

**THE MAJOR'S
FAVOURITE:
A NOVEL**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649641819

The Major's Favourite: A Novel by John Strange Winter

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
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Nov. 13, 24.

The Major's Favourite

A Novel

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BY

JOHN STRANGE WINTER

*Author of "Mignon's Secret," "Bootles' Baby,"
"Houp-la," "Army Society," "Only Human,"
"Aunt Johnnie," "The Other Man's Wife,"
"Every Inch a Soldier," "The Soul of
the Bishop," "A Seventh Child,"
"The Stranger Woman," "A Blame-
less Woman," etc., etc.*

Standard, Henrietta St. N. Y.

NEW YORK
PUBLIC
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NEW YORK
J. SELWIN TAIT & SONS

1895

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WAYNE
JUN
1908

PREFACE.

SOME years ago I wrote a little story called "Mignon's Secret." It was intended to show the grown-up mind something of the intense bitterness of the sorrows of childhood, sorrows which to us may seem trivial, but which to the child's heart and brain are immeasurable in the depth of their intensity. My public have taken "Mignon's Secret" to their heart, and apparently mean to keep it there—judging from the steady demand to-day for one edition after another—and among my most precious possessions is a book of Mr. Ruskin's inscribed by him "To the author of Mignon's Secret," two facts which tell me that my aim was reached and which reward me beyond price or words.

In the present simple story I hope

that my public will find an equal satisfaction in the study of another young mind, though one of a wholly different class to the unkempt little barrack bairn in "Mignon's Secret." This, too, is a barrack bairn, but one living in officers' quarters instead of being found in the ranks—I hope not the less interesting for that. I have tried to show the struggles of a young mind reared with all care and love, struggles between honour and affection, between right and wrong, between a conception of stern duty and the strength of faithful friendship. It is a pendant, though in no sense a sequel, to "Mignon's Secret."

JOHN STRANGE WINTER.

THE MAJOR'S FAVOURITE.

CHAPTER I.

NEW QUARTERS.

It is the fashion for all soldiers to abuse that particular spot of ground which is known to the world at large as Chertsey Camp. To the unenlightened outsider a soldier will explain that nobody, excepting a commanding officer keen on appointments to follow his last period of regimental life, is ever anything but sorry to find himself ordered there. A commanding officer of course, he explains, is glad to have an opportunity of showing off any little knowledge of soldiering that he happens to possess, and if he chances to have one or two really good soldiers among his officers he is the more glad to be at a place like Chertsey, because it enables him to take the entire credit for their smartness and efficiency unto himself. Chertsey Camp is a place where the

shadow of the Duke is very well known, and the shadow of a great many other important persons in the military world; it is a place where the shadows of all officers and, indeed, of all ranks under that of the officer in command, are supposed to grow less in proportion as his is supposed to wax larger; and therefore when the Red Horse found themselves ordered from Edinburgh to Chertsey Camp, they were as a whole proportionately dissatisfied and filled with dismay. However, grumblings are of little or no use in such cases, and therefore on the appointed day the regiment departed in detachments by the appointed route for the appointed destination, and in due course of time found itself once more gathered together in that portion of the Camp which is known as the "Cavalry Lines."

It was a cheerless and wretched enough prospect at first. If you can imagine going into a house just vacated by a large and untidy family who had left in such a hurry that they had not been able to sweep up the *débris* of their occupancy, you can imagine fairly well what the Red Horse felt when they took possession of their quarters in

Chertsey Camp. Mrs. Drummond, the wife of the senior major, stood in the little garden surrounding the major's hut and looked round with eyes filled with dismay. She was a regular old soldier, she had been following the drum for nearly twenty years, but she gave a portentous sigh and said, "Tom, we shall never be able to make this place look decent!"

The Major went to the corner of the hut and glanced at it sideways, then walked to the opposite corner and looked round that, after which he came back to his wife's side again and put his hand upon her shoulder. "My dear Kitty," he said, "it does look rather desolate, but I daresay you will be able to fettle things up in fine style after a while. One thing is very certain—we shall have to do the whole place out from end to end, and you had better tell them at the hotel that you will want your rooms for at least a fortnight and probably for longer."

"Yes, that would be the easiest way of doing it," said Mrs. Drummond, giving another sigh, "but it will cost an awful lot, Tom."

"Oh, well, as to that, paper and paint