beyond, where, safe from the marble hail, sat the Rag Doll with Lizbeth and the waxen blonde.

There was a rumble—a crash through the torn earth-works—a shock—a scream from the distant heights—and the Captain fell. A monstrous glassy had struck him fairly in the legs, and owing to his military habit of standing with them close together— Well, it was all too sad, too harrowing, to relate. An ambulance corps of Grandfather and Uncle Ned carried the crippled soldier to the Tool Chest Hospital. He was just conscious, that was all. The operation he bore with great fortitude, refusing to take chloroform, and insisting on dying with his musket beside him, if die he must. What seemed to give him greatest anguish was his heels, for, separated at last, they would not click together now; and his little fingers groped nervously for the misplaced seams of his pantaloons.

Long afterward, when the Captain had left his cot for active duty again, it was recalled that the very moment when he fell so gallantly in the trenches that day, a lady was found unconscious, flat on her face, at the foot of the Rocking Chair Hill.

Captain Jinks was never the same after that. Still holding his gun as smartly as before, there was, on the other hand, a certain carelessness of attire, a certain dulness of gilt buttons, a smudginess of scarlet coat, as though it were thumb-marked; and dark clouds were beginning to lower in the clear azure of his pantaloons. There was, withal, a certain rakishness of bearing not provided for in the regulations; a little uncertainty as

to legs; a tilt and limp, as it were, in sharp contrast to the trim soldier who had guarded the commissary chocolates under the Christmas fir. Moreover—though his comrades at arms forbore to mention it, loving him for his gallant service—he was found one night, flat on his face, under the dinner table. Now the Captain had always been abstemious before. Liquor of any kind he had shunned as poison, holding that it spotted his uniform; and once when forced to drink from Lizbeth's silver cup, at the end of a dusty march, his lips paled at the contaminating touch, his red cheeks blanched, and his black mustache, in a single drink, turned gray. But here he lay beneath the festive board, bedraggled, his nose buried in the soft rug, hopelessly inarticulate—though the last symptom was least to be wondered at, since he had always been a silent man.

You shook him where he lay. There was no response. You dragged him forth in his shame and set him on his feet again, but he staggered and fell. Yet as he lay there in his cups—oh, mystery of discipline!—his heels were close together, his toes turned out, his musket was at a carry, and his little fingers were just touching the seams of his pantaloons.

For the good of the service Mother offered to retire the Captain on half pay, and give him free lodging on the garret stair, but he scorned the proposal, and you backed him in his stand. All his life he had been a soldier. Now, with war and rumors of war rife in the land, should he, Captain Jinks, a private in the Grenadier Guards, lay down his arms for the piping peace of a garret stair? No, by gad, sir! No! And he stayed; and, strangest thing of all, he was yet to fight and stand guard and suffer as he had never done before.

But while the Captain thus sadly went down hill, the Rag Doll retired to a modest villa in the closet country upstairs. It was quiet there, and she could rest her shattered nerves. Whether she blamed herself for her rejected lover's downfall, or whether it was mere petulance at the social triumphs of the waxen blonde, is a question open to debate. Sentimentalists will find the former theory more to their fancy, but the blonde

and her friends told a different tale. Be that as it may, the Rag Doll went away.

January passed in barracks; then February and March, with only an occasional scouting after cattle-thieves and brigand bands. The Captain chafed at such inactivity.

"War! You call this war!" his very bristling manner seemed to say. "By gad! sir, when I was in the trenches before"

It was fine then to see the Captain and Grandfather—both grizzled veterans with tales to tell—side by side before the library fire. When Grandfather told the story of Johnny Reb in the tall grass, the Captain was visibly moved.

"Jinks," Grandfather would say—"Jinks, you know how it is yourself—when the bacon's wormy and the coffee's thin, and there's a man with a gun before you and a girl with a tear behind."

And at the mention of the girl and the tear the Captain would turn away.

Spring came, and with it the marching orders for which you and the Captain had yearned so long. There was a stir in the barracks that morning. The Captain was drunk again, it is true, but drunk this time with joy. He could not march in the ranks—he was too far gone for that—so you stationed him on a wagon to guard the commissary stores.

A blast from the bugle—Assembly—and you fell into line.

"Forward—*March!*"

And you marched away, your drum beating a double-quick, the Captain swaying ignominiously on the wagon and hugging his old brown gun. As the Guards swung by the reviewing-stand, their arms flashing in the sun, the Captain did not raise his eyes. So he never knew that looking down upon his shame that April day sat his Rag Lady, with Lizbeth and the waxen blonde. Her cheeks were pale, but her eyes were tearless. She did not utter a sound as her tottering lover passed. She just leaned far out over the flag-hung balcony and watched him as he rode away. It was a hard campaign. Clover Plain. Woodpile Mountain, and the Raspberry Wilderness are names to conjure with. From the back fence to the front gate, from the beehives to the red geraniums, the whole land ran with blood. Brevetted for per-

sonal gallantry on the Woodpile Heights, you laid aside your drum for epaulets and sword. The Guards and the Captain drifted from your ken. When you last saw him he was valiantly defending a tulip pass, and defying a regiment of the Black Ant Brigade to come and take him—by gad! sirs—if they dared.

"Where is the Captain?" Lizbeth asked you, one day on furlough when you lounged at home.

"I don't know," you said; and as you spoke there was the sound of a fall and a slight commotion at the edge of the crowd. A lady had fainted, some one said. The war went on. Days grew into weeks, weeks into months, and the summer passed. Search in camps and battlefields revealed no trace of Captain Jinks. Sitting by the camp fire on blustering nights, your thoughts went back to the old comrade of the winter days.

"Poor Captain Jinks!" you sighed.

"Jinks?" asked Grandfather, laying down his book.

"Yes. He's lost. Don't you know?"

"Jinks among the missing!" Grandfather cried. Then he gazed silently into the fire.

"Poor old Jinks!" he mused. "He was a brave soldier, Jinks was—a brave soldier, sir." He puffed reflectively on his corn-cob pipe. Presently he spoke again, more sadly than before:

"But he had one fault, Jinks had—just one, sir. He was a leetle too fond o' his bottle on blowy nights."

November came. The year and the war were drawing to a close. Before Grape Vine Ridge the enemy lay intrenched for a final desperate stand. To your council of war in the fallen leaves came Grandfather, a scarf around his throat, its loose ends flapping in the gale. He leaned on his cane; you, on your sword.

"Bring up your guns, boy," he cried. "Bring up your heavy guns. Fling your cavalry to the left, your infantry to the right. 'Up, Guards, and at 'em!' Cold steel, my boy—as Jinks used to say."

Grandfathers for counsel; little boys for war. At five that night the enemy surrendered—horse, foot, and a hundred guns. Declining the General's proffered sword, you rode back across the battlefield to your camp in the fallen leaves. The afternoon was waning. In the gath-

ering twilight your horse stumbled on a prostrate form. You dismounted, kneeled, brushed back the leaves, peered into the dimmed eyes and ashen face.

"Captain!" you cried. "Captain Jinks!" And at your call came Lizbeth, running, dragging the Rag Doll by her hand. Breathless they kneeled beside him where he lay.

"Oh, it's Captain Jinks," said Lizbeth, but softly, when she saw. Prone on the battle-field lay the wounded Grenadier, his uniform gray with service in the wind and rain.

"Captain!" you cried again, but he

did not hear you. Then the Rag Doll bent her face to his, in the twilight, though she could not speak. A glimmer of recognition blazed for a moment, but faded in the Captain's eyes.

"He's tired marching, I guess," said Lizbeth.

"Sh!" you said. "He's dying."

You bent lower to feel his fluttering pulse. You placed your ear to the cross of honor, rusted, on his breast. His heart was silent. And so he died—on the battle-field, his musket at his side, his heels together, his little fingers just touching the seams of his pantaloons.

The Old Home

BY CHARLES FRANCIS SAUNDERS

TO one forespent with stress of trade
And schemes of gain in city marts,
There comes a breath of country hay
Wafted from passing carts.

Fades the long line of brick and stone,
The street's rude tumult dies away,
From money-getting for a space
His soul cries holiday.

By that enchantment rapt from town,
He runs, his hand in Memory's,
Up the dear lane to the old home
Beside the tranquil trees.

The garden's myriad cups of bloom
His withered heart with fragrance flood;
Barn pigeons, cooing, lull to rest
The unrest of his blood.

A harp, untouched these many years,
His soul once more to music wakes,
Swept by the wind that bends the grass
And stirs the meadow brakes.

And with him down the orchard path,
Past spring-house and the pasture wall.
Her spirit walks who taught her child
Of the Love that is o'er all.

The vision vanishes, and straight
The street's rude tumult in his ears;
But in his heart a heavenly strain,
And in his eyes, sweet tears.