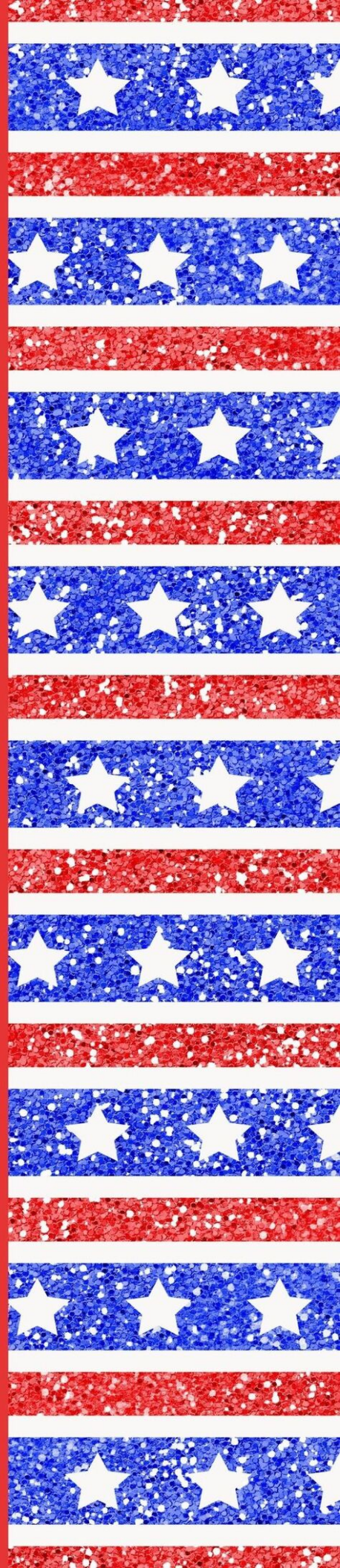


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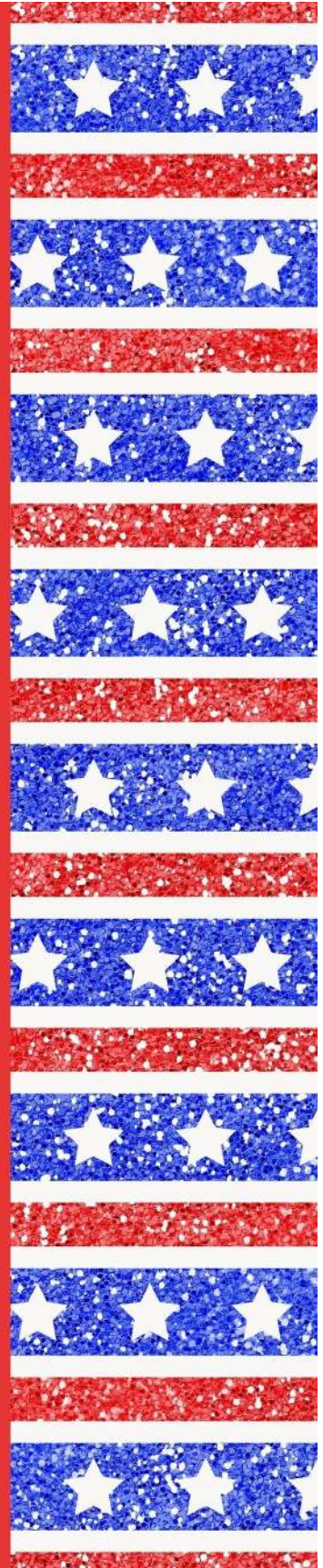
Kirk Munroe



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FORWARD, MARCH

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KIRK MUNROE

Forward, March

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Sheba Blake Publishing Corp.

2288 Crossrail Dr

Atlanta, GA 30349

support@shebablake.com

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About the Author

One

A Bowl of Roses



In the morning-room of a large, old-fashioned country-house, situated a few miles outside the city of New Orleans, sat a young man arranging a bowl of roses. Beside him stood a pretty girl, in riding costume, whose face bore a trace of petulance.

“Do make haste, Cousin Ridge, and finish with those stupid flowers. You have wasted half an hour of this glorious morning over them already!” she exclaimed.

“Wasted?” rejoined Ridge Norris, inquiringly, and looking up with a smile. “I thought you were too fond of flowers to speak of time spent in showing them off to best advantage as ‘wasted.’”

“Yes, of course I’m fond of them,” answered Spence Cuthbert, who was from Kentucky on a Mardi Gras visit to Dulce Norris, her school-chum and cousin by several removes, “but not fond enough to break an engagement on account of them.”

“An engagement?”

“Certainly. You promised to go riding with me this morning.”

“And so I will in a minute, when I have finished with these roses.”

“But I want you to come this instant.”

“And leave a duty unperformed?” inquired Ridge, teasingly.

“Yes; now.”

“In a minute.”

“No. I won’t wait another second.”

With this the girl flung herself from the room, wearing a very determined expression on her flushed face.

Ridge rose to follow her, and then resumed his occupation as a clatter of hoofs on the magnolia-bordered driveway announced the arrival of a horseman.

“She won’t go now that she has a caller to entertain,” he said to himself.

But in this he was mistaken; for within a minute another clatter of hoofs, mingled with the sound of laughing voices, gave notice of a departure, and, glancing from an open window, Ridge saw Spence Cuthbert ride gayly past in company with a young man whose face seemed familiar, but whose name he could not recall.

As they swept by both looked up laughing, while the horseman lifted his hat in a bow that was almost too sweeping to be polite.

“What did you say Ridge was doing?” he asked, as they passed beyond earshot.

“Arranging a bowl of roses,” answered Spence.

“Nice occupation for a man,” sneered the other. “And he preferred doing that to riding with you?”

“So it seems.”

“Well, I am not wholly surprised, for, as I remember him, he was a soft-hearted, Miss Nancy sort of a boy, who was always coddling sick kittens, or something of the kind, and never would go hunting because he couldn’t bear

to kill things. He apparently hadn't a drop of sporting blood in him, and I recall having to thrash him on one occasion because he objected to my shooting a bird. I thought of course, though, that he had outgrown all such nonsense by this time."

"There is no nonsense about him!" flashed out Spence, warmly; and then, to her companion's amazement, the girl began a most spirited defence of her absent cousin, during which she denounced in such bitter terms the taking of innocent lives under the name of "sport" that the other was finally thankful to change the conversation to a more congenial topic.

In the mean time Dulce Norris had entered the morning-room to find out why Spence had gone to ride with Herman Dodley instead of with Ridge, as had been arranged.

"Was that Herman Dodley?" asked the latter, without answering his sister's question.

"Yes, of course, but why do you ask with such a tragic air?"

"Because," replied Ridge, "I have heard reports concerning him which, if confirmed, should bar the doors of this house against him forever."

"What do you mean, Ridge Norris? I'm sure Mr. Dodley bears as good a reputation as the majority of young men one meets in society. Of course since he has got into politics his character has been assailed by the other party; but then no one ever believes what politicians say of one another."

"No matter now what I mean," rejoined the young man. "Perhaps I will tell you after I have spoken to father on the subject, which I mean to do at once."

Ridge Norris, on his way to the library, where he hoped to find his father, was somewhat of a disappointment to his family. Born of a mother in whose veins flowed French and Spanish blood, and who had taught him to speak both languages, and of a New England father, who had spent his entire business life

in the far South, Ridge had been reared in an atmosphere of luxury. He had been educated in the North, sent on a grand tour around the world, and had finally been given a position, secured through his father's influence, in a Japanese-American banking house. From Yokohama he had been transferred to the New York office, where, on account of a slight misunderstanding with one of his superiors, he had thrown up his position to return to his home only a few days before this story opens.

Now his family did not know what to do with him. He disliked business, and would not study for a profession. He was a dear, lovable fellow, honest and manly in all his instincts; but indolent, fastidious in his tastes, and apparently without ambition. He was devoted to music and flowers, extremely fond of horses, which he rode more than ordinarily well, and had a liking for good books. He had, furthermore, returned from his travels filled with pride for his native land, and declaring that the United States was the only country in the world worth fighting and dying for.

Taking the morning's mail from the hand of a servant who had just brought it, Ridge entered his father's presence.

"Here are your letters, sir," he said, "but before you read them I should like a few moments' conversation with you."

"Certainly, son. What is it?"

As Ridge told what he had heard concerning Herman Dodley, the elder man's brows darkened; and, when the recital was finished, he said:

"I fear all this is true, and have little doubt that Dodley is no better than he should be; but, unfortunately, I am so situated at present that I cannot forbid him the house. I will warn Dulce and her friend against him; but just now I am not in a position to offend him."

“Why, father!” cried Ridge, amazed to hear his usually fearless and self-assertive parent adopt this tone. “I thought that you were—”

“Independent of all men,” interrupted the other, finishing the sentence. “So I believed myself to be. But I am suddenly confronted by business embarrassments that force me temporarily to adopt a different policy. Truly, Ridge, we are threatened with such serious losses that I am making every possible sacrifice to try and stem the tide. I have even placed our summer home on the Long Island coast in an agent’s hands, and am deeply grieved that you should have thrown up a position, promising at least self-support, upon such slight provocation.”

“But he ordered me about as though I were a servant, instead of requesting me to do things in a gentlemanly way.”

“And were you not a servant?”

“No, sir, I was not—at least, not in the sense of being amenable to brutal commands. I was not, nor will I ever be, anybody’s slave.”

“Oh well, my boy!” replied the elder, with a deep sigh, “I fear you will live to discover by sad experience that pride is the most expensive of earthly luxuries, and that one must consent to obey orders long before he can hope to issue commands. But we will discuss your affairs later, for now I must look over my letters.”

While Mr. Norris was thus engaged, Ridge opened the morning paper, and glanced carelessly at its headlines. Suddenly he sprang to his feet with a shout, his dark face glowing and his eyes blazing with excitement.

“By heavens, father!” he cried, “the United States battle-ship *Maine* has been blown up in Havana Harbor with a loss of two hundred and sixty of her crew. If that doesn’t mean war, then nothing in the world’s history ever did. You needn’t worry about me any more, sir, for my duty is clearly outlined.”

“What do you propose to do?” asked the elder man, curiously. “Will you try to blow up a Spanish battle-ship in revenge?”

“No, sir. But I shall enlist at the very first call to arms, and offer my life towards the thrashing of the cowards who have perpetrated this incredible crime.”

Thrilled to the core by the momentous news he had just read, Ridge hastened to impart it to his mother and sister. At the same time he ordered a horse on which he might ride to the city for further details of the stupendous event. As he was about to depart, Spence Cuthbert and her escort, returning from their ride, dashed up to the doorway.

“Have you heard the news?” cried Ridge, barely nodding to Dodley.

“Yes,” replied Spence. “Isn’t it dreadful? Mr. Dodley told me all about it, and after hearing it I couldn’t bear to ride any farther, so we came back.”

“I wish he had told me before you started,” said Ridge, “so that I might have been in the city long ago.”

“You were so busily and pleasantly engaged with your roses that I hesitated to interrupt you,” murmured Herman Dodley. “Now, however, if I can be of any assistance to you in the city, pray consider me at your service.”

“Can you assist me, sir, to obtain a commission in the army that will be summoned to visit a terrible punishment upon Spain for her black treachery?”

“Undoubtedly I could, and of course I would do so with pleasure if the occasion should arise. But there won’t be any war. The great Yankee nation is too busy accumulating dollars to fight over a thing of this kind. We will demand a money indemnity, it will be promptly paid, and the whole affair will quickly be forgotten.”

“Sir!” cried Ridge, his face pale with passion. “The man who utters such words is at heart a traitor to his country.”

“If it were not for the presence of ladies, I would call you to account for that remark,” muttered Dodley. “As it is, I shall not forget it. Ladies, I have the honor to wish you a very good-morning.”

With this the speaker, who had not dismounted, turned his horse’s head and rode away.

Two

War Is Declared



Never was the temper and patience of the American people more sorely tried than by the two months of waiting and suspense that followed the destruction of their splendid battle-ship. The *Maine* had entered Havana Harbor on a friendly visit, been assigned to a mooring, which was afterwards changed by the Spanish authorities, and three weeks later, without a suspicion of danger having been aroused or a note of warning sounded, she was destroyed as though by a thunder-bolt. It was nearly ten o'clock on the night of Tuesday, February 15th. Taps had sounded and the crew were asleep in their hammocks, when, by a terrific explosion, two hundred and fifty-eight men and two officers were hurled into eternity, sixty more were wounded, and the superb battle-ship was reduced to a mass of shapeless wreckage.

It was firmly believed throughout the United States that this appalling disaster was caused by a submarine mine, deliberately placed near the mooring buoy to which the *Maine* had been moved, to be exploded at a favorable opportunity by Spanish hands.

The Spaniards, on the other side, claimed and strenuously maintained that the only explosion was that of the ship's own magazines, declaring in support

of this theory that discipline on all American men-of-war was so lax as to invite such a catastrophe at any moment.

To investigate, and settle if possible, this vital question, a Court of Inquiry, composed of four prominent naval officers, was appointed. They proceeded to Havana, took volumes of testimony, and, after six weeks of most searching investigation, made a report to the effect that the *Maine* was destroyed by two distinct explosions, the first of which was that of a mine located beneath her, and causing a second explosion—of her own magazines—by concussion.

During these six weeks the country was in a ferment. For three years war had raged in Cuba, where the natives were striving to throw off the intolerable burden of Spanish oppression and cruelty. In all that time the sympathies of America were with the struggling Cubans; and from every State of the Union demands for intervention in their behalf, even to the extent of going to war with Spain, had grown louder and more insistent, until it was evident that they must be heeded. With the destruction of the *Maine* affairs reached such a crisis that the people, through their representatives in Congress, demanded to have the Spanish flag swept forever from the Western hemisphere.

In vain did President McKinley strive for a peaceful solution of the problem; but with both nations bent on war, he could not stem the tide of popular feeling. So, on the 20th of April he was obliged to demand from Spain that she should, before noon of the 23d, relinquish forever her authority over Cuba, at the same time withdrawing her land and naval forces from that island. The Spanish Cortes treated this proposition with contempt, and answered it by handing his passports to the American Minister at Madrid, thereby declaring war against the great American republic.

At this time Spain believed her navy to be more than a match for that of the United States, and that, with nearly two hundred thousand veteran,

acclimated troops on the island of Cuba, she was in a position to resist successfully what she termed the “insolent demands of the Yankee pigs.”

On this side of the Atlantic, Congress had appropriated fifty millions of dollars for national defence, the navy was being strengthened by the purchase of additional ships at home and abroad, fortifications were being erected along the entire coast, harbors were mined, and a powerful fleet of warships was gathered at Key West, the point of American territory lying nearest the island of Cuba.

Then came the President’s call for 125,000 volunteers, followed a few weeks later by a second call for 75,000 more. This was the summons for which our young friend, Ridge Norris, had waited so impatiently ever since that February morning when he had arranged a bowl of roses and read the startling news of the *–Maine’s–* destruction.

No one in all the country had been more impatient of the long delay than he; for it had seemed to him perfectly evident from the very first that war must be declared, and he was determined to take an active part in it at the earliest opportunity. His father was willing that he should go, his mother was bitterly opposed; Dulce begged him to give up his design, and even Spence Cuthbert’s laughing face became grave whenever the subject was mentioned, but the young man was not to be moved from his resolve.

Mardi Gras came and passed, but Ridge, though escorting his sister and cousin to all the festivities, took only a slight interest in them. He was always slipping away to buy the latest papers or to read the bulletins from Washington.

“Would you go as a private, son?” asked his father one evening when the situation was being discussed in the family circle.

“No, no! If he goes at all—which Heaven forbid—it must be as an officer,” interposed Mrs. Norris, who had overheard the question.

“Of course a gentleman would not think of going as anything else,” remarked Dulce, conclusively.

“I believe there were gentlemen privates on both sides during the Civil War,” said Spence Cuthbert, quietly.

“Of course,” admitted Dulce, “but that was different. Then men fought for principles, but now they are going to fight for—for—”

“The love of it, perhaps,” suggested the girl from Kentucky.

“You know I don’t mean that,” cried Dulce. “They are going to fight because —”

“Because their country calls them,” interrupted Ridge, with energy, “and because every true American endorses Decatur’s immortal toast of ‘Our Country. May she always be in the right; but, right or wrong, our country.’ Also because in the present instance we believe it is as much our right to save Cuba from further oppression at the hands of Spain as it always is for the strong to interpose in behalf of the weak and helpless. For these reasons, and because I do not seem fit for anything else, I am going into the city to-morrow to enlist in whatever regiment I find forming.”

“Oh, my boy! my boy!” cried Mrs. Norris, flinging her arms around her son’s neck, “do not go tomorrow. Wait a little longer, but one week, until we can see what will happen. After that I will not seek further to restrain you. It is your mother who prays.”

“All right, mother dear, I will wait a few days to please you, though I cannot see what difference it will make.”

So the young man waited as patiently as might be a week longer, and before it was ended the whole country was ringing with the wonderful news of

Admiral George Dewey's swift descent upon the Philippine Islands with the American Asiatic squadron. With exulting heart every American listened to the thrilling story of how this modern Farragut stood on the bridge of the *Olympia*, and, with a fine contempt for the Spanish mines known to be thickly planted in the channel, led his ships into Manila Bay. Almost before the startled Spaniards knew of his coming he had safely passed their outer line of defences, and was advancing upon their anchored fleet of iron-clad cruisers. An hour later he had completely destroyed it, silenced the shore batteries, and held the proud city of Manila at his mercy. All this he had done without the loss of a man or material damage to his ships, an exploit so incredible that at first the world refused to believe it.

To Ridge Norris, who had spent a week in the Philippines less than a year before, the whole affair was of intense interest, and he bitterly regretted not having remained in the Far East that he might have participated in that glorious fight.

"I would gladly have shipped as a sailor on the *Olympia* if I had only known what was in store for her!" he exclaimed; "but a chance like that, once thrown away, never seems to be offered again."

"But, my boy, it is better now," said Mrs. Norris, with a triumphant smile. "Then you would have been only a common seaman; one week ago you would have enlisted as a common soldier. Now you may go as an officer—what you will call a lieutenant—with the chance soon to become a captain, and perhaps a general. Who can tell?"

"Whatever do you mean, mother?"

"What I say, and it is even so; for have I not the promise of the Governor himself? But your father will tell you better, for he knows what has been done."

So Ridge went to his father, who confirmed what he had just heard, saying:

“Yes, son; your mother has exerted her influence in your behalf, and procured for you the promise of a second-lieutenant’s commission, provided I am willing to pay for the honor.”

“How, father?”

“By using my influence to send Herman Dodley to the Legislature as soon as he comes back from the war.”

“Is Dodley going into the army?”

“Yes. He is to be a major.”

“And would you help to send such a man to the Legislature?”

“If you wanted to be a lieutenant badly enough to have me do so, I would.”

“Father, you know I wouldn’t have you do such a thing even to make me President of the United States!”

“Yes, son, I know it.”

And the two, gazing into each other’s eyes, understood each other perfectly.

“I would rather go as a private, father.”

“I would rather have you, son; though it would be a great disappointment to your mother.”

“She need not know, for I will go to some distant camp before enlisting. I wouldn’t serve in the same regiment with Herman Dodley, anyhow.”

“Of course not, son.”

“I suppose his appointment is political—as well as the one intended for me?”

“Yes; and so it is with every other officer in the regiment.”

“That settles it. I would sooner join the Cubans than fight under the leadership of mere politicians. So, when I do enlist, it will be in some regiment