

**TWO SOLDIERS, AND
DUNRAVEN RANCH.
TWO NOVELS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649148035

Two soldiers, and Dunraven ranch. Two novels by Charles King

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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CHARLES KING

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TWO NOVELS.

BY

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CONQUEST," ETC., ETC.



PHILADELPHIA:
J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY.

1892.

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TWO SOLDIERS.

I.

THE rain was plashing dismally on the grimy window-sill and over the awning of the shops below. The street-cars went jingling by with a dripping load of outside passengers on both platforms. Wagons and drays, cabs and closed carriages, that rattled or rumbled along the ordinarily busy thoroughfare, looked as though they had been dipped in the river before being turned loose on the street, and their Jehus, a bedraggled lot, must needs have had something amphibious in their composition, else they could not have borne up against the deluge that had been soaking the city for two days past. The policeman, waddling aimlessly about at the opposite corner, enveloped in rubber cap and overcoat, cast occasional wistful glances into the bar-room across the way, wherein the gas was burning in deference to the general gloom that overhung the neighborhood, and such pedestrians as had to be abroad hurried along under their umbrellas as though they half expected to have to swim before they could reach their destination. The dense cloud of sooty smoke that had overhung the metropolis for weeks past, and that wind from any direction could never entirely dissipate, for the simple reason that smoke-stacks by the score shot up in the outskirts on every side, now seemed to be hurled upon the roofs and walls, the windows and the pavement, in a black, pasty, carboniferous deposit, and every object out of doors that one could touch would leave its inky response upon the hand. A more depressing "spell of weather" had not been known for a year, and every living being in sight seemed saturated with the general gloom,—every living being except one: Captain Fred Lane, of the Eleventh Cavalry, was sitting at the dingy window of his office in the recruiting rendezvous on Sycamore Street and actually whistling softly to himself in supreme contentment.

Two missives had reached him that ghastly morning that had served to make him impervious to wind or weather. One—large, formal, impressive, and bearing the stamp of the War Department in heavy type across its upper corner—had borne to him the notification of his promotion to the rank of Captain (Troop D) Eleventh Cavalry, *vice* Curran, retired. The other—a tiny billet—had given him even greater happiness. It might be hard to say how many times he had read and re-read it since he found it on the snowy cloth of his particular breakfast-table in his particular corner of the snug refectory of "The Queen City," on the books of which most respectable if somewhat venerable club his name had been borne among the list of Army or Navy Members ever since his "graduation-leave," fifteen years before.

All his boyhood, up to the time of his winning his cadetship at West Point, had been spent in the city where for the past sixteen months he had considered himself fortunate in being stationed on recruiting-service. During the second year of his term at the Academy he was startled by the receipt of a sad letter from his mother, telling him briefly that his father, long one of the best-known among the business-men of the city, had been compelled to make an assignment. What was worse, he had utterly broken down under the strain, and would probably never be himself again. Proud, sensitive, and honorable, Mr. Lane had insisted on paying to the uttermost farthing of his means. Even the old homestead went, and the broken-hearted man retired with his faithful wife to a humble roof in the suburbs. There, a few months afterwards, he breathed his last, and there, during Fred's graduating year, she followed him. When the boy entered on his career in the army he was practically alone in the world. Out of the wreck of his father's fortune there came to him a little sum that started him in the service free from debt and that served as a nest-egg to attract future accumulations. This he had promptly banked until some good and safe investment should present itself, and, once with his regiment on the frontier, Mr. Lane had found his pay ample for all his needs.

It is unnecessary to recount the history of his fifteen years' service as a subaltern. Suffice it to say that, steering clear of most of the temptations to which young officers were subjected, he had won a reputation as a capital "duty-officer," that was accented here and there by some brilliant and dashing exploits in the numerous Indian campaigns through which the Eleventh had passed with no small credit. Lane was never one of the jovial souls of the regiment. His mood

was rather taciturn and contemplative. He read a good deal, and spent many days in the saddle exploring the country in the neighborhood of his post and in hunting and fishing.

But, from the colonel down, there was not a man in the Eleventh who did not thoroughly respect and like him. Among the ladies, however, there were one or two who never lost an opportunity of giving the lieutenant a feline and not ineffective clawing when his name came up for discussion in the feminine conclaves occasionally held in the regiment. Sometimes, too, when opportunity served, he was made the victim of some sharp or sarcastic speech that was not always easy to bear in silence. Mrs. Judson, wife of the captain of B Troop, was reputed to be "down on Lane," and the men had no difficulty whatever in locating the time when her change of heart took place.

The truth of the matter was that, thanks to simple habits and to his sense of economy, Lane had quite a snug little balance in the bank, and the ladies of the regiment believed it to be bigger than it really was; and, having approved the furnishing and fitting up of his quarters, the next thing, of course, that they essayed to do was to provide him with a wife. There the trouble began. Simultaneously with the arrival of his first bar as a first lieutenant there came from the distant East Mrs. Judson's younger sister "Emmy" and Mrs. Loring's pretty niece Pansy Fletcher. Lane was prompt to call on both, to take the young ladies driving or riding, to be attentive and courteous in every way; but, while he did thus "perceive a divided duty," what was Mrs. Loring's horror on discovering that pretty Pansy had fallen rapturously in love with "Jerry" Lattimore, as handsome, reckless, and impecunious a young dragoon as ever lived, and nothing but prompt measures prevented their marriage! Miss Fletcher was suddenly re-transported to the East, whither Jerry was too hard up to follow; and then, in bitterness of heart, Mrs. Loring blamed poor Fred for the whole transaction. "Why had he held aloof and allowed that—that scamp—that ne'er-do-weel—to cut in and win that innocent child's heart, as he certainly did do?" Against Lattimore the vials of her wrath were emptied *coram publico*, but against Lane she could not talk so openly.

Mrs. Judson had beheld the sudden departure of Miss Pansy with an equanimity she could barely disguise. Indeed, there were not lacking good Christians in the garrison who pointed significantly to the fact that she had almost too hospitably opened her doors to Miss