

DUNRAVEN RANCH.

A Story of American Frontier Life.

By CAPT. CHARLES KING, U. S. A.,

AUTHOR OF "THE COLONEL'S DAUGHTER," "FROM THE RANKS," "THE DESERTER," ETC.

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CHAPTER XI.

CHAPTER XI. "Who! Miss Maitland?" exclaimed Perry, with a sudden start and a flash of anger light in his blue eyes.

Ewen smiled quietly as he answered, "Yes, she needs exercise and wanted to come down to the gate and meet Dr. Quinn. She went on up the valley, and I wonder she is not back."

The bright light faded quickly as it came; the glad blue eyes clouded heavily. Ewen looked at the young soldier, surprised in his florid face, surprise that turned suddenly away, as though looking for his comrades of the hunt.

"I think they're coming now," said the manager, peering up the valley under the shading willows. "Yes, Won't you stop a bit?"

"Not now," was the hurried reply. "Thank you for that story; it has given me a lot to think about. I'll see you again. The last words were almost shouted back, for, urged by sudden dig of the spur, Nolan indignantly lashed his heels, then rushed in wrathful gallop towards the eastern bluffs. It was no wild pang his rider had inflicted on his pet and comrade; it was only the involuntary transmission of the shock to his own young heart—a cruel, jagged stab, that came with those thoughtless words.

"She wanted to come down to the gate and meet Dr. Quinn, and went on up the valley." He would not even look back and see her riding by that man's side.

CHAPTER XII. "USE the expression of Mr. Dana, 'Ned Perry seemed off his feed' for anger," he had pronounced the big success, despite the fact of Perry's defection—he had not even joined them at luncheon—and it was agreed that it should be repeated the first bright day after muster. That ceremony came off on Monday with due pomp and formality and much rigidity of inspection on the part of the post commander. It was because he is more content than anywhere, here Gladys' quarters, 'twas she who named it, two years ago, for her mother was a connection of the earls. But Maitland even here hates to have his name mentioned; and that is why I say he refers all business to me and keeps himself out of everything. Do you see what a weight he carries?"

Mr. Ewen had grown red with the intensity and rapidity of his talk. He removed his hat and mopped his face and brow with a big silk handkerchief, and then glanced again at Perry, who had listened with absorbed interest and who was now silently thinking it over, looking curiously at Ewen the while.

"Have I bored you half to death?" asked the Englishman, somewhat ruefully. "I never told that story before, but it has been making me feel as if I should like to tell it to you."

"Dored? No! I never was more interested in my life. I was thinking what a different sort of fellow you were from the man I met out yonder the other day. Did they never do anything to clear the matter up? In our country it never would have been allowed to rest there."

"It was too far gone; and when the boy killed himself the thing was used by all the government papers—you'd call them 'administration programs'—as a confession of judgment. When the Lancers came home there was some talk, but it was soon hushed. Maitland had shut up the old place by that time and gone no one knew where, but I read it in one of the London papers—Truth, I think—a story that two of the irregulars had quarreled with their fellows and after the war had made a tale that made a sensation in Cape Colony. They said that the young officer was a mad man; that up to midnight he had pushed on, but every scout and patrol they met warned them that thousands of Zulus were ahead, and that it was madness to try. The men began whispering among themselves, and begged the sergeant to attempt to dissuade the Lancer officer, but he refused to budge, and he began to talk, but they all refused to listen."

"At last they halted at a little stream and flatly refused to go a step further. He ordered, begged and implored. He promised heavy reward to any one of their number who would come and show him the way. Then they heard the night cries or signals of some war parties across the fields, and the sergeant and most of the men put spurs to their horses; the others followed, and they had five or six miles until they were within our patrolled lines; then they bivouacked, supposing, of course, the Lancer had followed them. But he hadn't; he never joined them all next day, and likely as not he had done his best to get through that strange country by night alone, and had tried to carry his dispatches to the detachment. They knew they must take a straight story by all the government papers—they were twelve against one when it came to evidence, as the sergeant pointed out, and so they agreed on the one that sent him to Coventry."

"Some of the Lancer officers got hold of this and swore they believed it true; but meantime the government had had little squad of niggers before they dared look round to see what had become of their prince, whom they had left to fight the gang alone. If any soul Maitland's text for a month. If any soul of his had ever been made in the campaign, disgrace, deny him, forbid him his sight, cut him off forever. And right in the midst of it all—a judgment, some people said—there came the awful news that Cornet Maitland of the Lancers was to be court-martialed for misbehavior in face of the enemy."

"Of course the old man only raged at first; said it couldn't be true; 'twas all some foul invention or ridiculous blunder; but he ran up to London and saw somebody at the Horse Guards—that's our war office, you know—and came back looking a century older and simply crushed to earth. Mrs. Cowan says they showed him the official report of a general officer who was called upon to explain why he had not sent certain troops to the relief of an advanced and threatened post, and he replied that he had sent the order by Cornet Maitland, of the Lancers; had given him an escort of a dozen men and strict injunctions to push through by night, at all hazards, though the way was beset with Zulus, and that he neither went through nor returned, but was found hiding at a kraal two days after, only twenty miles away. The escort returned, and after much cross-examination had told the story, separately and collectively, that the young officer had become utterly unnerfed towards midnight by the reports from scouting parties and others; had declared to them that it was simply madness to attempt to push through; and, though they massed a crew to a man; and, though they announced that they were staunch and ready, he refused, and ordered them to bivouac where they were for the night, and in the morning he had disappeared. They declared they supposed he had gone back to camp, and after sitting a day they returned to their quarters."

"When found at the kraal he was delirious with fever, or pretended to be, said the general, and he was brought in under arrest and the trial was proceeded. I don't know how it turned out. He was not court-martialed, but permitted to return to England. It was said he told a very different story; that he had begged them to let him have half a dozen of his own Lancers instead of the pack of irregulars they gave him; he did not trust them, and feared they would abandon him as they had the prince; but the staff officer said the order couldn't be changed—these men knew the country and all that sort of thing, you know; and there was one fellow in the Lancers who stuck to it that he believed Maitland had tried his best to get through alone. But 'twas all useless; somebody had to be held responsible, and the failure was all heaped on him."

"Meantime, there had been fury at home; old Maitland had written casting his own blame on the prince, but for all I know—and the next thing there came a message belonging was found in perfect order—his letter to the captain of the ship, the portmanteau, watch, ring, clothing, etc., just as he described in that letter—and he was no more seen. It was the conviction of all that he must have leaped overboard in the darkness when far out at sea."

"Then Mrs. Maitland bowed her head and never lifted it again. Then, all alone and flowerly rejecting anything like sympathy, old Maitland took to travel—came here to America, wandered around the world, shunning men as he would these prairie wolves; and when he had to go to England he would see no one but the attorneys and solicitors with whom he had business. Here at Dunraven he is more content than anywhere, because he is more content than anywhere, here Gladys' quarters, 'twas she who named it, two years ago, for her mother was a connection of the earls. But Maitland even here hates to have his name mentioned; and that is why I say he refers all business to me and keeps himself out of everything. Do you see what a weight he carries?"

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"How did it happen?" asked Perry. "All through his son. There had been more of them, but there was only one—Archie—when the Lancers were ordered to South Africa. He was a regular soldier, and the old man, of course, could not ask Archie to quit the service just when orders for dangerous duty came. The boy went to the Cape with his corps, and got into the thick of the Zulu war just at the time of the massacre of the Twenty-fourth at Isandlwana and the fight at Rorke's Drift. I was at home then, and all England was quivering with grief over such needless sacrifice as that of that regiment, and all ready to fall down and worship such fellows as Chard and Bromhead, who made the superb fight almost at the same time."

"They say old Maitland wanted to go himself, as volunteer or something, with Lord Chelmsford, but it couldn't be done. His father had fought at Alma and Inkerman, and his grandfather had led the Guards at Waterloo. The whole tribe were soldiers, you know; and now Archie was with the Lancers in Zululand, and the Lancers were going to wipe out the disasters of the first fights of the campaign, and Archie was to uphold the grand old fighting name and come home covered with glory. He was the heir now, and Miss Gladys was but a little girl, and his grandfather had been a soldier, and she was his housekeeper in those days, and a sort of companion, too, to Mrs. Maitland, who was very delicate. The old man was very fiery and proud and full of fierce denunciation of everything that had gone wrong in the campaign; and he offended some people by the way he condemned some officer who was a friend of theirs, and there were some who thought he talked too much, but he fairly boiled over when the news came of how the prince imperial had been abandoned by his escort, and that a British officer and a dozen men had run two miles at top speed from a beggarly little squad of niggers before they dared look round to see what had become of their prince, whom they had left to fight the gang alone. If any soul Maitland's text for a month. If any soul of his had ever been made in the campaign, disgrace, deny him, forbid him his sight, cut him off forever. And right in the midst of it all—a judgment, some people said—there came the awful news that Cornet Maitland of the Lancers was to be court-martialed for misbehavior in face of the enemy."

"Of course the old man only raged at first; said it couldn't be true; 'twas all some foul invention or ridiculous blunder; but he ran up to London and saw somebody at the Horse Guards—that's our war office, you know—and came back looking a century older and simply crushed to earth. Mrs. Cowan says they showed him the official report of a general officer who was called upon to explain why he had not sent certain troops to the relief of an advanced and threatened post, and he replied that he had sent the order by Cornet Maitland, of the Lancers; had given him an escort of a dozen men and strict injunctions to push through by night, at all hazards, though the way was beset with Zulus, and that he neither went through nor returned, but was found hiding at a kraal two days after, only twenty miles away. The escort returned, and after much cross-examination had told the story, separately and collectively, that the young officer had become utterly unnerfed towards midnight by the reports from scouting parties and others; had declared to them that it was simply madness to attempt to push through; and, though they massed a crew to a man; and, though they announced that they were staunch and ready, he refused, and ordered them to bivouac where they were for the night, and in the morning he had disappeared. They declared they supposed he had gone back to camp, and after sitting a day they returned to their quarters."

"When found at the kraal he was delirious with fever, or pretended to be, said the general, and he was brought in under arrest and the trial was proceeded. I don't know how it turned out. He was not court-martialed, but permitted to return to England. It was said he told a very different story; that he had begged them to let him have half a dozen of his own Lancers instead of the pack of irregulars they gave him; he did not trust them, and feared they would abandon him as they had the prince; but the staff officer said the order couldn't be changed—these men knew the country and all that sort of thing, you know; and there was one fellow in the Lancers who stuck to it that he believed Maitland had tried his best to get through alone. But 'twas all useless; somebody had to be held responsible, and the failure was all heaped on him."

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