

THE BATTLE WON.

CHAPTER XL.

A RACE FOR A LIFE.

It was done. The forms were all duly observed; and Vanessa Grahame was legally married to Richard Anderson, Lord Carickbairn, at the registry office of East Chelsea, before the registrar, and in the presence of his clerk and two witnesses—John Cummings and Maud Redmond.

"That's a queer lot," said the registrar, returning to the inner office after closing the door on the marriage party. "What do you make of 'em?"

"Something wrong going on there."

"That's my opinion."

"Not one of 'em looked quite right. Did you notice the bride?"

"She looked as white as a ghost—never smiled once; I saw that."

"I mean, when she sat down to sign her name, she stopped for quite half a minute with the pen in her hand, with a kind of wild look in her face as if she couldn't bring herself to do it. Did you see it?"

"No; the man fixed me. There was a rum look in his face if you like—a hungry look, and his eyes all puffed up and blood-shot."

"Drink, I suppose."

"Either he'd been drinking, or else he'd just risen from a sick-bed. He could hardly walk across the office, and that parson fellow, Cummings, actually had to tell him how to spell his own name. Look at his signature."

"Hum! I thought I heard one of them call him Lord Carickbairn, or something like that."

"I shouldn't be surprised. 26 Paton street. Is that all right?"

"Oh, he's had lodgings there three weeks for the sake of the notice, I expect?"

The registrar looked at the register a minute in silence, and then said:

"I tell you what I think: this is a put-up job. Anderson is some young swell with a lot of money—a lord as likely as not—and a dipsomaniac, I should say; and the young girl has been led on to marry him by the fat woman and the parson who stand in to share the plunder. I don't like the look of either of them—too managing."

"They looked anxious enough till it was all over, and then they seemed to have a load off their mind. How anxious they were to get off, too?"

"They wouldn't have been married here—a young couple of that kind—if it had been all right, you may be sure. However, that's not my affair."

"They're a queer lot, anyhow."

The "queer lot" went to Sloane Square Station in the cab which had brought them from Regent Street to the registry office. A train was leaving the platform as they descended the stairs; another was due in seven minutes. With his arm linked in Nessa's, Carickbairn tottered to a seat, and sat down. She, too, thought that he had been drinking; but overcoming her instinctive repugnance, she seated herself by his side, with the firm resolve to do her duty by the man she had taken for her husband.

With a bent head and downcast eyes summoning her fortitude, and striving, with all the strong purpose of her earnest disposition, to do what was right; he holding her arm with feverish energy, and casting his furtive glance from her to Cummings, who was walking with Mrs. Redmond at a little distance apart.

"I am your wife, now," Nessa said in a low tone, still looking down, "and I will try to make you well and strong and happy."

"Yes! yes!" he answered, quickly, scarcely above a whisper; "I shall be strong enough to-morrow; strong enough when we get away from him." He nodded toward Cummings, and tightened his hold upon her arm.

Cummings, walking away from them, carried a small Gladstone bag in one hand, and the tickets he had procured at the booking office in the other.

"Take these tickets," said he, "and I'll give you the money for the others."

Mrs. Redmond took the tickets, and finding but three, said, in quick alarm—

"You're coming too."

"No, I shall quit you here."

"What, and leave me to go on alone with them?"

"Yes; you'll get out at Blackfriars. It's only a stone's throw to St. Paul's station. You can take a growler to the terminus at Holborn Viaduct if you prefer it. There's sure to be a continental train at about six."

"You'll have to come with us. I won't do it alone."

"You must. It's nearly four. I shall have to meet Hexham at Euston."

"What for?"

"To put him off the scent."

"Rubbish. I'm not going to trust myself for a couple of hours with that fellow."

"Why, he may break out and do it in the carriage before we get to Blackfriars."

"Nonsense. You can see for yourself that he's as helpless as a baby. Besides, he's reasonable enough now, and more cunning than the pair of us. He knows that he will have her all to himself in a few hours, and he'll wait his opportunity."

"You can say what you like, I won't trust him. If you don't go on I won't."

"Well, how about Hexham?"

"Let him find out that you're gone when he gets to the rooms. There will be nothing odd in that."

"Yes, there will, his telegram is on the table telling me to expect him."

"Nothing's to be gained by alarming him before the time. It's just as easy to say that Carickbairn gave you the slip at four, and that you have been hunting for him since, as any other lie. Besides, what does it matter? He's bound to find out the truth. You've got nothing to gain from him. You've staked everything on getting your share of the girl's fortune, and you'll be a fool indeed if you neglect any means of making that sure. Here comes the train; are you coming or not?"

"Have it your own way; but mind, it will be your fault if we fail. The first thing Hexham will do when he finds us gone and learns that Carickbairn was bad last night will be to go to the police station. Better let me go and put him on a wrong track. Shall I or not?"

The train came to a stand.

"No," answered Mrs. Redmond, decisively.

Cummings nodded with an air of resignation, and stepped into the carriage after Nessa and her husband. Mrs. Redmond followed.

At St. Paul's they found that the Queensborough train did not leave before 8.30. It was now too late for Cummings to attempt to intercept Hexham at Euston.

They went to a hotel in the neighborhood and dined. As the time went on, Cummings grew more and more restless and uneasy—glancing with apprehension at every newcomer who entered the dining room. At seven o'clock he could no longer endure inaction, and proposed that they should go to the Viaduct station, where possibly they could put Nessa and Carickbairn in the train. Mrs. Redmond, as impatient and apprehensive as he, assented to the proposal.

"A nice thing for me if I'd been along with them," muttered Mrs. Redmond, as she and Cummings followed Nessa and her husband through the booking office.

"If I had gone as I wished—and I was a fool not to go—you'd have had nothing to fear," growled Cummings in reply. "I should have had Hexham miles out of London by now. As it is, he may be in this very station for all we can tell. Is that the Queensborough train on the right there?" he asked of a porter.

"Oh, no, sir. Queensborough train, 8.30; they won't make it up for an hour yet, sir. Any luggage, sir?"

"No. Let me know as soon as the train is up. You'll find me in the smoking-room of the hotel."

"Very good, sir; I won't forget—smoking-room of the hotel—That's a rum'un," he said behind his hand to a couple of ticket collectors standing near, as Cummings and his party withdrew. "Four passengers for the continental express and no luggage."

Cummings, going in advance, found the smoking-room empty, and held the door for the rest to pass in. They took a corner table. The waiter brought coffee, cigarettes, and some illustrated papers. Nessa, seated beside her husband, who kept his hand constantly on her arm, tried to interest him in the engravings and find new occupation to her thoughts. For beyond the consideration of the grave responsibilities involved in the irrevocable step she had taken, a certain uneasiness was taking possession of her which owned its origin to trifles that seemed too insignificant to deserve attention at such a time.

At the present moment, for instance, she noticed that her husband, bending over the paper as if to look at the pictures, had his eyes covertly fixed on Cummings, while the fingers of his left hand, as it hung over his knee below the table, were constantly opening and closing, as if he were clutching an imaginary object; and again she observed that whenever the door opened Cummings and Mrs. Redmond invariably turned to see who it was that entered.

Cummings, lighting a cigarette, seated himself on a lounge a little way from the table. Mrs. Redmond rose, took a time-table from an adjacent sideboard, and seated herself beside him.

"What on earth did you come up here for she asked in an undertone looking in the book."

"Better than sitting in the waiting-room, where we could be spotted by anyone passing through. It's the first place we should be looked for."

"We might have escaped notice amongst a lot of people. We are conspicuous sitting alone in this ghostly big room. Better have stayed at the hotel where—"

She stopped abruptly as the door opened, and a man in the dress of a railway police officer looked round the room with knitted brows till his eyes rested on them, when he withdrew and went off with a business-like step.

"Who's that?" she cried in alarm.

"Oh, bother!" he replied, impatiently. "What's the good of fidgeting? You'll make me as nervous as yourself if you go on like this."

There was a pause. Then she whispered without moving her head:

"Carickbairn keeps looking over at us. What's the matter with him?"

"Nothing. He's watching his opportunities, that's all."

"It mustn't happen here."

"He won't attempt it while I'm in sight. He'll wait till they're quite alone."

"Do you think he'll do it before they get to Queensborough?"

He nodded.

She rested content with this for five minutes; then she asked:

"Is that his bag you've got there?"

"Yes."

"What's inside?"

"His razors."

At last the porter came to say that the train was in and the booking office open. Cummings took up the bag, and they went down to the station. Mrs. Redmond left them to get the tickets and rejoined them at the wicket.

"Only two going on?" said the collector, examining the tickets.

"Only two," Cummings answered. "This lady and I will go on the platform to see our friends off."

"All right, sir."

They went down the platform.

"What class?" asked the guard.

"First."

Cummings falling back and putting his hand in his pocket, told the guard, in a low tone, that the lady and gentleman going on were a newly-married couple.

"All right, sir," said the obliging official; "I'll take care they keep the compartment to themselves."

He took the half-crown Cummings had ready and locked the door on Nessa and her husband.

"Hope you'll have a nice journey, dear," said Mrs. Redmond through the window; "mind you write to-morrow and let me know how you are getting on." She nodded and fell back. Cummings stepped forward and shook hands with Carickbairn.

"Good-by. Pleasant journey," he said and then putting the bag through; "here's your shaving tackle in there."

Carickbairn taking the bag on his knees, spread his hands over it as he nodded—his eyes shifting from Cummings to Nessa, and then back to Cummings with a gleam of intense gratification.

It was half-past five when Hexham found on the table in his room the telegram he had sent to Cummings, intimating his return and desiring him to be at home when he arrived. He rang the bell at once.

"Where's Mr Cummings?" he asked, sharply, when the servant came up.

"He went out about two o'clock, sir, with Lord Carickbairn."

"Did he leave any message?"

"No, sir."

"Did anyone call for them?"

"No, sir. Lord Carickbairn was very bad last night." Hexham knew that by the condition of the adjoining room.

"He couldn't have gone out if he had been very bad," he said, tentatively.

"Well, sir, it was as much as ever he could get down to the cab. Misses said he oughtn't to have been taken out in such a state."

Hexham saw that there must have been a special reason for taking him out. He was a man of determination and prompt action, despite his easy-going look. From the rooms in Victoria Mansions, it was but ten minutes' walk to Scotland Yard. He went straight to the chief, and put the case before him in a few words.

"My name is Hexham," he said, presenting his card; "I am private keeper to Mr. Richard Anderson, son of the American millionaire of that name. You've heard of him, perhaps?"

"The gentleman who insists upon calling himself Lord Carickbairn?"

"Yes. I left him in charge of a man named Cummings three weeks ago to go to Ireland, where I expected to stay a few days. The illness of my mother detained me there. I came back this evening and found both Mr. Anderson and Cummings gone—under suspicious circumstances."

"Suspicious circumstances?"—in interrogatively.

"Yes. I wired Cummings to be at home, and I learned that soon after getting my telegram he removed Mr. Anderson, whose condition must have rendered going out extremely dangerous."

"Dangerous in what way?"

"Dangerous as regards his own health, and the safety of others. He had an attack last night. After that he should have complete rest. Any excitement may produce a second attack, and in that condition he is capable of murder. I may tell you, if you are not already aware of the fact, that he is a homicidal maniac."

"He was tried for murder in New York, and acquitted on the ground of insanity?"

"Yes."

"Is Cummings aware of this?"

"Perfectly."

"What motive can he have for taking him out?"

"I cannot tell. But I suspect some mercenary end. Mr. Anderson, of course, has almost unlimited wealth which might be the object of some intrigue."

"But this man Cummings, whom you trusted with the charge of Mr. Anderson—"

"I have known him five years. He has been under me ever since I brought Mr. Anderson over. He has always appeared honest and trustworthy to me; but I heard something of his antecedents yesterday which shook my faith and determined me on returning a once."

"Well, sir, what do you wish me to do?"

"Wire to all stations, and command instant inquiry. Of course, expense is no consideration."

"Very good. Write a description of the two men as briefly as you can on this form."

Hexham sat down and wrote at once:

"Anderson, gentleman, 31; tall, slight, fair; pinched angular features, bent shoulders, head forward, straw-colored mustache; dressed (probably) in round hat and morning suit. Cummings, 45, stout, dark; shaven face; dresses and looks like a priest."

"That is right," said the chief, reading the paper and touching a bell; "now, sir, will you wait here in the hope of an answer coming in, or will you call again?"

Hexham waited. The first hopeful answer was received an hour later.

"Seen at St. Paul's station. Still enquiring. Then came another. 'Dined at Randall's Hotel. Just gone.' Nothing of any importance was offered for half-an-hour, then Hexham read from the tape, 'Priest and gentleman with two ladies, smoking-room, Holborn Viaduct station.'

It was 8.25 when Hexham dashed up to the station in a hansom.

"Which is the next train out?" he asked of the porter as he leapt out.

"Continental in—off in a few minutes."

Hexham rushed to the wicket, and at a glance caught sight of Cummings and Mrs. Redmond at the door of a carriage. Pushing the collector aside, he ran down toward them. They turned and walked off toward the front of the train. The guard, whistle in hand, was holding up his hand.

"Open this door!" shouted Hexham, trying the handle.

"Here's a compartment, sir." The guard opened another door.

"Open this door!"

"Can't, sir—"

"Quick! don't you see the man's got an open razor in his hand?" shouted Hexham. At that moment there was a woman's scream from the inside of the carriage.

CHAPTER XII.

NESSA'S EYES ARE OPENED.

Nessa was sitting by the window, opposite her husband, when Cummings suddenly exclaimed, "Hexham!" At the sound of that name, Mrs. Redmond, who was speaking to her, stopped abruptly, turned her head sharply toward the wicket, and the next moment hurried away in the opposite direction with Cummings. As Hexham rushed up to the door, her husband flew to the other end of the compartment with the bag in his hand. There he stood for a moment, looking at Hexham, as if in the last extremity of fear; then seizing the one opportunity offered by the delay in unfastening the door, he tore open the bag and snatched at the razor lying inside. Under the impression that he intended to commit suicide, Nessa, with a scream, sprang to her feet, and darted forward to arrest his hand. He grasped her by the left hand, and, putting the razor to his mouth, opened the blade with his teeth, and she saw by the mad fury in his eyes that it was her life, and not his own, that he intended to take. But before he could use the hideous thing, Hexham was upon him, and he was thrown back in the padded corner of the carriage, his arms tightly pinned to his side, and the razor fell from his unnerved fingers. So much was impressed distinctly on her mind; what followed was vague and dream-like—until, recovering from the shock, she found herself on the platform, supported by a couple of railway officials, surrounded by a few curious spectators, and saw the train, which was to have taken her, gliding away in the distance. There was no one on the platform beyond the gaping group about her. Where were her husband and Hexham, and Mrs. Redmond and Cummings? The two latter had made their escape in the outgoing train; Hexham, intent only on avoiding unpleasant

consequences of his patient's murderous attack, had whisked his man off the platform, and was now clearing on the station. He had hardly cast a glance on Nessa; certainly he had not recognized her. In reply to her faltering questions, the officials, after looking about, could tell her no more than was patent to her own observation, and that was summed up in the policeman's brief announcement—"the parties are all gone, seemingly."

The poor girl was utterly bewildered, and when asked if she would take a cab, she accepted the suggestion eagerly, with nothing but the vague idea of finding her husband, by whose side it was now her duty to stand. There was no doubt in her mind about that. She had known, from the very beginning, that his mind was unsound, and it was the consideration that, by devoting her life to making his a little happier and better than she found it, which had finally decided her upon becoming his wife. She said, unsparringly to herself, that she had married him for her own selfish ends—to escape the temptation of yielding, as she inevitably must, to the influence of Sweyn Meredith—to escape destitution, to provide herself with luxuries, which seemed essential to happiness, and she was bound by her bargain to fulfill the duties of her position. And she reasoned—if a young, unworried girl in such a desperate position can be said to reason—that her duty was not lessened by the fact that her condition was worse than she had been led to believe it, but the more imperative because he stood in greater need of love and tender care.

But how was she to find him? That question was brought home to her by the cabman touching his hat, and asking, "Where to, miss?" She was completely ignorant as to her husband's address. It occurred to her, however, that Mrs. Redmond might know, and so she told the man to take her to Maple Grove.

"How much?" she asked, when she got in.

"Three shillings, miss, is my fare."

Nessa, looking in her purse, found that she had no more than two shillings and sixpence, and this the obliging cabman consented to take.

Mrs. Redmond had not returned; Nessa decided to wait until she came in, wondering what had detained her, perplexed still more by the recollection of her strange behaviour. Doubtless she would explain all when they met. In the meantime Nessa saw that she must try to be patient and reasonable, and think out her position clearly. There was no alternative but to wait; she had no friends, and no money to pay for a bed at a hotel. She walked about the room trying to overcome a growing suspicion of foul play and treachery that had sprung up in her mind, until the lengthening hours increasing the mystery of Mrs. Redmond's absence, she sank down on a couch, and, from sheer exhaustion, fell asleep. The woman of the house brought her some breakfast in the morning. Nessa waited until ten o'clock, and then, leaving word that she would return in the course of the morning, she went out to find the registry office where she had been married the day before.

The registrar recognized her at once, and, seeing the trouble in her face, led her into his inner office, and gave her a chair, before inquiring what business had brought her there.

"Will you tell me if you know where Lord Carickbairn lives?" Nessa asked.

"Your husband?"

"Yes."

"The address he gave is 26 Eaton Street. Is that near here?"

"Quite close—the second turning on the left."

"Thank you very much."

"But," said the registrar, as Nessa was about to rise, "he does not live there."

The disappointment that suddenly followed the expression of satisfaction in the young wife's face told a tale, and he continued:

"Something unusual in the look of your husband and your friends led me to call at Eaton Street this morning, and I learnt there that the apartments were let to a gentleman, who, I presume, is Mr. Cummings for a month, and the rent paid in advance, but that since that day neither he nor any one else had taken possession of them. I tried to discover where the gentleman lived, but the people of the house knew nothing whatever about him; they had neglected to ask his name. It is probable that the rooms were taken only to comply with the regulations of the Marriage Act."

"And—and that is all," faltered Nessa.

"Well,"—the registrar hesitated.

"Please tell me all you know—anything," Nessa pleaded.

"It is rather a delicate question; but may I ask, Mrs. Anderson, if you are aware that Lord Carickbairn is an assumed title?"

Nessa shook her head—deprived of speech by the dread of some terrible revelation.

"I have examined the Directory and the Peerage; there is no such a name as Richard Anderson, Lord Carickbairn, in either."

Nessa was stupefied.

"What am I to do?" she murmured.

"With a view to helping you if I can, may I ask what has happened?"

"They are gone—gone!" she replied, wildly.

"And you want to know how to find them—Well, we can, perhaps, find one. Maud Redmond," he said, opening the register, "lives in Maple Grove. John Cummings gives the same address as your husband."

"She is not there—she has not returned. I have been at her house all right."

"I am afraid I can give you no further information. But if, as I am led to suppose by your youth and these grave circumstances, you have contracted this marriage without the sanction of your friends, and have now reason to suspect the good faith of those who induced you to marry—if I am right in these suppositions, I think I may venture to offer you advice."

"Oh, pray do. I am quite helpless—quite unable to guide myself."

"Then let your friends guide you. Go back to them."

"My friends!" she said, in a tone of despair that told her she had no hope in that direction.

"If that is out of the question, there is still one other resource—consult a solicitor."

"What can he do? Will he find my husband?"

"Ah, that may be a matter for the police to take up. I cannot say. But you may rely on this—that if you put your case in the hands of a first-class solicitor, he will take whatever steps are advisable to secure your interests."

"Would it be very expensive?" Nessa asked, timidly.

"That depends on the nature of the case. If it involved a lawsuit it might be very expensive. Of course, you can do nothing without some outlay—I may say considerably outlay."

"I am penniless—I can do nothing," Nessa said to herself, rising in despair, with the feeling that it was useless to continue the discussion. The registrar rose also.

"I think I may say with certainty," he said, going toward the door, "that you ought to do nothing without legal advice. I mean that you ought to take the opinion of a competent adviser before you put yourself again in communication with your husband and the persons who have led you to marry him."

"Oh, surely my first duty is to find my husband," said Nessa, with conviction in her tone.

"I am not sure of that." He stopped, with his hand on the door, and, facing her, repeated gravely, "I am not sure of that. Your solicitor may find that you have been led into this marriage by unscrupulous persons with some view to their own advantage. You must trust no one concerned—you do not see how this marriage may tend to their advantage, at present unseen by you. That is to cause you are ignorant of evil. I can imagine a case in which a marriage and desertion would affect a wife's fortune. Suppose, for example, the wife's estate were entailed, the succession would be naturally diverted by her dying without family, and this could be effected by the husband abandoning her on the day of her marriage. I do not say that this is your case; I only suggest it as one example of a hundred combinations that might be devised with the same motive. Certain facts lead me to suspect that you are the victim of some combination, and I have spoken, perhaps unwisely, because I feel it would be ungenerous to be silent. I can see that you are a lady by birth and education; your dress leads me to believe that you have wealth. Your husband is already proved to be an impostor. You were deeply agitated when you came here yesterday, and you signed your name binding you to that man with evident reluctance. The woman who came with you was ill-bred and coarse; the man, Cummings, looked as if he were staking his fortune on the cast of a die—they were both eager to get the business done, and, when it is done, all three disappear in a manner which it seems to me you cannot explain."

"No. It is all a mystery to me."

"Well, I think I have shown you where you may look for a clue to the mystery; at least, I have tried to show that it is not your first duty to find your husband. It is on the contrary—for a certain reason which a solicitor would have less diffidence in pointing out than I find—your duty to avoid correspondence or communication of any kind with him until you are assured that this marriage has not been contracted with a sinister purpose. You have asked my advice," he added, turning the handle of the door; "it is summed up in a dozen words: before you find your husband or his friends, or they find you, see a solicitor."

He opened the door and bowed, and Nessa, expressing her gratitude in a few incoherent and confused phrases, went out.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Every Watch A Compass.

A few days ago I was standing by an American gentleman, when I expressed a wish to know which point was the north. He at once pulled out his watch, looked at it, and pointed to the north. I asked him whether he had a compass attached to his watch.

"All watches," he replied, "are compasses." Then he explained to me how this was. Point the hour hand to the sun, and the south is exactly half way between the hour and the figure XII. on the watch. For instance, suppose that it is four o'clock. Point the hand indicating four to the sun, and II. on the watch is exactly south. Suppose that it is eight o'clock, point the hand indicating eight to the sun, and the figure X on the watch is due south. My American friend was quite surprised that I did not know this. Thinking that very possibly I was ignorant of a thing that everyone else knew, and happening to meet Mr. Stanley, I asked that eminent traveller if he was aware of this simple mode of discovering the points of the compass. He said he had never heard of it. I presume, therefore, that the world is in the same state of ignorance of the inventor of the compass. I do not know what town boasts of my American friend as a citizen.

How Bridget Won Her Case.

She was a queer, shrewd girl who was engaged to a certain well-to-do youth. His father had thriftily got some property together which the son would inherit. The youth knew very little; he had lost one eye and, as Bridget said of him, he was emphatically "not much to look at," but his expectations made him attractive. Presently Bridget was in great distress. She came to her employer, who was a lawyer, in a raging state of mind. The young man had jilted her and she was going to sue him for breach of promise! Her account of the matter was a curious mixture of humor, indignation and craftiness. She would sue him for damages, but it was plain that her object was to force him to marry her.

The employer tried to ascertain whether the young man had any pretext for jilting her. What had she done to offend him? Bridget lowered her voice confidentially. "I'm thinkin'," she said, "that it's all about a bit of a conversation that we had. 'Sure now, Bridgie, said he to me one night, as we sat in the kitchen, 'wud ye marry me if I had no money?' 'What do ye take me for?' says I, 'sure an' I wudden't, thin! There's nobody wud marry the likes o' ye but for the money ye have!' An' wid that, sort, he riz up sudden-like an' wid away. 'Twas the thrut! I tole 'im; but sure he's a foine little lad, sorr, an' I'd marry him the day, I'm that fond of him—wid the money!'"

Her lawyer was convinced that Bridget had a good case and advised her to bring suit. She did so, and her examination in court was a scene long to be remembered. With one breath she scorched the defendant with her satire and with the next she praised and cajoled him.

"Sure he's not a beauty," she admitted to the court; "he's only the one eye, but it's afflily becomin' to him, yer anner!"

Bridget won her case; the youth, relenting before such tact, changed his capacity of defendant for that of bridegroom, and all the "sisters and cousins" came to the wedding.