

***The Youngest  
Trenholm***

**Mary Kinley  
Ingraham**

**\* A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook \***

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please contact a <https://www.fadedpage.com> administrator before proceeding. Thousands more FREE eBooks are available at <https://www.fadedpage.com>.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. IF THE BOOK IS UNDER COPYRIGHT IN YOUR COUNTRY, DO NOT DOWNLOAD OR REDISTRIBUTE THIS FILE.

*Title:* The Youngest Trenholm

*Date of first publication:* 1919

*Author:* Mary Kinley Ingraham (1874-1949)

*Date first posted:* July 26, 2022

*Date last updated:* July 26, 2022

Faded Page eBook #20220746

This eBook was produced by: John Routh & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

# THE YOUNGEST TRENHOLM

BY MARY KINLEY INGRAHAM

“You’re the first Trenholm to run when he ought to fight.” The speaker was a girl of twenty-one. Her high forehead, insufficiently shaded by the fine, brown hair, her thin, too delicately coloured cheeks, the soft depths of her dark eyes that looked through disfiguring spectacles, and her sharp, decided voice that contradicted the softness of her eyes, all proclaimed her at once a Trenholm and a schoolmistress. In everything but the voice she was a younger and feminine counterpart of the old doctor, her father, who now turned troubled eyes from his son Bob, whose face he was patching with court plaster, to the lad who had brought the first blot upon the Trenholm ’scutcheon.

“Don’t be hard on Fred, Margaret,” he quavered, but doubtfully, for there was something in this affair, as there often was in affairs where his youngest son was concerned, that he could not understand.

Bob and Fred Trenholm had met the Saltzmann boys up the brook where the smelts were coming so thick you could scoop ’em out with your hands, and the Saltzmanns had called the Trenholms sons of a strange maternal ancestor. Whereat Bob had leaped to the fray, calling upon Fred to come on. Fred came on slowly, and when he perceived that Bob was engaging the attention of both the Saltzmann boys he came off again. In fact, he ran home. Thither Bob followed him, in the course of twenty minutes, with torn clothes, bleeding nose, and irregularly bulging countenance. His story of the battle and of Fred’s dastardly retreat brought the wounded hero praises and surgical aid, while it brought his brother the shamed reproaches of their sister, and the troubled, bewildered attention of their father. A Trenholm running from an enemy was a phenomenon this fine old gentleman, who had begun his career as an army surgeon in India, and was finishing it as a village doctor in Nova Scotia, could not understand.

But Fred was not all Trenholm. Had you been there you would have noted at once his resemblance to a fourth person in the room, who moved furtively about, changing the position of the books on the table and of the ornaments on the mantel-piece. She kept glancing at Margaret the while, to satisfy herself that the girl was too deeply absorbed to notice what she was

doing and put a stop to it. This was the mother of the family, whose only importance in this story or anywhere else arises from the fact that she had borne seven Trenholms. Dr. Trenholm's father had been a soldier and a gentleman in the Old Country; Mrs. Trenholm's father was probably at this moment whittling a stick and spitting tobacco juice in Jim Allen's store at the Crossroads. He had whittled many sticks in his day, and had smoked infinite tobacco, but had done little else. You are wondering how his daughter came to be the wife of Dr. Trenholm, but that does not belong to this story.

Now, while Fred's sister looked at him accusingly, and his father gazed at him sadly, and his mother shifted things about to have them for once the way she liked them and did not look at him at all, the culprit sprawled in a chair with his hands in his pockets, his head bowed to the family storm, and wished he wasn't a Trenholm. That was about the content of his consciousness until he shot a glance at his sister and surprised a flash of something behind her spectacles. Something wonderful. You and I might have known Margaret for years and never have seen it. It flashed for Fred alone, and boy though he was, and only half Trenholm at that, he was wise enough to know this, and be glad. Now, when Fred caught the flash, he slunk out, wishing he wasn't a cowardly sneak.

This little family affair I have been telling you about happened in the early summer of 1910. On a June morning of 1917 Margaret and Fred Trenholm again sat facing each other in the same room. The old father was not there; his proud, gentle eyes had closed for the last time three years before, and so had not been forced to look, with the impotence of age, upon a world in agony. Bob was not there. The mother may have been there, or may have been in some other part of the house; it really does not matter. Fred's college report had just arrived. It contained two crosses called plucks in the undergraduate vernacular, but Margaret was strangely indifferent to these. She held the telegram that had come three days before from some busy person who regretted that he had to inform Mrs. Trenholm that her son, Lieutenant Robert Marchmont Trenholm, had been killed in action. While Margaret fingered the telegram her eyes rested on Fred, and the question that for two years he had read in their dark depths had now become insistent. Her lips had never framed it. To have asked this lad why he didn't enlist would have been like prompting him in an examination. She could not understand the delay, but this beloved brother would go, of course, for he was a Trenholm, not a sneaking Saltzmann. All his older brothers had volunteered, and three had been accepted. John, the eldest, who had five children and a

leaky valve, had been turned down, as had also Septimus, a university professor who had spoiled his eyesight poring over Greek particles.

“Why don’t you say it?” burst out Fred, as he sat there miserably, reading the question in his sister’s eyes. “You want me to get killed as well as Bob.”

Now this was a mean, disgusting speech. The Trenholm in Fred felt that it was, but it was something not Trenholm that spoke. Margaret did not answer. So Fred slunk away to the store where he worked during the summer, and his sister went to her schoolroom, for her vacation had not yet begun.

The days dragged miserably after that. Fred avoided his sister’s eyes, so that he never caught a flash of that which from his babyhood had shone for him alone. Perhaps it was there no longer. Margaret draped the portraits of her soldier brothers with their country’s flag, and before Robert’s she kept a vase of flowers. When she spoke to Fred it was about trivial things. The boy himself broke the silence.

“You’re ashamed because I don’t go, Marge, but you’d be more ashamed if I did.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean I should funk. Do you remember when I ran from the Saltzmanns, and you gave me the devil for it? Well, I’d run from the Germans the same way. I’d be stood against a wall and shot before I’d been in the fight a week. Think of it.”

“I can’t think of it.”

“I know you can’t. We’re not the same breed.”

He went on as if answering his sister’s unspoken question.

“What if we get the draft? I can get exemption, I guess. There’s this farm, that never had a decent hill of potatoes, and there’s mother. I’m her only support, for all you’ve kept things going and sent me to college when you ought to have been in the sanatorium.”

He moved about the room in a hunted way.

“Look here, Marge,” he said, as he sat down again, and looked with eyes that did not shift into his sister’s white face. “I put it up to you. God knows I wish I’d been killed instead of Bob. It isn’t the thought of that that keeps me back. I’m afraid of the way I’ll act when the big minute comes, and of—

well, you know what would be the next thing. My story will be different from Bob's. You won't be proud of it. But hang it if I'll sneak round here any longer. Tell me to go and I'll go. Might as well get it over. There's no place in the world for a coward now."

Margaret at twenty-eight was not what you would call a lovable woman. She was foolishly proud of her Trenholm ancestry, and snobbishly neglectful of her mother and her mother's relatives. People called her stuck up, old maidish, and schoolma'amy. I am inclined to think they were right, though I refuse to be responsible for their choice of epithets. No man had ever coveted her for his wife, and the children she taught feared her rather than loved her. Her brothers found her tiresome, with the single exception of Fred. He alone had the key to the cold-looking; shuttered house of his sisters affections, and he alone knew that the interior was not only warm, but rich and beautiful. Not that he would have told you so in those words. He would have said that Marge wasn't half bad, if gone at in the right way. And perhaps his figure is as good as mine. As for Margaret, she loved this disappointing brother of hers with all the force of a nature whose really strong emotions were denied other outlets. This denial ended when the war began. Had you known Margaret in the years that followed you would have been conscious of a new development in her, of something bigger than her Trenholm pride, bigger even than her love for Fred. I need not try to define it. You have felt the same in many a woman who in these strange times of ours has surrendered her heart's idols to horror and violent death. This something swelled high in Margaret's heart that summer morning when her inglorious champion placed the gage of battle in her hands. With it came a wave of understanding sympathy, a great compassion for the tortured wretch before her, that in no wise resembled the doting love of former days. She put her arms around him.

"Let us think it out together, dear Fred."

When they had thought it out together they decided that Fred should enlist the next Monday. Margaret was to be surety for his courage, though they didn't put it just that way.

"I'll go with you to Halifax," she said, "and I won't teach next fall. The doctor said I was to rest. And I'll see you every week."

As soon as Fred put on khaki he looked and felt the soldier. He fairly glowed over the thought that he was no longer sneaking about in civilian clothes. As for France and its terrors, Marge had said that would be all right, and Marge could be depended upon to make good what she said. She had

bidden him enlist. It was up to her. It did not occur to the boy that by thus shifting the responsibility of his action from his own shoulders to his sister's he was putting a heavy burden upon her. He was less than half Trenholm, and his mother's people had never troubled themselves about such small things as letting others carry their private loads.

Margaret, true to her promise, saw her brother often, admired him to his heart's content, and talked of the laurels he would win. Neither spoke of the horror Fred had conjured before his sister's eyes on that June morning—the vision of the youngest Trenholm facing the firing squad. That vision he also had transferred. Now during the long nights it swayed before Margaret's eyes, while Fred, tired with his day's drill, slept healthily.

As the time for parting drew near the boy's confidence seemed to increase. He had a few days' leave early in December. Margaret joined him in the city, where he was eager to give her the time of her life. They stood looking out upon the harbour on the morning of the sixth, that morning when ruin and sudden death swooped upon the fair city of Halifax.

“Golly, those ships act queer.”

“Queerly, you mean. I don't see anything wrong, Fred. Please don't say ‘Golly’.”

“There! You said it yourself.”

“I only repeated it after you. But there is something wrong, Fred. Oh, Fred!”

Margaret threw her arms about her brother as the loud booming roar that heralded the explosion on the Belgian ship ended with fearful crash. They both staggered, but managed to keep erect as they clung together. Then came another roar, followed by the strange and awful sounds of a falling city. Fred Trenholm clutched his sister's dress with the gesture of a frightened child. Then some hurtling thing struck them, and they fell.

Dr. Martin, with his friend Harding, found them a little later. Their arms were around each other, the boy's hands still where he had clutched his sister's skirt, while hers were clasped behind his neck.

“Husband and wife?” said the doctor. “No, the woman's much the older. Brother and sister, likely.”

He stood up after a brief examination.

“Nothing for me to do here. It will be all over for both in a few minutes. Better see them through, Harding. The woman's conscious.”

And the doctor hurried on to more hopeful cases.

Suddenly the boy stirred. His hands wandered gropingly along his sister's dress, and then resumed their frightened clutch.

"Marge!"

"Yes, Fred, I'm here."

She struggled to bring her face close to his, while she gave a grateful glance to the big man who helped her.

"What happened, Marge? Are the Germans here?"

"They must be."

"I didn't run?"

"No, no. You were brave, dear, like the Trenholms. You tried to save me. Don't you see?"

But Fred saw nothing, for the darkness of death had come upon him. Mr. Harding, seeing that Margaret wished it, lifted her so that she could look upon her brother's face. She gazed until she knew that he was dead. Then, with a long and almost happy sigh, she, too, closed her eyes.





## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

A cover was created for this ebook which is placed in the public domain.

[The end of *The Youngest Trenholm* by Mary Kinley Ingraham]