

PRETTY MISS NEVILLE

BY B. M. CROKER

CHAPTER XXII

CAPTAIN BERESFORD HIMSELF

"We met, 'twas in a crowd—Bally."

In whatever other channels their affections ran there was certainly no love lost between Mrs. St. Ubes and Mrs. Vane.

Mrs. St. Ubes had the advantage of being a resident of long standing, who knew her ground well. She had been a noted leader of society for more seasons than she had cared to count.

She detested women and made no secret of the fact and always selected her friends entirely from the opposite sex, with the exception of one lady, a Miss Hudson—who, flattered by this signal mark of condescension, readily became her confidante, or, according to the gossips of Mulkapore, her jackal.

La belle lionne was past her premiere jeunesse; I am not wronging her in any way when I say that she was fully five and thirty. She had been lovely, and was still remarkably good looking.

Mrs. St. Ubes excelled in dancing, tennis, and riding, and also in a certain kind of smart repartee that evoked explosions of laughter from her immediate adherents.

Mrs. Vane had the advantage of youth on her side; she was very pretty, too, an excellent tennis player, a renowned dancer, and was in her own way a consummate mistress of the art of versiflage.

Consequently, it will be seen that she prepared to fight Mrs. St. Ubes on her own ground and with her own weapons. She won the prize at the tennis tournament (a handsome gold bangle), carried it off after a desperate struggle with Mrs. St. Ubes.

For some time Mrs. St. Ubes had mentally looked upon the bangle as her own. She annexed more than one of that lady's favorite partners at balls and small dances, and engaged her almost beyond endurance by receiving her most stinging remarks and cutting little speeches with a smiling affability of demeanor that completely baffled her adversary.

Ladies, one and all, favored Mrs. Vane, and would have been sincerely gratified to see Mrs. St. Ubes extinguished and put down. Mrs. Vane never ignored her own sex; she was always pleasant and friendly; and, sought after as she was in society, I have seen her sit half an evening talking to an old dowager whose daughter she had known up the country; or walk for an hour at the band with a stupid, uninteresting girl whose sister had been her schoolfellow.

She never said spiteful things of people, nor mimicked nor caricatured their failings for the amusement of her friends. Consequently she was far more popular than Mrs. St. Ubes. Moreover she was the most generous and good natured of human beings; her dresses were con- stantly "out," being copied by other people's dresses; her songs made the round of Mulkapore; her nimble fingers trimmed hats and bonnets, and made up bouquets for all our immediate female circle.

"K 50!" What in the world did she mean? After a few seconds' consideration, I "gave it up," in fact, I completely forgot the circumstance in coming over a much involved programme. Five minutes later I took my place in one of the numerous sets of Lancers that were forming up and down the room.

Our was a sixteen set, and as we took our position I glanced casually from couple to couple. There was Mrs. St. Ubes looking remarkably well, in a low black net dress, trimmed with quantities of gold, and whispering (goodness knows what) to her partner behind her enormous black fan. There was Lizzy Hudson in that horrible green again. Exactly opposite stood Mrs. Vane, looking unusually pretty and animated; nothing suited her so well as pink, and her partner was a good looking gunner. A second glance—I shut my eyes and then opened again—no, they had not deceived me! I was face to face with my kinsman, cousin, and former fiancé—Maurice Beresford!

Before I had time to collect my scattered wits it was our turn to advance. He was coming toward me; prompt flight had been my first insane impulse, but common sense held me fast. As we touched each other's fingers, and made the usual small gratification, I stole a glance over his face as his eyes met mine, yet during the whole five figures I was aware that they strayed very often in my direction. My wits seemed to be preternaturally sharpened, and I knew that he was asking Mrs. Vane who I was, and all about me. I wonder what my partner thought of me! Probably, that I was some poor half-witted creature. I answered—when I replied at all—completely at random; and the bad shots I made were to be gathered from the expression of puzzled amazement reflected in my companion's face.

Although I dared not be all eyes, I was an embodiment of two intensely listening ears—my ears actually ached with trying to catch what our vis-à-vis were talking about, and if in the "tall young lady in white" Maurice had discovered his runaway cousin, Nora O'Neill.

No sooner was the dance over, than with a hasty excuse, I relinquished my partner's arm, and made my way to the ladies' dressing room. At first it was crowded with various other dancers who had put in for repairs. I ensconced myself in a remote arm chair, feeling, without any affectation, quite nervous and almost stunned by the sudden shock of meeting Maurice, till the soft strains of the "Dolores" waltz completely emptied the apartment of all.

There was one exception; Mrs. St. Ubes lingered behind, ostensibly to have a stitch put in the rosette of her shoe, but in reality to repair some little flaws in her complexion. Thinking herself alone, she hurried to the toilet-table, removed and tightened her fringe (which was false) powdered her face most carefully, and then leisurely surveyed the back of her head, and her profile, by means of a handglass. The result of the inspection was evidently satisfactory; and, giving her skirts a final twitch, she was turning to leave the room, with a complacent smile on her lips. In turning, for the first time she perceived me, reclining in a deep arm chair, the critical spectator of her recent operations, and the smile suddenly froze into an expression of disgusted amazement.

"You here, Miss Neville? What on earth are you doing? Why are you not dancing?" she asked, sharply. "I felt a little giddy," I returned, standing up, "and thought I would sit quiet for a few minutes."

"Giddy?" she echoed, with an incredulous snarl, looking into my face with a scrutiny that was downright rude. "You! Such an untiring waltzer, to talk of being giddy! You have not been quarrelling with anyone, have you? or setting your partners at loggerheads?" she asked, with an air of amiable interest.

"Oh, dear, no," I answered, energetically. "By the way," arranging her bracelets, "I suppose you have carte blanche from Major Percival about dancing? Some men are so exacting in that way, they won't allow their fiancées to dance round dances."

"Major Percival is not so selfish," I replied, warmly. "Oh," with a little significant sniff "he is just like his neighbors, no better and no worse. He is a charming friend," emphatically, "but I don't think he will make a good husband."

"He gave it to me as a 'philopena' last year. Oh! long before he ever saw you; so you need not look so jealous."

"I am not feeling jealous, Mrs. St. Ubes; so my looks must be deceitful. And if you will kindly allow me to pass, I am going to ask for a glass of water," moving away.

"Oh—certainly. I hope your giddiness will soon go off," she returned nodding to me carelessly; and without another word she turned and sailed out of the room.

Probably on the principle of counter-irritation, my interview with Mrs. St. Ubes roused me from the state of mental coma into which I had fallen on so suddenly beholding my cousin. I drank some iced water, bathed my forehead with eau-de-Cologne, and felt better. My heart still beat very fast; but I was now, comparatively speaking, composed, as I walked over to the cheval-glass, and took a good long, impartial look at myself. The mirror introduced me to a tall, slight, graceful girl, with quantities of wavy, bronze-colored hair growing low on her forehead, and fastened up in a knot at the back. She had large dark eyes (hue indistinct by candle-light); very long lashes, which turned upward at the tips; a pretty, curved mouth, evidently well used to laughter and smiles; and a creamy, fair complexion.

This good looking young person was dressed in a simple, light-colored, artistically arranged with clouds of tulle and bunches of silvered narcissus; the low body was finished off with a berthe of the same flowers, and one or two nestled among her dark auburn tresses. What possible resemblance could any one see between her and that vision of ugliness, Nora O'Neill? Nora, with her skimpy, short skirts, her hair dragged off her face, and confined in a pigtail, her complexion the rendezvous of sun and freckles! Here could not know me!" I said to myself with decision, as I straightened my necklet, and pulled up my long gloves; "I'll go back to the ball-room and brave it out! No one would recognize Nora O'Neill in Miss Neville," and, with another long, critical stare, I gathered up my fan and bouquet, and swept out of the room.

I was instantly seized upon by my partner, anxious to make the most of the last bars of the "Dolores." During the next three or four dances neither Mrs. Vane nor Maurice appeared in the ball room, and I was beginning to breathe a little more freely, when a well-known treble at my side exclaimed: "Oh, here you are! I've been looking for you everywhere. Captain Beresford wishes to be introduced to you. Captain Beresford, Miss Neville."

Maurice bowed gravely, and so did I. But I was on the eve, all the same, of one of my wildest and most foolish explosions of laughter. To be introduced in this formal way to Maurice—Maurice, whose pockets I had sewn up, whose pillow I had assiduously floured—was almost asking too much from my gravity.

"You will never guess the reason Captain Beresford assigned for an immediate introduction," said Mrs. Vane, tapping me playfully with her fan. "He declares that you are the very image of his grandmother! Did you ever hear of anything so absurd?"

"Maurice was getting 'hot,' as they say in Magic Mountain, for a foolish girl was my only comment. It was really like the picture of Molly Beresford that hung in the library at Gal- low, here was a compliment, and no mistake! She had been a celebrated beauty, and the toast of three counties. It is really too bad of Mrs. Vane," exclaimed Maurice, now addressing me, "to divulge what I had imparted to her in the strictest confidence. No lady can ever keep a secret—such, at least, is my experience," he added, with a smile.

"Can they not?" I asked, incredulously. "I am quite sure that I could keep one if I tried."

"The South," I replied, laconically. "The South is a large place," he said, with a smile.

"It is," I answered, shortly. "Don't you think that you have asked enough questions for one evening, Captain Beresford?" I put in quickly; "or would you like to know my age and height?"

"I am sure I beg your pardon, I am afraid you will think me very inquisitive, but I come from the South of Ireland too, and as most people in that part of the world are connected in some way, I was thinking that perhaps, for all we knew, you and I might be twentieth cousins once removed. Are you quite certain that you have no relations of the name of Beresford?" he asked, looking at me earnestly with his dauntless, gray eyes.

"This was too much even for my equanimity, which, considering everything, had been most remarkable. I had been playing with fire hitherto and rather liked the sensation than otherwise. Dropping my fan and instantly diving for it in order to conceal my tell-tale cheeks, I replied, as I stood up, 'I am engaged for this dance, Captain Beresford, and have no leisure for tracing out my genealogy just at present.' I said this with all the stiffness and dignity I could assume, and carrying my head very high, stepped out of our mutual seclusion into the wide, well lit veranda.

Maurice looked more surprised than abashed at my sudden change of demeanor, and contented himself with carrying my bouquet, and critically examining it, as we strolled back toward the ball room.

"May I ask you one more question, Miss Neville?" he inquired, with an air of the most humble deference. "My heart literally stood still with fear, and my knees trembled beneath me. What was he going to say? Had he a glimmering of the truth? I felt cold all over, as unable to frame a syllable, I bowed my head."

"Are you any relation to Colonel Neville, the great sportsman?" "What a relief!" "Yes, I am his niece," I replied civilly.

"Indeed! I have a letter of introduction to him from an old friend of mine; I shall call and present it to-morrow in person. Will you introduce me to your mother?" observing auntie, who was beamed upon by the chaperons, rise and make a gesture of delight and relief as I approached. She beamed on my partner for having restored to her her little stray sheep.

"Auntie," I said, "Captain Beresford wishes to be introduced to you!" "The beaming smile instantly disappeared from her countenance, and she accorded Maurice a most frigid salutation. There was yet another dance, and a most pertinaacious dancing maniac would listen to no excuse, and led me off protesting and entreating, while Maurice and auntie remained *te te te*. However he contrived it I know not, but by the time I returned to my weary relative her face was once more wreathed in smiles, and Maurice was sitting beside her, laughing and talking, and evidently winning golden opinions from the dear old lady.

We held a council of war that night in auntie's dressing-room. We agreed to let the missing cousin remain at large.

"After a little while we will tell him, perhaps," concluded auntie. "If he is really as nice as he seems in first acquaintance, we will confide in him by and by. And I have no doubt that you and he will be excellent friends, more especially when he hears that you are engaged to be married!"

So saying, and yawning most extravagantly, and kissing me affectionately, and dismissed me to bed.

TO BE CONTINUED

A FOOL FOR CHRIST'S SAKE

Posted up on the dining-room door of the Grand Hotel at Ixelles Bains was a notice that could not fail to catch the passer's eye. As the stream of visitors drew near, they paused singly or in groups, to read what was written on the door; and then passed on, commenting each in his own way upon what he or she had read.

"The Sisters in charge of the home for the aged will make a collection during dinner to-day."

It was a recognized institution, and the habitues of the place accepted it as such; but some of the newcomers began grumbling at the continual calls that seemed to be made upon their purses.

"What bad luck!" said one lady, turning to her neighbor. "If only that stupid collection has been just a day later I should have escaped it. My cure ends to-morrow."

"Then, on the contrary, I thank you are very lucky, even in spite of the collection," was the reply. "I know I wish I were leaving this week. I've never known such a place for making money fly. This hotel is inquisitively dear, I consider, and then, there are the baths and the doctor, and 'tips' expected by everyone. One never goes out without buying something; and, no matter what one spends on one's clothes before coming, one has always to be getting new things here."

"It's enough to ruin a Croesus," groaned a third. "And on top of it all," chimed in the first speaker again, "we are expected to contribute to their local charities. The last straw, I call it."

"My dear lady, I agree with you there," said a stout, prosperous-looking man, who up to this had no chance of joining in the conversation. "I know these institutions are necessary and very excellent, I dare say, and I subscribe regularly once a year to more than one in my neighborhood. But beyond that I draw a line."

"Yes, yes," agreed several others; "help those at home certainly. But it is really rather too much to expect us, who are only birds of passage, to support their poor for them in a place like this."

"I call it an abuse," went on the fat man. "That is just what it is," came the chorus of agreement. "This promiscuous begging certainly is an abuse."

"Especially when one would so much prefer keeping one's money in one's own pocket," added a young Italian officer dryly.

"I am so glad you agree with me!" said the first speaker, turning quickly to the officer, whose favor she had sought for assiduously but in vain, quite oblivious of the sarcasm of his remark.

There was, however, more than a touch of contempt in the smile with which he answered her. "I am afraid I was merely voicing the general thought, not giving my own opinion," he explained politely. "Then what is your opinion?" she asked in a tone of surprise.

"I think that one should give what one can whenever one is asked for a deserving charity such as this home," he replied. "A bad system, sir; a most pernicious doctrine!" exclaimed the fat man, who again managed to get a hearing. "Why are the old people these Sisters are begging for in a home at all? Why are they not self-supporting citizens, like ourselves? Because they have been imprudent, idle, extravagant. Through their own fault, sir, I say—through their own fault."

"Vice is the forerunner of misery," another man announced sententiously. "That I grant you," rejoined the officer, addressing the last two speakers at once. "But it is equally true that there are also many who, after working all their lives, find themselves destitute in their old age through no fault of their own. Besides, there are many who could not get work; or who, getting it, could not do it from ill health or for other reasons."

"You are a believer in luck, I gather?" said his neighbor, who had not yet taken any part in the discussion. "To a certain extent I am," answered the officer. "And you, sir—what do you think about this collection?"

"You ask my opinion, do you?" repeated the professor—for professor he was, writ large on every line of his shriveled, sallow face. "My opinion is that those who are determined to get on, do so, sooner or later, no matter what obstacles may rise in their paths. As for so-called charitable institutions, I consider them superfluous and undesirable. They are merely harbors for impostors, beginning with those who undertake their management."

"That," he said in a contemptuous tone, "is all I feel called upon to give to idlers and drunkards—and fools." He had raised his voice, and the exaggerated contempt that he put into the last word drew attention to the fact that he intended to include in it the Sister herself as well as her poor.

As the professor spoke, the Italian officer sprang to his feet, and the onlookers caught the flash of anger in his eye as he bent in a bow before the little man. "I am sorry, Sister," he said, laying a golden louis on the five-centime piece, that I can not afford any more for your admirable charity. I should be honored," he continued, "if you would allow me to shake hands with you."

The professor's insulting words had apparently left the Sister unmoved; but as, for an instant, she raised her eyes to this young man, who had courage enough to make himself the champion of the servants of God, he saw that tears were trembling on her lashes. But this he noticed only unconsciously; for as she looked up he realized why she had brought back to him a winter, some three or four years gone by, which he had spent in Rome. "Mademoiselle de B—"

"Oh, hush, hush, please!" "The two exclamations were spoken at once, but those near at hand had heard the name he had spoken—the name of a princely family long famed for bravery and brains and unswerving loyalty to God. If a member of that family was a fool—well she was a fool for Christ's sake.

The collection was finished, and now both Sisters stood together for a moment. The younger one had laid her hand in the officer's outstretched palm. But, bending, he raised to his lips, first those little white fingers, then the work-hardened ones of her companion, before moving backward to open the door and let them go. His sudden exclamation had not been intended to reveal what the Sister preferred should remain unknown, and all he could do now was to ignore his recognition of his former acquaintance.

It had all happened so quickly that the Sisters were in the doorway before those around had grasped what had taken place under their own eyes. Only the professor understood it thoroughly. Something in the Sister's demeanor, her calm dignity had impressed him; and, following in the officer's act of homage and the discovery of her identity, had suddenly shown him the pitiful ignorance, the cowardly insolence of his act and words. He was fanatically anti-religious, anti-Christian, even, and for the moment of fanaticism had overwhelmed his instincts as a gentleman. But only for an instant. Before the door had time to close he was on his feet. The Sisters, seeing him standing before them, paused; and immediately he spoke, so that everyone in the room should hear:

"I must apologize for what I have just said and done," and now he, too, bowed, and he spoke. "And especially to you, Sister, whom I intentionally insulted. I can only beg of you to accept my sincere apology" (he laid a hundred-franc note on the plate on which the elder Sister had gathered the whole collection together), "and an offering less unworthy of your acceptance for your work of—of heroic charity."

"Thank you, sir! May God reward your generosity!" answered the elder Sister, simply; whilst the younger, without a thought of his rudeness to herself, but thinking only of her old people's needs, smiled up at him in gratitude. "And, avowed atheist, boasted anti-Christian as he was, for a moment he went back to the trusting beliefs of his long past youth.

"Sister," he said, and he caught at her gray habit as she moved away. "If you forgive, will you say a prayer for me?" "Certainly, Monsieur, she replied, and her voice was soft and musical like the voice of a child. "I will get our old people to pray; and I, too, will pray," she added in a lower tone, "that God may teach you how to pray for yourself."

Then the door closed and the two Sisters passed away out of sight.—From the Italian, by Alice Deane for the Ave Maria.

TENDEREST OF MOTHERS

A STORY OF AN OLD SOLDIER

An old soldier who for more than forty years had led a life of loneliness, and who was not known by his companions or neighbors ever to have been a Catholic, suddenly stopped the priest one day as he passed the little cottage where he lived, and surprised the good man by telling him that he wanted to go to confession.

"But are you a Catholic?" inquired the priest. "Yes, Father," was the reply—"that is to say, I was once a Catholic."

"Certainly you may come to confession whenever you wish," said the priest. "But I am curious to know what has impelled you to this step. It can hardly be fear of immediate death, for you look as well and as hearty as ever I saw you."

"I never was better in my life," replied the man. "For the past fortnight I have been feeling unusually well. But something has taken hold of me. Father: a vague unrest which I cannot describe. For several days I have been saying to myself that