

DUNRAVEN RANCH

A Story of American Frontier Life.

By Capt. CHARLES KING, U. S. A., Author of "The Colonel's Daughter," "From the Banks," "The Deserter," Etc.

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CHAPTER II.



ED PERRY hated reveille and morning stables about as vehemently as it was possible for a soldier to follow who was in other respects thoroughly in love with his profession. A fair type of the American cavalry officer, when once he got in saddle and settled down to business, one would hardly ask to find Tall, athletic, slender of build, with frank, laughing blue eyes, curly, close cropped, light brown hair, and a trifling mustache that was a source of inexpressible delight to its owner and of some envy to his brother subalterns, Mr. Perry was probably the best looking of the young officers who marched with the battalion to this far away station on the borders of the Llano Estacado. He had been ten years in service, counting the four he spent as a cadet, had just won his silver bar as the junior first lieutenant of the regiment, was full to the brim of health, energy, animal spirits and fun, and, barring a few demerits and debts in his earlier experiences, had never known a heavier care in the world than the routine and ephemeral anxiety as to whether he would be called up for recitation on a subject he had not so much as looked at, or "hived" absent from a roll call he had lazily slept through.

Any other man, his comrades said, would have been spoiled a dozen times over by the petting he had received from both men and women; but there was something essentially sweet and genial about his nature—something "lacking in guile about his perceptions," said a cynical old captain of the regiment—and a jovial, sunshiny way of looking upon the world as an Eden, all men and all women as friends, and the army as the profession above all others, and these various attributes combined to make him popular with his kind and unusually attractive to the opposite sex. As a cadet he had been perpetually on the verge of dismissal because of the appalling array of demerits he could roll up against his name, and yet the very officers who had written the memoranda of his sins—omission and commission—against the regulations were men who openly said he "had the makings of one of the finest soldiers in the class." As junior second lieutenant—"plebe"—of the regiment, he had been welcomed by every man from the colonel down, and it was considered particularly rough that he should have to go to such a company as Capt. Canker's, because Canker was a man who never got along with any of his juniors; but there was something so irrepressibly frank and cordial in Perry's cheerful face when he would appear at his captain's door in the early morning and burst out with "By Jove, captain! I slept through reveille again this morning, and never got down till the stables were nearly over," that even that cross grained but honest troop commander was disarmed, and, though he threatened and reprimanded, he would never punish—would never deny his subaltern the faintest privilege; and when promotion took the captain to another regiment he bade good-by to Perry with eyes that were suspiciously wet. "Why, blow it all, what do you fellows hate Canker so for?" the youngster often said. "He ought to put me in arrest time and again, but he won't. Blamed if I don't put myself in arrest, or confine myself to the limits of the post, and do something, to cut all this going to town and hops and such things. Then I can stick to the troop like wax and get up at reveille; but if I'm out dancing till 2 or 3 in the morning it's no use, I tell you; I just can't wake up."

It was always predicted of Ned Perry that he would be "married and done for" within a year of his graduation. Every new face in the five years that followed the garrison prophecy. "Now he's gone, sure!" but, however devoted he might seem to the damsel in question, however restless and impatient he might be when compelled by his duties to absent himself from her side, however promising to casual observers—perhaps to the damsel herself—might be all the surface indications, the absolute frankness with which he proclaimed his admiration to every listener, and the fact that he "had been just so with half a dozen other girls," enabled the cooler heads of the regiment to decide that the time had not yet come—or at least the woman.

"I do wish," said Mrs. Turner, "that Mr. Perry would settle on somebody, because, just so long as he doesn't, it is rather hard to tell who he belongs to." And, as Mrs. Turner had long been a reigning belle among the married women of the post, and one to whom the young officers were always expected to show much attention, her whimsical way of describing the situation was readily understood. But here at the new station—at far away Rosier—matters were taking on a new look. To begin with, the wives of the officers of the cavalry battalion had not joined, none of the ladies of the post were here, and none would be expected to come until the summer's scouting work was over and done with. The ladies of the little battalion of infantry were here, and, though there were no maiden sisters or cousins yet at the post (most assured that more than one was already summoned), they were sufficient in number to enliven the monotony of garrison life and sufficiently attractive to warrant all the attention they cared to receive. It was beginning to be garrison chat that if Ned Perry had not "settled on somebody" as the ultimate object of his entire devotion, somebody had settled on him, and that was pretty Mrs. Bellman.

And though Ned Perry hated reveille and morning stables, as has been said, and could rarely "take his week" without making one or more lapses, here he was this beautiful May morning out at daybreak when it was his junior's tour of duty, and wending his way with that youngster out to the line of cavalry stables, booted and spurred and equipped for a ride. The colonel had listened with some surprise to his request, proffered just as the party was breaking up the night before, to be absent from garrison a few hours the following morning. "But we have battalion drill at 9 o'clock, Mr. Perry, and I need you there," he said. "Oh, I'll be back in time for that, sir. I wanted to be off for three hours or so before breakfast." The colonel could not help laughing. "Of course you can go—wherever you like at those hours, when you are not on

guard; but I never imagined you would want to get up so early. "Never! I would, colonel, but I've been interested in something I've heard about this ranch down the Monee, and thought I'd like to ride down and look at it. Go ahead, by all means, and see whether those lights came from there. The 'Green Dawn'—where a fellow's sword-cut slightly across the lake by showing a light in her cottage window just that way three times, and he answered by turning out the lights in his room. Of course the distance wasn't saying, when this chance there was no one here to turn down any light—Eh! what did you say?" "I beg pardon, colonel. I didn't mean to interrupt," put in a gentle voice at his elbow, while a little hand on Perry's arm gave it a sudden and vigorous squeeze, "but Capt. Lawrence has called me twice—he will not re-enter after lighting his cigar—and I must say good night."

"Oh, good night, Mrs. Lawrence, I'm sorry you go so early. We are going to reform you all in that respect as soon as we get fairly settled. Here's Perry, now, would it not play whist with me an hour yet?" "Not this night, colonel. I have promised to walk home with us" (another squeeze), "and go to bed, or to a faithful escort. Good night. We've had such a lovely evening together."

And Ned Perry, dazed, went with her to the gate, where Capt. Lawrence was awaiting them. She had barely time to murmur a few words to Perry.

"You were just on the point of telling him about the doctor's lights. I cannot forgive myself for being the means of seeing it; but keep my confidence, and keep—by all means, everybody is talking about it; it will come soon enough."

Naturally, Mr. Perry went home somewhat perturbed in spirit and all alive with conjecture as to what these things could mean. The first notes of "assembly of the trumpets"—generally known as "fringe-call"—roused him from his sleep, and by the time the men marched out to the stables he had had his plunge bath, a rigorous wash, and a chance to think over his plans before following in their tracks, dressed for his ride. The astonishment of Lieut. Parke, the junior of the troop, was something almost too deep for words when Perry came bounding to his side, and, "What on earth brings you out, Ned?" was his only effort.

"Going for a gallop—down the Monee; that's all. I haven't had a fresher for a week."

"Gait! we get exercise enough at morning drill, one would think, and our horses too. Oh!"—And Mr. Parke stopped suddenly, and flashed across him that perhaps Perry was going riding with a lady friend and the hour was selection. If so, 'twas no business of his, and remarks were uncalled for. When no momentary relief was afforded by the stable Mr. Parke was outside at the picket rope, and busily occupied in his duties, supervising the fastening of the fresh, spirited horses at the line, for the troop commander was usually attracted to the opposite sex. As a cadet he had been perpetually on the verge of dismissal because of the appalling array of demerits he could roll up against his name, and yet the very officers who had written the memoranda of his sins—omission and commission—against the regulations were men who openly said he "had the makings of one of the finest soldiers in the class." As junior second lieutenant—"plebe"—of the regiment, he had been welcomed by every man from the colonel down, and it was considered particularly rough that he should have to go to such a company as Capt. Canker's, because Canker was a man who never got along with any of his juniors; but there was something so irrepressibly frank and cordial in Perry's cheerful face when he would appear at his captain's door in the early morning and burst out with "By Jove, captain! I slept through reveille again this morning, and never got down till the stables were nearly over," that even that cross grained but honest troop commander was disarmed, and, though he threatened and reprimanded, he would never punish—would never deny his subaltern the faintest privilege; and when promotion took the captain to another regiment he bade good-by to Perry with eyes that were suspiciously wet. "Why, blow it all, what do you fellows hate Canker so for?" the youngster often said. "He ought to put me in arrest time and again, but he won't. Blamed if I don't put myself in arrest, or confine myself to the limits of the post, and do something, to cut all this going to town and hops and such things. Then I can stick to the troop like wax and get up at reveille; but if I'm out dancing till 2 or 3 in the morning it's no use, I tell you; I just can't wake up."

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go back to your feeding." And then Mr. Parke turned in some surprise, for Sergt. Gwynne, by long odds the "smartest" and most soldierly of the non-commissioned officers of the cavalry battalion, for the first time in his history seemed to have forgotten himself. Though his attitude had not changed, his face had, and a strange look was in his bright blue eyes—a look of incredulity and wonderment and trouble all combined. The lieutenant was fairly startled when, as though gathering himself together, the sergeant faintly asked: "I beg pardon, sir—had I ridden—where?" "Down to the Ranch, sergeant—that one you can just see, away down the valley."

"I know, sir; but—the name?" "Dunraven Ranch."

For an instant the sergeant stood as though in a daze, with sudden effort, saluted, faced about, and plunged into the dark recesses of the stable.

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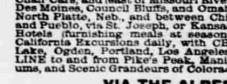
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