

THE RATTLE WON

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A NEW TEMPTATION.

Nessa was dressing to go out the next morning when the maid knocked at her door, and said:

"Please, miss, will you come into the sitting-room, missis says, before you go out?"

"Yes, I will come," Nessa answered; "almost directly."

Mrs. Blount had told her briefly when she came in that Grace had called in the afternoon to see her, and now she expected to be scolded for coming home late, perhaps to be told she must go away on account of her irregularities.

"I can't help it," she said to herself with a sigh; "I ought to go. I'm not fit to stay here now. Perhaps she has told Grace. I wonder what she thinks of me."

She went down-stairs painfully conscious of her faults, and hoping that Mrs. Blount would forgive her in order that they might part without ill-feeling. The sitting-room door was partly open; she entered, closed the door, and turning to the table where Mrs. Blount invariably stationed herself on serious occasions, she started with an exclamation of astonishment. Sweeney stood before her!

For a couple of moments they stood silent and still facing each other, and marking the change a few weeks had produced. But her wonder was greater than his, for Grace had prepared him for what he saw, while she was ignorant of the struggle which had exhausted him. The boyish gaiety was gone from his face, the carelessness from his manner; he looked quite old and severe, despite the softness in his deep eyes. She could only attribute this change to present displeasure, as she accounted for his presence by supposing that Mrs. Blount had written to him complaining of her misbehavior.

"You have come to scold me," she said, in a tone of contrition.

"Yes—partly," he answered, but there was no anger in his voice; and taking both her hands in his he held them as if he meant to keep them for ever, looking into her eyes the while with such tender earnestness and deep solicitude that her heart fluttered with a wild, uncontrollable joy.

"Don't you think I ought to scold you?" he asked, after a moment's pause, still holding her hands in his.

"I have done wrong," she said, thinking of the pain she had given Mrs. Blount; she has been very kind to me, and I have tried her patience shamefully; and instead of asking her to pardon me I have been so lenient and morose not treating her as a friend at all.

"Is she the only one you have failed to treat as a friend? Have you kept your promise to me? Why didn't you write to me and say 'I want your advice'?"

"But I am a quite well now. There is nothing the matter with my health."

"Ah, you think of me only as your doctor. Well, as your doctor, let me assure myself that I can do nothing for you. Sit down, no not there with your back to the light; here where I may see your face." He seated her, and, still holding her hands, stood before her, looking down.

"Your eyes are sunk, your cheek is thin; there are signs of suffering, pain, fatigue about your mouth," he said.

"It is fatigue. I went to the theatre last night, and after that I had supper. It was very late when I came home."

"Yes. It was nearly one when you put out your light."

"You have heard all about me."

"No, not all. I know that you have been seeking happiness and found but a very poor substitute for it. I know that, poor as the substitute is, it makes you for a time forget what that trouble is, and I must make sure of it before I dare to prescribe a remedy."

"She trembled under his fixed gaze."

"You don't know how dull it is here," she pleaded.

"Yes, I do. I know that this house must be terribly dull in comparison with the glitter and movement of the scenes you have lived in—that the life here must be terribly monotonous after an existence of perpetual change and variety."

"And then I am only a girl, with no serious object in life—"

"If you were a man with the most serious purpose a man can have—the determination to subdue inclination and renounce the dearest desire of his heart—the result would have been the same. If a quiet life had been the cause of your unhappiness, you should have found happiness in this last change. But are you happy?" She kept her head down, making no sign. "No; you have not found even satisfaction. We cannot buy happiness—we can only buy pleasures, and they are scarcely better than the narcotics, that for a little while make us forget, and like narcotics, these pleasures must be taken by those whose happiness depends upon them in stronger and stronger doses till the end comes. Look at Goldy in the cage there. If external countenance for anything should have died of misery the day after he was taken from the fields. But he lives and sings there in a prison."

"And why can't he?"

"The case is different. That little prisoner has all the food he needs, but our craving hearts wish for the nourishment, that is denied us. It seems to me that we need nothing here but love. I think I could live content with all this small room holds."

"You are a man," Nessa said, still striving to hold her ground.

"And for that reason, I am less easy to satisfy than you who are a woman. There's not the difference between us that you imagine. Look up in my face. Do you see no change—no trace of past suffering?"

She looked up quickly, and with tender sympathy overcame her silence, said, "Have you been ill?"

"Not more than you, who tell me you are well. But I have suffered as you have, though I am a man, though my surroundings have not been dull, living out of doors among men—at home amidst a bevy of noisy children; and though I have had a serious purpose ever before me, I have suffered in spite of all these influences to forgetfulness, until my endurance can go no further. Dear one, you know the cause. I love you, and all my happiness depends upon your loving me. Her head had sunk again. He waited a moment, and then continued:

"I know your suffering and mine spring from the same cause, but whether you love me or another I dare not say. I have only my hope to guide me. Give me a sign that

"I may know." He loosened her hands: they slid down into her lap heavily.

"A word—a sign—to tell me that you love me or love me not," he urged passionately. She thought of Grace, and started to her feet, white and trembling violently. She could not stay there feeling herself unequal to this conflict.

"You must not leave me like this," he cried, taking her by the arm as she made a quick, terrified step toward the door. "For God's sake, put me out of this suspense? Oh, you do love me, darling!"

For a moment she stood irresolute, swayed between principle and passion, and then, her fervent love throwing all conscientious scruples to the wind, she flung her arms about his neck and sank, with a cry of joy, upon his breast.

He kissed her cold cheek till the hot blood rose, murmuring incoherent words of passionate love. Then again the image of Grace rose before Nessa's eyes, freezing her heart with a sense of guilt and shame.

"No, no!" she cried, shrinking from his lips, freeing herself by a physical effort from his arms. "I am nothing. It is Grace you must love."

"It is you I love—you, who are all the world to me. And now that I know you love me no one on earth shall separate us."

She shook her head wildly and escaped from the room. He left the house almost immediately after. To tell Grace what had happened was the first duty that presented itself to his mind.

It was less easy for Nessa to determine her course she had to take. For a time it was impossible for her to compose her thoughts into any definite form. She shook her head to foot as she sat upon the side of her bed endeavoring to overcome the convulsive agitation of mind and body. Little by little, as the physical and mental agitation subsided, certain convictions rose distinct and clear from the tumult of ideas that crowded her mind. First she saw the impossibility of her becoming Sweeney's wife. Her whole soul revolted against an act which seemed to her a deliberate crime against Grace. Next, she perceived the necessity of severing all communion with Sweeney.

But how was that to be done? She had, in the madness of a moment, acknowledged that she loved him. She knew that she loved, and must still love him, despite this great fault in his character. She could not hope to turn him from her by reasoning. She was not match for him. He might produce arguments that would sap all her best intentions. She felt that if he took her in his arms and breathed upon her face again, she must yield as she had yielded. He would return. How could she evade him? She saw only one way of escaping temptation: She must fly. That, too, was obvious. She must leave the house and never return to it.

But would he be thwarted—be a man strong and powerful in all things? Would he not find her in her retreat and compel her to be his wife? She foresaw that he would do so. What barrier could she place between herself and him? Why, there was one simple enough. There was one thing that she had meditated doing for a week past merely as a means of procuring the pleasures which her means would soon fail to provide. It was another step downwards; but surely if it had been almost a matter of indifference whether she took it or not before, it was justifiable and a welcome step now that it was to save herself from lifelong shame, and Sweeney from lasting remorse, and Grace from such a hopeless misery as she herself now endured.

All that remained of her money, save a few shillings, she enclosed in an envelope with a few lines to Mrs. Blount expressing her regret for all the trouble she had given, and begging her to accept the sum in payment of her board and lodging; then she took a last look round the room, ran noiselessly down the stairs, and left the house unobserved.

About the same time, from her lodgings in Marble Grove, Fulham, Mrs. Redmond set out for the restaurant in Regent Street, where they were to meet and lunch with Lord Carickbairn. It struck one as she reached the Chandos. She could be punctual when it suited her. At the door she was met by a man in a clerical frock coat.

"You, alone?" she said in surprise, giving her hand, and on his nodding gloomily, she asked, "Are they upstairs?"

"I don't know whether she is. I haven't been up to see. I've been looking out for you. Come up the street; got something to say."

They walked toward the circus briskly and in silence for two or three yards; then Mrs. Redmond spoke, "Where's Carickbairn?"

"At home in a straight waistcoat," he replied, in a low tone of discontent.

"What?"

"Attack came on in the night. I thought it would. Didn't you see how queer he looked at supper?"

"I noticed you kept your eye on him, and were precious particular about the knives."

"I can generally tell within a few hours when he's going to be bad."

"Oh, well, you can tell her that he's sprained his ankle, or something. She won't mind. She's not ready for it yet, and it's no good frightening her by being in a hurry; she might suspect. It will be time enough when her money runs out and she feels the want of it. I suppose he'll be all right tomorrow or the day after, and a day or two won't make much difference to us."

"Won't it though!" said he, sullenly. "The governor's coming back."

"What?"

"Hexham will be back this afternoon. I found a telegram from him when I got in last night. He started from Dublin yesterday evening."

Mrs. Redmond muttered an imprecation between her set teeth, and after a pause asked, in a tone of dismay, "What are we to do now?"

"Nothing; the game's up! You may lay your life Hexham won't give us a chance."

"Why not? Couldn't he stand in with us? If we go equal shares all three in the money we shan't do badly."

The man laughed at her.

"You don't know what you're talking about," he said. "Why Hexham's been trusted as the day. He'd never have been trusted to take care of Carickbairn otherwise. If he chose to be dishonest he could bolt safely with more than you could offer him for putting his hand to such a dangerous job as this. He'd break every bone in my body if I hinted such a thing to him."

"Well something must be done," she said in desperation.

"Then you'll have to look sharp about it; he'll be in London by five."

"Where is Carickbairn now?" she asked after a long pause.

"In his room. I left him strapped down."

"Look here!" said she, taking his arm and speaking low, "I'll undertake to bring the girl into the room in a couple of hours if you'll shut 'em in together and—and leave a knife where he can get at it!"

"Well, you are a jessabel!" he muttered, glancing at her, sidelong.

"Never mind what I am; will you do it? You get as much as I do; you made your own terms, and knew what they were for. Will you do it?"

"What's the good? The paroxysm's over by this time. He'll be as helpless as a child when I get back."

"Everything's against us," she said, bitterly; then, exasperated by the man's silence, she cried, "Why don't you suggest something? You didn't leave him to see me for nothing, I know."

"Oh, I'm content to throw up the affair. It's not a nice business, and too confounded risky. Hexham pays me well; and a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush."

"That's all very fine. I know you—you want to put all the responsibility on my shoulders; but you are just as loth as I am to throw up the chance of making a fortune."

"Well, I thought there might be just a chance that you had brought the girl up to the scratch. As I tell you, after this bout Carickbairn may be as easily led as a child. We've had everything ready for the last week. If we could only get the girl to consent, we might put them in train and pack them off to the continent before Hexham arrives."

Mrs. Redmond stopped suddenly, and turning round, said:

"Let's go back to the restaurant and find her!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

NESSA YIELDS.

A glazed door with a gauze blind closed the entrance from the staircase to the private dining-room of the Chandos Restaurant. Peeping over the top of the blind Mrs. Redmond saw Nessa seated at the table. She turned, and by a sign bade her companion in the clerical dress look. The girl sat in an attitude of deep dejection, looking listlessly through the window at her side; the light falling on her face revealed an expression of apathy and weariness in it which encouraged their hopes.

"You leave her to me. Go and fetch Carickbairn, and bring enough money to pay her fare; I have none."

The man turned and went down-stairs; Mrs. Redmond entered the dining room.

"They haven't come yet," she said after kissing Nessa. "Oh, well we won't wait. Whatever you choose. It's all the same to me!"

The waiter came in and Mrs. Redmond ordered soup, outlets, and a bottle of Moselle.

"It's no use dreaming of anything but the simplest of things in these beastly English places," she said, seating herself opposite Nessa; "and then it's doubtful if you'll get them decent. Now, in Brussels, or anywhere on the continent, it's quite another thing. Even at a second-rate place like the Rocher de Canal, for instance, they get a lunch that makes you gay for the rest of the day."

"I suppose it's very nice in Brussels—everything," said Nessa, looking up with a gleam of interest in her eye.

"Nice! why, it's a paradise in comparison with this murky hole. Here's a wretched day for you, and were half way through May. A couple of inches of mud in the streets; I suppose we ought to be grateful that it isn't snow. It never surprises me to hear of people throwing themselves in the river."

Nessa shuddered; she perhaps had thought of such an escape from the misery of living.

"What's the matter, chummy?" asked Mrs. Redmond; "you look more down on your luck than usual to-day."

"I wish we were in Brussels," said Nessa. "So do I, by George! It's a lovely little place. Music in the park, lots of smartly dressed women and children, people sitting outside the cafes in the warm sunshine, lots of lovely old buildings with a market place in the middle full of flowers, peasants in great wooden shoes and queer dresses, dogs trotting along drawing carts full of bright brass milk cans! Oh, it is quite lovely!"

She clasped her hands and threw up her eyes, and a faint smile came in to Nessa's face with the odd picture this description presented to her imagination.

"It must be interesting," she said.

"Interesting, I should think it was! Why, chummy, it's a thing to make you forget every trouble you ever had. Couldn't we run over there for a week or two?"

"I have no money left."

"Tut, tut! There, that's it. I haven't a couple of pounds in the world. It's all gone; and I can't tell how. I'm sure we've been as careful as we could; we have bought nothing that wasn't absolutely necessary to ladies in our position. Do you really mean you have nothing left?"

"Yes. I don't think I've more than enough to pay for our lunch."

"Is it possible? Why, what are we to do, chummy, for subsistence? I positively dare not run into debt again. Do you think you could borrow anything from your friends?"

Nessa shook her head. It was almost a satisfaction to her to think that there was no alternative left; Mrs. Redmond could scarcely conceal her exultation.

"Well, one thing is very certain," she said; "I must accept that engagement and go drabbling about the provinces with that beastly low music-hall company. You wouldn't care for that sort of thing, would you?"

Nessa shook her head as she drew together the crumbs on the table-cloth.

"Of course you must do something for yourself if your friends won't help you; but luckily for you you're not bound to accept such a degrading position as mine. You've only got to say the word and you can get all that money can buy—carriages, horses, dress, diamonds—everything. Ah," with a shake of head, "fancy! in a couple of hours you could be dashing down to Queensborough in a saloon carriage, get on board one of those lovely boats with the sea sparkling around you, and the soft breeze blowing all the gloom out of your mind steam-

up that beautiful river to Flushing, and tomorrow morning be lounging upon an awning on one of those delicious Rhine boats passing through the most gorgeous scenery in the world, with some new object of interest at every turn to give delight to life.

There, dear, it's impossible to think of any unpleasantness under such circumstances, and everything about you seems perfectly charming." Mrs. Redmond continued to dilate upon the delights of continental travel until her imagination and recollections were exhausted, encouraged to the utmost by the evident interest with which Nessa listened. At length, fatigued by the effort and impatient of Nessa's silence, she said in a tone of irritation:

"I can't tell what you're about to refuse such a chance. I suppose you've got some boyish romantic attachment." She waited for a response, but Nessa made none. "I thought so," she said with growing vexation at the failure of her eloquence; "you've been awfully close about your friends; but I can see well enough what's the matter. You're smitten with some fellow whom you hope to catch."

Nessa shook her head.

"Well, you expect to find some one better than Carickbairn—a duke perhaps."

Nessa shook her head once more without any sign of resenting Mrs. Redmond's sarcasm.

"Then I can't understand why you hesitate. I should have thought you had had enough of misery."

"It may be that is why I do hesitate. If I could only love Carickbairn—"

"I don't see why you shouldn't love him; he can give you everything that women of our class marry for. You talk about love as if you were still a child at school. It's just those matches that result from such silly sentiment that turn out bad. I never knew any couple yet who married for love who didn't detest each other before a year was ended. Can't you see your own eyes? Look down in the street there; can you pick out a single well-dressed woman who looks as if she were in love? Not one, they have all found that the real enjoyment of life comes from dress and position and all that. Love is an amusement—it lasts at the outside for a year or so; but wealth brings enjoyment for a whole life time. What would become of us after forty if we had nothing but love to live upon?"

"Oh, we must love as long as we live; it is part of our life," said Nessa fervently. "Do not old people weep when death parts them from those they love?"

"That's affection; and it's precisely that affection which springs up after marriage when two people have married sensibly, and not married from inclination."

As Nessa seemed to accept this proposition, Mrs. Redmond continued:

"A woman must come to love a man who is always providing her with what she wants."

"But the man must love to give; and if love only springs from receiving, and the wife gives nothing," Nessa suggested.

"But the wife does give something—she gives herself. What more could a man ask for? Besides, men are different from women—they like giving."

"So do women surely?"

Mrs. Redmond, judging her sex by her own standard, was not so convinced on this head, but she was quite ready to grant it for the sake of argument.

"Well, there you are!" said she, "if both give both must love. And the more you give, the more you ought to love. And, of course, the more you give to Carickbairn, you do give more than if he were quite the man of your choice. No one denies that he is a little weak in his intellect, and requires some one to guide him; but in taking care of him, and making some sacrifice with a sort of philanthropic notion—a kind of feeling that you are making him happy—Mrs. Redmond checked herself, for she was being carried by the force of her own logic to lengths that appeared to her a little too ridiculous to impose even on such a simpleton as Nessa. But she certainly would have continued had she known what hopeful conviction she had caused to dawn upon the mind of her guest. As it was, she leaned back in her chair and folded her arms in morose silence, saying to herself that it was no good going any further; she must give up the attempt to mould the stubborn girl to her purpose.

Both sat quite silent for some minutes; then Nessa looking up, with a set resolve in her clear eyes, said:

"How long would it take to arrange for a marriage?"

"Oh, the arrangements are all made. When we first began to talk about this affair, I felt so sure you intended to do the sensible thing that I told Carickbairn to give the formal notice at the registry office in his parish, and it was done. Why dear chummy—Mrs. Redmond leant forward, warmed with a sudden rush of affection—"You could be married this very afternoon, if you liked!"

"Then I will be married this afternoon," said Nessa, firmly.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Fruits of Courtship.

Ned Grimes wore a sad countenance. He was often asked what the matter, but no satisfactory answer was forthcoming. At length an intimate friend obtained the following particulars of him:

"You know," said Ned, "I have been courting Sally W. a long while; and so we had a great notion of getting married when that damned old colonel—"

"Go on, Ned, don't be a boy; what about Colonel—?"

"Why, you see, Sally said I had better ask him, and so I did, as perlige as I knowed how."

"Well, what reply did he make?"

"Why, he kinder hinted round as if I wasn't wanted there."

"Well, Ned, let us know what the hints were—what the colonel said to disturb your mind so."

"Why, he said if he caught me there again he would cowhide me till I hadn't an inch of skin left on my back; darn his old picter!"

A man's best fortune, or his worst, is his wife.

The Cornwall hercule club, champions of the world, defeated the Ottawas six or six games to nothing, last Saturday.

Oliver Morphy, whose death by drowning in Lake Winnepig was reported the other day, was well known in Toronto aquatic circles. He was one of the Argonaut crew that made the best mile and a half record in still water at Watkin's Glen, and he rowed with an Argonaut crew at Henley, Eng.

Who Napoleon II. Was.

"Who was Napoleon II.?"

A question often asked and, strange to say, seldom, if ever, answered. Napoleon the Great, the Second, the Little. That is the order. The Second Napoleon was duke of Reichstadt, son of Napoleon I. and a daughter of Hapsburg. Losing all hope of ever leaving a son and heir by his beautiful Josephine, he turned to the French senate and secured a divorce. What was said by him and Eugene to Josephine is only partially known. The gentle woman, true as women always are, yielded to his schemes. Josephine silenced, and the decree granted, Napoleon turned to Russia, to that mixture of madness, terror and cruelty, the Romanoffs. He would wed a daughter of that house, which, his prophetic mind had prophesied, would one day rule Europe. Refused by a child of the Greek church, he turns to one like himself, a recreant from the Roman catholic. The splendid bauble of the Bourbon crown in alliance with the Corsican was too much, even for Matternich.

Marie Louise was willing. She, the descendant of a long line of kings, of Europe's oldest royal house, was to mingle her blood with that of a Corsican adventurer. The offspring of the marriage was Napoleon II., king of Rome and a duke of Reichstadt. In its cradle kings and rulers—a poor, bitter-minded, broken prisoner; and Rome's king, Reichstadt's duke, had neither diadem nor scepter, only disease—death. Whether he was diplomatically done away with or died of disease not unnaturally contracted no one will ever know. He, the hero, who in "The Bonny Bunch of Roses" promises so many big things, lived to accomplish nothing.

Napoleon III. got his title, the Third, for the Second never reigned, by a compositor mistaking the exclamation points—"!!!"—for the Roman numerals III. Napoleon II. seems to have inherited much more of the Hapsburg facial characteristics than those of the Bonaparte.

Not only the wide, long West from beyond the Pyrenees to the Zuyder Zee, from Jura to the ocean, but lands lying to the east, by the Tigris, the Hellespont, the Ganges and the Nile and Euphrates. Where Caesar went and Alexander he would go. Only a few years ago there was no conqueror, no king, only an exile—a poor, bitter-minded, broken prisoner; and Rome's king, Reichstadt's duke, had neither diadem nor scepter, only disease—death. Whether he was diplomatically done away with or died of disease not unnaturally contracted no one will ever know. He, the hero, who in "The Bonny Bunch of Roses" promises so many big things, lived to accomplish nothing.

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