TWO SOLDIERS

A Thrilling Army Romance of the Western Frontier.

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CHAPTER I.

Two missives had reached him.

The rain was plashing dismally on the grimy window sill and over the awning of the shops below. The street cars went tingling 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 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 barroom 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 smokestacks 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. Capt. 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 reread 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 on 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 utmost 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 afterward, 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 was one or two who never lost an opportunity of giving the lieutenant a feline and not ineffective clawing whenever 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 retransported 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 well—to cut in and win that innocent child's heart, as he certainly did do? 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 Fletcher and her lover during that brief but volcanic romance. Certain it is, however, that it was in her house and in a certain little nook off the sitting room that their long, delicious meetings occurred almost daily, the lady of the house being busy about the dining room, the kitchen, or the chambers overhead, and Emily, who was a good girl, but densely uninteresting, strumming on the piano or yawning over a book at the front window.

"What Mr. Lane needs is a gentle, modest, domestic little woman who will make his home a restful, peaceful refuge always," said Mrs. Judson; and, inferentially, Emmy was the gentle and modest creature who was destined so to bless him. The invitations to tea, the lures by which he was induced to become Emmy's escort to all the hops and dances, redoubled themselves after Miss Fletcher's departure; but it was all in vain. Without feeling any particular affinity for Mr. Lane, Emmy stood ready to say "Yes" whensoever he should ask; but weeks went on, he never seemed to draw nearer the subject, and just as Mrs. Judson had determined to resort to heroic measures and point out that his attentions to Emmy had excited the remark of the entire garrison, and that the poor child was herself looking wan and strange, there was a stage robbery not twenty miles from the post. Lane, with fifteen troopers, was sent in pursuit of the desperadoes, and captured them, after a sharp fight, ninety miles up the river and near the little infantry cantonment at the Indian reservation; and thither the lieutenant was carried, with a bullet through his thigh. By the time he was well enough to ride, the regiment was again in the field on Indian campaign, and for six months he never saw Fort Curtis again. When he did Emmy had gone home, and Mrs. Judson's politeness was something awful.

Lane was out with the Eleventh again in three more sharp and severe campaigns, received an ugly bullet wound through the left shoulder in the memorable chase after Chief Joseph, was quartermaster of his regiment a year after that episode, then adjutant, and finally was given the recruiting detail as he neared the top of the list of first lieutenants, and for the first time in fifteen years found himself once more among the friends of his youth—and still a bachelor.

Securing pleasant quarters in the adjoining street Mr. Lane speedily made himself known at the club to which he had been paying his moderate annual dues without having seen anything of it but its bills for years past, yet never knowing just when he might want to drop in. Then he proceeded after office hours to hunt up old chums, and in the course of the first week after his arrival he had found almost all of them. Bailey, who sat next to him in school, was now a prominent and prosperous lawyer. Terry, who sat just behind him, and occasionally inserted crooked pins in a convenient crack in his chair, was thriving in the iron business.

Warden had made a fortune "on 'change," and was one of the leading brokers and commission merchants of the metropolis. He had always liked Warden; they lived close together, and used to walk to and from school with each other almost every day. Mr. Lane had started on his quest with a feeling akin to enthusiasm. Calm and reticent and retiring as he generally was, he felt a glow of delight at the prospect of once more meeting "the old crowd;" but that evening he returned to his rooms with a distinct sense of disappointment. Bailey had jumped up and shaken hands with much effusion of manner, and had "my-dear-fellow-ed" him for a minute or two, and then, "Now, where are you stopping? I'll be round to look you up the very first evening I can get away, and—of course we'll have you at the house;" but Lane clearly saw he was eager to get back to his desk, and so took his leave. Terry did not know him at all until he began to laugh, and then he blandly inquired what he'd been doing with himself all these years. But the man who rasped him from top to toe was Warden. Business hours were over, and their meeting occurred at the club. Two minutes after they had shaken hands Warden was standing with his back to the log fire, his thumbs in the arm holes of his waistcoat, tilting on his toes, his head well back, and most affably and distinctly patronizing him.

"Well, Fred, you're still in the army, are you?" he asked.

"Still in the army, Warden."

"Well, what on earth do you find to do with yourself out there? How do you manage to kill time?"

"Time never hung heavily on my hands. It often happened that there wasn't half enough for all we had to do."

"You don't tell me! Why, I supposed that about all you did was to drink and play poker."

"Not an unusual idea, I find, Warden, but a very unjust one."

"Oh, yes, I know, of course, you have some Indian fighting to do once in a while, but that probably amounts to very little. I mean when you're in permanent camp or garrison. I should think a man of your temperament would just stagnate in such a life. I wonder you hadn't resigned years ago and come here and made a name for yourself."

"The life has been rather more brisk than you imagine," he answered, with a quiet smile, "and I have grown very fond of my profession. But you speak of making a name for myself. Now, in what would that have consisted?"

"Oh, well, of course, if you really like the army and living in a desert and that sort of thing, I've nothing to say," said Warden; "but it always struck me as such a—such a—well, Fred, such a wasted life, all very well for fellows who hadn't brains or energy enough to achieve success in the real battle of life" (and here Warden was "swelling visibly"), "but not at all the thing for a man of your ability. We all conceded at school that you were head and shoulders above the rest of us. We were talking of it some years ago in this very room; there'd been something about you in the papers—some general or other had mentioned you in a report. Let's see; didn't you get wounded, or something, chasing some Indians?" Lane replied that he believed that "something like that had happened," but begged his friend to go on; and Warden proceeded to further expound his views:

"Now, you might have resigned years ago, taken hold of your father's old business and made a fortune. There's been a perfect boom in railroad iron and every other kind of iron since that panic of '73. Look at Terry; he is rolling in money—one of our most substantial men; and you know he was a mere drone at school. Why, Fred, if your father could have held on six months longer he'd have been the richest man in town today. It always seemed to me that he made such a mistake in not getting his friends to help him tide things over."

"You probably are not aware," was the reply, "that he went to friend after friend—so called—and that it was their failure or refusal to help that broke him down. The most active man in pushing him to the wall, I am told, was Terry's father, who had formerly been his chief clerk."

"Well," answered Warden, in some little confusion, for this and other matters in connection with the failure of Samuel Lane & Co., years before, were now suddenly recalled to mind, "that's probably true. Business is business, you know, and those were tough times in the money market. Still, you could have come back here when you left West Point, and built up that concern again, and been a big man today—had your own establishment here, married some rich girl—you're not married, are you?"

Lane shook his head.

"On the other hand, then, you've been fooling away all this time in the army, and what have you got to show for it?"

"Nothing—to speak of," was the half whimsical, half serious answer.

"Well, there! Now don't you see? That's just what I'm driving at. You've thrown away your opportunities—. 'All right, Strong; I'll be with you in a minute,'" he called to a man who was signaling to him from the stairway. "Come in and see us, Fred. Come and dine with us, any day. We're always ready for friends who drop in. I want you to meet Mrs. Warden and see my house. Now excuse me, will you? I have to take a hand at whist." And so away went Warden, leaving Lane to walk homeward and think over the experiences of the day.

He had "made a name for himself" that was well known from the Yellowstone to the Colorado. Thrice had that name been sent to the president with the recommendation of his department commander for brevets for conspicuous and gallant conduct in action against hostile Indians. The Pacific coast had made him welcome. Busy San Francisco had found time to read The Alta's and The Chronicle's correspondence from the scene of hostilities, and cordially shook hands with the young officer who had been so prominent in more than one campaign. Santa Fe and San Antonio, Denver, Cheyenne and Miles City were points where he could not go without meeting "troops of friends." It was only when he got back to his old home in the east that the lieutenant found his name associated only with his father's failure, and that his years of honorable service conveyed no interest to the friends of his youth. "Money makes the mare go," said Mr. Warden, in a subsequent conversation; and money, it seems, was what he meant in telling Lane he should have come home and "made a name for himself."

Lane had been on duty a year in the city when a rumor began to circulate to the effect that investments of his in mining stocks had brought him large returns, and men at the club and matronly women at the few parties he attended began asking significant questions, which now it pleased him to parry rather than answer directly. His twelve months' experiences in society had developed in him a somewhat sardonic vein of humor and made him, if anything, more reticent than before. And then—then all of a sudden there came over the spirit of his dream a marked and wondrous change. He no longer declined invitations to balls, parties or dinners when he knew that certain persons were to be present. Mabel Vincent had just returned from a year's tour abroad, and Lieut. Fred Lane had fallen in love at first sight.

It was a note from her that made even that dingy old office, on this most dismal of days, fairly glow and shine with a radiance of hope, with a halo of joy and gladness such as his lonely life had never known before. The very first time he ever saw himself addressed as Capt. Fred Lane, Eleventh cavalry, was in her dainty hand. He turned his chair to the window to read once again the precious words, but there entered, dripping, a Western Union messenger with a telegram.

Tearing it open, Lane read these words: "All join in congratulations on your promotion and in wonderment at the colonel's selection of your successor. Noel is named."

Lane gave a long whistle of amazement. "Of all men in the regiment!" he exclaimed. "Who would have thought of Gordon Noel?"

CHAPTER II.

"Come up, crowd! come up everybody! It's champagne today."

The colonel of the Eleventh cavalry was a gentleman who had some peculiarities of temperament and disposition. This fact is not cited as a thing at all unusual, for the unbiased testimony of the subalterns and even the troop commanders of every cavalry regiment in the service would go far toward establishing the fact that all colonels of cavalry are similarly afflicted. One of the salient peculiarities of the commanding officer of the Eleventh was a conviction that nothing went smoothly in the regiment unless the captains were all on duty with their companies; for, while at any time Col. Riggs would approve an application for a lieutenant's leave of absence, it was worse than pulling teeth to get him to do likewise for a gentleman with the double bars on his shoulder. "Confound the man!" growled Capt. Greene, "here I've been seven years with my troop, saving up for a six months' leave, and the old rip disapproves it! What on earth can a fellow say?"

"You didn't go about it right, Greeney," was the calm rejoinder of a comrade who had been similarly "cut" the year previous. "You should have laid siege to him through madam a month or so. What she says as to who goes on leave and who doesn't is law at headquarters, and I know it. Now, you watch Noel. That fellow is wiser in his generation than all the rest of us put together. It isn't six months since he got back from his staff detail, and see how constant he is in his attentions to the old lady. Now, I'll bet you anything you like the next plum that tumbles into the regiment will go to his maw and nobody else's."

"Riggs wouldn't have the face to give anything to Noel—in the way of detached duty, I mean. I heard him say when 'Gordy' was coming back to the regiment that he wished he had the power to transfer subs from troop to troop; he'd put Noel with the most exacting captain he knew and see if he couldn't get a little square service out of the fellow."

"That's all right, Greene. That's what he said six months ago, before Noel was really back, and before he had begun doing the devoted to her ladyship at headquarters. Riggs wouldn't say so now—much less do it. She wouldn't let him, comrade mine; and you know it."

"Noel has been doing first rate since he got back, Jim," said Capt. Greene, after a pause.

"Oh, Noel's no bad soldier in garrison—at drill or parade. It's field work and scouting that knocks him endwise; and if there's an Indian within a hundred miles—Well, you know as much as I do on that subject."

Greene somewhat gloomily nodded assent, and his companion, being wound up for the day, plunged ahead with his remarks:

"Now, I'm just putting this and that together, Greene, and I'll make you a bet. Riggs has managed things ever since he has been colonel so that a lieutenant is ordered detached for recruiting service and never a captain. It won't be long before Lane gets his promotion; and I'll bet you even before he gets it Riggs will have his letter skimming to Washington begging his immediate recall and nominating a sub to take his place. I'll give you odds on that; and I'll bet you even that the sub he names will be Gordy Noel."

But, though he scouted the idea, Greene would not bet, for at that instant the club room was invaded by a rush of young officers just returning from target practice, and the jolliest laugh, the most all pervading voice the cheeriest personality of the set were those of the gentleman whose name Capt. Jim Rawlins had just spoken.

"What you going to have, fellows?" he called. "Here, Billy, old man, put up that spelter; I steered the gang in here, and it's my treat. Don't go, Forbes; come back, old fellow, and join us. Captain, what shall it be? Say, you all know Dick Cassidy of the Seventh. I heard such a good rig on him this morning. I got a letter from Tommy Craig, who's on duty at the war department, and he told me that Dick was there trying to get one of these blasted college details. What d'ye suppose a cavalryman wants to leave his regiment for to take a thing like that?"

"Perhaps his health is impaired, Noel," said Wharton, with a humorous twinkle in his handsome eyes. "Even cavalrymen have been known to have to quit their beloved profession on that account, and get something soft in the east for a year or so."

The color mounted to Noel's cheeks, but he gave no other sign of understanding the shaft as aimed at him. Promptly and loudly as ever he spoke out:

"Oh, of course, if he's used up in service and has to go in to recuperate, all well and good; but I always supposed Cassidy was a stalwart in point of health and constitution. Who's going to the doctor's to-night? you, Jack?"

Jack—otherwise Lieut. John Tracy—shook his head as he whiffed at the cigarette he had just lighted, and then stretched forth his hand for the foaming glass of beer which the attendant brought him, but vouchsafed no verbal reply. Lee and Martin edged over to where the two captains were playing their inevitable game of seven up. Two of the juniors—young second lieutenants—despite the extreme cordiality of Noel's invitation, begged to be excused, as they did not care to drink anything—even a lemonade; and no sooner had the party finished their modest potation than there was a general move. Wallace and Hearn went into the billiard room; Wharton and Lee started in the direction of their quarters; and presently Mr. Noel was the only man in the clubroom without an occupation of some kind or a comrade to talk to.

Now, why should this have been the case? Noel's whole manner was overflowing with jollity and kindliness; his eyes beamed and sparkled as he looked from one man to the other; he hailed each in turn by his Christian name and in tones of most cordial friendship; he chatted and laughed and had comical anecdotes to tell the party; he was a tall, stylish, fine looking fellow, with expressive dark eyes and wavy dark brown hair; his mustache was the secret envy of more than half of his associates; his figure was really elegant in its grace and suppleness; his uniforms fitted him like a glove, and were invariably of Hatfield's choicest handiwork. Appearances were with him in every sense of the word, and yet there was some reason why his society was politely but positively shunned by several of his brother officers and "cultivated" by none.

It was only a few years after the great war when Gordon Noel joined the Eleventh from civil life. He came of an old and influential family, and was welcomed in the regiment as an acquisition. He made friends rapidly, and was for two or three years as popular a youngster as there was in the service. Then the troop to which he was attached was ordered to the plains, via Leavenworth. It was a long journey by boat, and by the time they reached the old frontier city orders and telegrams were awaiting them, one of which, apparently to Mr. Noel's great surprise, detached him from his company and directed him to report for temporary duty at the war department in the city of Washington. He was there eighteen months, during which time his regiment had some sharp battles with the Cheyennes and Kiowas in Kansas and the Indian Territory. Then a new secretary of war gave ear to the oft repeated appeals of the colonel of the Eleventh to have Mr. Noel and one or two other detached gentlemen returned to duty with their respective companies, and just as they were moving to the Pacific coast the absentees reported for duty and went along. At Vancouver and Walla Walla Noel seemed to regain by his joviality and good fellowship what he had lost in the year and a half of his absence, though there were out and out soldiers in the Eleventh who said that the man who would stay on "fancy duty" in Washington or anywhere else while his comrades were in the midst of a stirring campaign against hostile Indians couldn't be of the right sort.

Up in Oregon the Modoc troubles soon began, and several troops were sent southward from their stations scouting. There were several little skirmishes between the various detachments and the agile Indians, with no great loss on either side; but when "Capt. Jack" retired to the natural fastness of the lava beds serious work began, and here Mr. Noel was found to be too ill to take part in the campaign, and was sent in to San Francisco to recuperate. The short but bloody war was brought to a close without his having taken part in any of its actions, but he rejoined after a delightful convalescence in San Francisco (where it was understood that he had broken down only after riding night and day and all alone some 300 miles through the wilderness with orders to a battalion of his regiment that was urgently needed at the front), and was able to talk very glibly of what had occurred down in the Klamath Lake country. Then came his promotion to a first lieutenancy, and, as luck would have it, to a troop stationed at the Presidio.

For three months he was the gayest of the gay, the life of parties of every kind both in town and in garrison; he was in exuberant health and spirits; he danced night after night and was the most popular partner ever welcomed in the parlors of hospitable San Francisco. And then all of a sudden there came tidings of an outbreak among the Arizona Apaches of so formidable a character that the division commander decided to send his Presidio troopers to re-enforce the one regiment that was trying to cover a whole territory. There was pathetic parting, with no end of lamentation, when Mr. Noel was spirited away with his lynx eyed captain; but they need not have worried—those fair dames and damsels; not a hair of his handsome head was in danger, for the —th had grappled with and throttled their foes before the detachment from the Eleventh were fairly in the territory, and the latter were soon ordered to return and to bring with them, as prisoners to be confined at Alcatraz, the leaders of the outbreak, who would be turned over to them by the —th. To hear Noel tell of these fierce captives afterward was somewhat confusing, as, from his account, it would appear that they had been taken in hand to hand conflict by himself and a small detachment of his own troop; but these were stories told only to over credulous friends.

The Eleventh came eastward across the Rockies in time to participate in the great campaign against the Sioux in '76, and was on the Yellowstone when Custer and his favorite companies were being wiped out of existence on the Little Horn. The news of that tragedy made many a heart sick, and Mr. Noel was so much affected that when his comrades started to make a night ride to the front to join what was left of the Seventh he was left behind, ostensibly to sleep off a violent headache. He promised to ride after and catch them next day, but, through some error, got aboard Gen. Terry's steamer, the Far West, and made himself so useful looking after the wounded that the surgeon in charge was grateful, and, knowing nothing of his antecedents, gave him a certificate on which he based an application for leave on account of sickness, and went to Bismarck with the wounded, and thence to the distant east, where he thrilled clubs and dinner tables with graphic accounts of the Custer battle and how we got up just in time to save the remnant of the Seventh.

The Eleventh fought all through the campaign of '76 and the chase after Chief Joseph in '77, but Noel was again on temporary duty at the war department, and there he stayed until '78, by which time various officials had become acquainted with some of the facts in the case. The Eleventh "cold shouldered" him for a while after he got back; but they happened to be now in a region where there were no "hostiles," and where hops, germans, theatricals, tableaux and entertainments of all kinds were the rage. No other man could be half so useful to the ladies as Gordon Noel. He had just come from Washington and knew everything; and when they took him up and made much of him there was no use for the men to stand aloof; they had to take him up, too.

Lane was adjutant of the regiment at this time; and he, having seen every report and letter with reference to Mr. Noel that had been filed in the office, would hardly speak to him at all except when on duty, and this feeling was intensified when, a year or so later, they were suddenly hurried to Arizona on account of a wild dash of the Chiricahuas, and as the different companies took the field and hastened in the pursuit Mr. Noel was afflicted with a rheumatic fever of such alarming character that the youthful "contract" surgeon who had accompanied his troop held him back at the railway and speedily sent him east on a three months' sick leave, which family influence soon made six. And this was about the record and reputation that Mr. Noel had succeeded in making when Capt. Rawlins was ready to bet Capt. Greene that, despite it all, the regimental Adonis would get the recruiting detail, vice Lane, for everybody knew Fred Lane so well as to prophesy that he would apply to be relieved and ordered to rejoin his regiment, and everybody was eager to see him take hold of poor old Curran's troop, for if anybody could "straighten it out" Lane could.

The news that Noel was named by the colonel caused a sensation at regimental headquarters which the Eleventh will probably not soon forget. "Old Riggs" had become the commander of the regiment after it seemed that the Indian wars were over and done with, and, thanks to our peculiar system of promotion, was now at the head of an organization with which he had never served as subaltern, captain or junior field officer. Discipline forbade saying anything to his face—for which the colonel was devoutly thankful—but everybody said to everybody else that it was all Mrs. Riggs' doing, a fact which the colonel very well knew.

So did Noel, though he rushed into the club room apparently overwhelmed with amazement and delight.

"I supposed of course it would be Follansbee. I never dreamed he would give it to me. Come up, crowd! come up, everybody! It's champagne today!" he jovially shouted; and there were men who could not bear to snub him openly. Nothing had really ever been proved against him; why should they judge him? But there were several who declined, alleging one excuse or another; and even those who drank with him did so while applauding Wharton's toast:

"Well, Noel, here's to you! It ought to have been Follansbee; but I wish you the joy of it."

CHAPTER III.

"I don't know how to tell you how I regret having to say 'No,' Mr. Lane."

Never before had Fred Lane known the sensation of being reluctant to rejoin his regiment. When the colonel wrote a personal letter to him some eight or ten weeks previous, telling him that Curran would almost surely get the next vacancy on the retired list and that he would expect his old adjutant to come back to them at once and restore efficiency and discipline to Troop D, Mr. Lane replied with the utmost readiness; but this was before Mabel Vincent came into his life and changed its whole current. How much and how devotedly he loved her Lane himself never realized until the day of his promotion reached him, and with it the news that his successor was already designated. He knew that within the week he might expect orders from the war department to join his troop at Fort Graham as soon as he had turned over his funds and property to the officer designated to relieve him; he knew Noel so well as to feel assured that he would not wait for the arrival of formal orders, but, if the colonel would permit, would start the instant he received telegraphic notification from Washington that "Old Riggs'" nomination had been approved. "This is Wednesday," he mused; "and by a week from today I can count on his being here; and in ten days I must go."

There was a large party that night, and, fully a week before, he had asked that he might have the honor of being Miss Vincent's escort. It was with great disappointment that he received her answer, which was spoken, however, in a tone of such sorrow that poor Lane felt that the barbs, at least, of the arrow had been removed.

"I don't know how to tell you how I regret having to say 'No,' Mr. Lane," she said, and there was a tremor in her voice and a little quiver at the corners of her pretty mouth. "I have almost felt confident that you were going to ask me—is that a very bold thing to say?—for you have been so—so kind to me since our first meeting, and indeed I wanted in some way to let you know that there were other arrangements already made. But how could I say anything? Mr. Rossiter, the eldest son of father's former partner, comes to pay us a visit of four or five days before he goes abroad again. And he is a great friend of the Chiltons, and, being our guest, he goes with me. Indeed, I'm very sorry, Mr. Lane, if you are disappointed."

Fred, of course, begged that she should give herself no uneasiness. There was no other girl whom he had thought of taking. Mr. Rossiter was very much to be envied, and he would like to call and pay his respects to that gentleman when he arrived. "By all means do," said Miss Vincent; and, if not asking too much, would Mr. Lane get him a card at the club? Brother Rex was away, or she wouldn't trouble him. But Lane was delighted to be troubled. Anything she asked—any service he could render her—he flew with untold eagerness to accomplish; and, though properly jealous of the coming man—this Mr. Rossiter, of whom he had never before heard mention—he was eager to meet and entertain him. The gentleman was to arrive on Monday, and Lane spent a delightful evening at the Vincents', wondering why he hadn't come. Tuesday would surely bring him, or an explanation, said Miss Mabel; and on Tuesday Lane was prompt to call, and glad to spend another long evening at the hospitable old homestead, and stoutly did he hold his ground through three successive relays of visitors, encouraged to do so by a certain look in his lady's bright eyes that spoke volumes to his throbbing heart, and that very next morning at the club he found her dainty missive on his breakfast table.

How early she must have risen to write it!—and to have seen the announcement of his promotion in the Washington dispatches! True, he remembered that it was frequently her pleasure to be up betimes to give her father his coffee; for Vincent pere was a business man of the old school, who liked to begin early in the day. Of course he had seen the name in the Washington news and had read the paragraph to her; that was the way to account for it. But her note was a joy to him in its sweet, half shy, half confidential wording. She merely wrote to say that Mr. Rossiter had wired that he would be detained in New York until the end of the week; and now, if Capt. Lane had really made no engagement, she would be glad indeed if he cared to renew the invitation which with such regret she was compelled a week ago to decline. Lane totally forgot his breakfast in his haste to rush to the writing room and send her a reply.

All "The Queen City" had been quick to see or hear of his "sudden smite" and consequent devotion to Mabel Vincent, and great was the speculation as to the probable result.

"How can she encourage him as she does? What can she see in that solemn prig?" indignantly demanded Miss Fanny Holton, who had shown a marked interest in Mr. Lane during his first six months in society, and had danced with him all through the season. "He is one of the forlornest, stupidest men I ever knew—utterly unlike what I supposed a cavalry officer to be."

"And yet, Fanny dear, you were very much taken up with him the first winter—last year, I mean," was the reply of her most devoted and intimate friend.

"What an outrageous fib! I wasn't, and if I was it was because I wanted to draw him out—do something to enliven him. Of course I danced with him a great deal. There isn't a better dancer in town, and you know it, Maud; you've said so yourself time and again."

"Well, you didn't draw him out—nor on. But the moment he sees Mabel Vincent he falls heels over head in love with her. Why, I never saw a man whose every look and word so utterly 'gave him away,'" was Miss Maud's characteristic and slangy reply. "And it's my belief she'll take him, too. She likes him well, and she says he knows more than any other man she has ever met.

"He has money, too, and can resign and live here if she wants him to," went on Miss Maud after a pause which, oddly enough, her friend had not taken advantage of.

"You don't know anything about what Mabel Vincent will or won't do, Maud. I've known her years longer than you have, and, though I'm awfully fond of her, and wouldn't have this repeated for the world—and you must swear never to repeat it to anybody—I know beg so well that I can say she doesn't know her own mind now and would change it in less than six months if she did. She is as fickle in love as in her friendships; and you can't have forgotten how inseparable you and she were for three months at Mme. Hoffman's, and then how she fastened on Katherine Ward. I don't care a snap of my finger whom Mr. Lane chooses to fall in love with, but if it's Mabel Vincent he'd better insist on a short engagement and stand guard over her with his sword in the meantime. It's 'out of sight out of mind' with her, and has been ever since she was 4 years old."

And so in the smoking room at the club and in the feminine cliques and coteries in society the probability of Mabel Vincent's accepting Capt. Lane was a matter of frequent discussion. But of all this chit-chat and speculation Capt. Lane stood in profound ignorance as he entered his dark office that drenching Wednesday morning with her precious note in his waistcoat pocket. He neither knew nor cared what old Vincent was worth; all he wanted was Mabel's own sweet self, for he loved her with his whole heart and soul, with all the strength and devotion of his deep and loyal nature. He could hardly control his voice so as to speak in the conventional official tone to the sergeant in charge as the latter saluted him at the doorway and made the customary report of the presence of the detachment. Lane stepped into his little dressing room and quickly appeared in his neat fatigue uniform. There wasn't a ghost of a chance of would be recruits wandering in that day; but he was a stickler for discipline. He required his men to be always in their appropriate uniform, and never neglected wearing his own while in the office; yet in all the Queen City no one but his little party, the applicants for enlistment and the few citizens who came in on business had ever seen him except in civilian dress.

"These reports and returns all go in tomorrow, I believe?" said Lane to his sergeant.

"They do, sir."

"Well, will you take them in to the clerk again," said Lane, blushing vividly, "and tell him to alter that 'first lieutenant' to 'captain' wherever it occurs? The—official notification is just here," he added, almost apologetically.

"Sure I'm glad to hear it, sir. All the men will be glad, sir, and I'm proud to think that I was the first one to congratulate the captain today," was the sergeant's delighted answer. "I'll call Taintor in at once."

But Lane was blissfully thinking of the little note, now transferred to the breast pocket of his uniform blouse, and of how not his honest old sergeant but sweet Mabel Vincent was the first to hail him by his new title, and in thinking of the note and of her he failed to notice that, so far from coming at once, it was fully ten or fifteen minutes before Taintor, the clerk, put in an appearance, and when he did that his face was ashen gray and his hand shook as though with palsy.

"The sergeant will tell you what is to be done with the papers, Taintor," said Lane, conscious that he was blushing again, and consequently striving to appear engrossed in the morning paper. The man picked them up one after another and without a word; he dropped one to the floor in his nervousness, but made a quick dive for it, and then for the door, as though fearful of detection. He hurried through the room in which the sergeant and one or two men were seated, and, reaching his big desk at a rear window, where he was out of sight, dropped the papers on the floor and buried his face in his shaking hands.

A few minutes later the sergeant, coming into the little cubby hole of a room in which Taintor had preferred to do his work, found him with his arms on the desk and his face hidden in them, and the soldier clerk was quivering and twitching from head to foot.

"What's the matter with you, Taintor?" growled the old soldier, "Didn't you promise me you'd quit drinking?"

The face that looked up into his was ghastly.

"It isn't drink, sergeant," moaned the man. "At least, I haven't exceeded for a month. I've got a chill—an ague of some kind. Just let me run down to the drug store and get some quinine—with perhaps a little brandy. Then I can do this work. Do, sergeant. I won't abuse your kindness."

"Well, go, then," was the reluctant answer; "but get back quick. And only one drink, mind you."

Taintor seized his cap and fairly tottered through the adjoining room to the stairway, down which he plunged madly, and, heedless of the pelting rain, darted across the street to the gas lighted barroom.

"There's something worse than either whisky or ague back of this," muttered the veteran sergeant, "and I could swear to it."

Continued next Saturday

The Bill Poster's Revenge.

An amusing scene happened near Seventeenth and Spruce streets Wednesday night. A bill poster, with brush and pail of paste, was walking calmly along when he was accosted by a party of young toughs who didn't like his appearance. The poster bore the sarcastic comments in silence, which quietness so exasperated one ruffian that he jostled against the man of peace. This was enough; forbearance had ceased to be a virtue, and setting down his pail he dipped the long handled brush in it and proceeded to cover his tormentor with the vile, ill smelling stuff. From the crown of his head to the sole of his foot the tough was deftly smeared, and yelled to his companions to help him. This they were about to do when by some mistake a policeman hove in sight and the fun ceased. The policeman evidently had seen the entire affair, for he offered to put the sticky tough under arrest, though he showed no desire to touch him; but the bill poster said he guessed his antagonist was sufficiently punished, and indeed he seemed so, for with one eye stuck tight, hair plastered and clothes ruined the tough was a sad spectacle.—Philadelphia Times.

Color in the Dining Room.

The abominable fashion of discarding the white tablecloth altogether in favor of red or other colored silk is distinctly Yankee. In New York colored entertainments—"pink teas," "blue luncheons," etc.—are very much in fashion. Not only the service and the decorations but the dresses of the guests are supposed to reproduce the dominant note of color decided upon by the hostess, who is doubtless influenced in her choice more by the consideration of what suits her complexion than by that of what will be becoming to her visitors.

An English lady, a victim to this queer mania, gave a "red luncheon" some months ago, the foundation of which was the bare mahogany table, upon which the meal was served without a cloth—in truth, a chilly and comfortless innovation.—Cornhill Magazine.

HE COULD NOT HELP IT.

CAPT. KING, THE BRAVE SOLDIER WHO WAS FORCED TO BE A NOVELIST.

His Interesting Life and How His Stories Made Him Famous—How He Looks, Dresses and Works—The Romance of His Life.

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The story of Capt. Charles King's eventful life reads more like a work of romantic fiction than a plain statement of every day facts. Capt. King's name has become as familiar as a household word to readers of serial and magazine literature the past few years, and he is today one of the best known and most widely read authors in America. The demand for his stories is so great that no less than six novels are now being printed in as many magazines and syndicates, besides several other important new works, and he has enough orders ahead to keep him busy every hour of the day for the next two years.

Capt. King has been writing stories of love and war steadily for the past six or eight years, and in that time he has turned out an incredibly large number of novels, and what is still more remarkable, they are all good ones. Capt. King is a soldier by instinct and profession, a born ruler of men, but the receipt of a savage bullet and the appearance of one or two military stories from his pen combined to force him, somewhat reluctantly, into the field of literature. The demand for his stories gradually became so great that he has been compelled to abandon everything else and become a professional novelist.

Capt. Charles King is a resident of Milwaukee. He lives in a pretty little home on Prospect avenue, surrounded by his happy little family—a wife and several children. He is 46 years of age, but appears much younger. He is small of stature, light and graceful, a blonde, with blue eyes and a handsome, intelligent face. Being near sighted he constantly wears glasses. Excepting a mustache his face is clean shaven. He is fond of society, dresses faultlessly and like a true military man is erect and dignified, keen of speech and quick at repartee. When not wearing his uniform he occasionally affects dress of a very striking kind. The portrait herewith given shows him in a suit of spotless white cloth in which he occasionally appears during the summer months.

CAPT. KING, AUTHOR OF "TWO SOLDIERS."

Capt. King first tried his prentice hand at writing when a subaltern of artillery, just after the war, but not with pecuniary success, if any other. He found [illegible] Reconstruction duty in the south, he began "Kitty's Conquest," and tried several publishers with it. No one wanted it, and he pitched the M