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ROSALBA;

OR,

FAITHFUL TO TWO LOVES.

An Episode of the Rebellion of 1837-38.

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[Written for the Canadian Illustrated News.]

CHAPTER X.

FAITHFUL TO THE FIRST LOVE.

TOWARDS the close of the summer of 1847, Walter Phipps was engaged on the quays receiving some merchandize which had arrived to him from England. After his work was done, he was about returning to his store, when his attention was attracted by a large crowd gathered around a newly arrived vessel. On approaching nearer, he observed a ghastly set of men, women and children just disembarked on the pier. It was an emigrant ship disgorging its mass of human freight. The spectacle was so piteous, that the benevolent merchant advanced still nearer, and stood at the head of the gangway, as a sick and apparently dying man was being borne out on a litter. There was something in that wasted figure, those sunken eyes, and that thin, iron-gray hair which appealed forcibly to his compassion, and without further reasoning with himself, he requested the captain, who was standing by, to allow him to take charge of the invalid.

"Do so, sir," said the captain, in a low voice. "It will be a charity. He has not a friend in the world and he is dying."

Instead of taking a vehicle on the quay, Walter directed a boy to run to his store and bring down his own carriage which was waiting to take him home. In that he transported the invalid to the Hotel-Dieu, where he recommended the nuns to give him every attention. He himself would be responsible for all the expenses.

"Poor Edgar Martin" he murmured, as he descended the steps of the hospital, "come home to die. I did not recognize him at once—he is so altered. But now I know it is he. What a Providence that we should thus meet! And Rosalba! Alas!"

He drove immediately to his physician's and brought him to examine his patient. The result of the diagnosis was that the sick man had not more than twenty-four hours to live.

"I must perform the sad duty myself," thought Walter, "and that speedily."

It was five o'clock in the afternoon. He returned home, ordered his double carriage and drove down to the Longueuil ferry. Once across the river, he proceeded rapidly to Varennes. A little after eight he reined in his horses in front of Rosalba's cottage. She, as well as her mother, were very much surprised at the unusual visit. They received him cordially, but his grave and constrained manner set them ill-at-ease. What could this mean? Why did he come, and in his double carriage?

Their anxiety was all the greater that Walter was slow to explain himself. He was visibly embarrassed and uttered at a loss for words to introduce the subject of his painful errand.

But time was pressing and he had to make an effort.

"Miss Varny," said he, "I have come to invite you and Mrs. Varny to accompany me to Montreal."

The mother and daughter stared at each other.

"When?" asked Mrs. Varny.

"This very night."

"And why?" demanded Rosalba, nervously, rising from her seat.

"On a mission of charity," said Walter, laying stress on the word *charity*, which he here understood in its full sense.

"Explain yourself. Where?" continued Rosalba, who noticed the increasing agitation of the merchant.

"At the Hotel-Dieu!" replied Walter in a whisper.

Swift as lightning flashes are the instincts of love. Rosalba grew deadly pale, as she screamed:

"O mon Dieu! He is there!" and pressing both hands on her poor heart, she sank to the floor.

Walter and Mrs. Varny raised her up and placed her on the sofa, but reviving convulsively, she sprang out of their hands:

"Quick, quick; let us go," she cried. "I am ready. Let us start at once. Oh! if I should arrive too late."

"Calm yourself, Miss Varny, I entreat you," said Phipps, in a soothing and gentle tone.

"We have time. You need to dress yourself warmly, for we have a long drive and the night is chilly."

"Yes, yes, we have far to go, and that is why we must depart immediately."

"My horses are fleet, Miss Varny. Once upon the road, we shall advance rapidly."

"And the ferry?" said Rosalba, who, in her wild passion, still thought of everything.

"I have engaged for a special trip at midnight. We shall be at Longueuil at that time."

"O thank you, thank you! Mr. Phipps. God will reward you for this."

The girl became calmer, and, with the help of her mother, made all suitable preparations for the journey. At ten the three departed. Before twelve they were at Longueuil. The ferry had steam up and they crossed immediately. At one they rang the bell of the Hotel-Dieu.

In the first part of the night the sick man seemed to sink rapidly, and one of his nurses was commissioned to apprise him of the fact. He heard the nun's exhortations with those open, staring, blank eyes which give so sad an expression to the face of the dying, and without answering a word his mind gave way, drifting slowly into delirium. He lay very still, and his frame was convulsed by no agony, but every now-and-then his lips moved, uttering faint words. The nurse stooped above him to catch their meaning, but all she could understand was the exclamation, "Rosalba, Rosalba!"

When the visitors arrived, the nun, who, with the infallible feminine instinct, had understood all, went forward into the corridor to meet Rosalba, and prepare her for the scene that awaited her, when the latter exclaimed:

"No need, *ma sœur*, no need. I know exactly what it is. I have always had that hope and presentiment. They are to be fulfilled to-day."

With this she penetrated into the sick room. The patient turned on his pillow when he heard the rustling of her dress; his breast heaved and his eyes dilated with love; he stretched out both his arms and exclaimed:

"At last, O Rosalba, at last!"

She threw herself on her knees at his bedside, and hid her face in his bosom. There they both wept in silence for a long, long time, till the accumulated sorrow of a dreary decade were discharged in tears. Then they grew calmer and conversed together of many things which only they could know and feel.

At length the practised eye of Rosalba discovered that the invalid was sinking fast. She arose and had the clergyman called in. Edgar made his reconciliation with God, and his peace with the world. When that supreme act of religion was accomplished, Rosalba reentered, accompanied by her mother and Walter, and another ceremony was gone through. There in the hospital ward, by the waning lamp-light, in the presence of the Grand Angel, who makes all things right at the close, Edgar and Rosalba were married. The emerald ring which Rosalba had treasured through all those years, was set upon her finger, the bridal kiss was exchanged, and the long parted twain were as one at last.

"God is good. God is very good!" murmured the dying man, with his hand resting on his wife's beautiful head, and his eyes fixed on the benignant face of the clergyman.

"The world has treated me cruelly. My young life has been wasted. But I am happy now, and willing to die."

Ten minutes afterward he was dead.

The next day, the following appeared in the *Gazette* among the obituaries:

DIED.

Early yesterday morning, at the Hotel-Dieu, Edgar Martin, formerly of Belœil, but latterly a political exile. A few minutes before his death, Captain Martin was married to Miss Rosalba Varny, daughter of the late Samuel Varny, Esq., of Varennes.

CHAPTER XI.

FAITHFUL TO THE SECOND LOVE.

AN incident which we omitted in describing the death of Edgar finds its appropriate place in this concluding chapter. When the physician called to examine the sick man, he was accompanied in the room by Walter Phipps. Edgar had only partially recovered his consciousness after the fatigue of the transit from the ship, and answered few of the doctor's questions; but when the examination was over, his attention seemed to be attracted a moment by the presence of Walter. He said nothing, though he was evidently trying to fix his thoughts upon something. As the doctor took his hat to depart, he approached the bed and said a good word to the patient. Walter, imitating his example, bent forward to Edgar's ear, and whispered:

"Courage, Edgar Martin, I will fetch her to-night."

The sound of that voice, its broken French, or the kind announcement, or perhaps all three, made Edgar start on his pillow. He opened his eyes wide, and would have spoken, but Walter had left the room.

Some hours later, when the dying man found himself alone with Rosalba, he asked her who had apprized her of his arrival and had brought her to him. She answered that it was Walter Phipps.

"Walter Phipps?"

"Yes, a generous young Montreal merchant."

"The same whose life you saved?"

"Yes, the same. It was he who brought you from the ship to the hospital."

"Ah, the noble man!"

And he related to Rosalba the incident of the bivouac, and how his life had then been saved.

"When I heard his voice, a few hours since, I remembered it immediately. Who could forget that voice having once heard it in that dreadful night, ten long years ago?"

Edgar had related this circumstance to Rosalba in the very first letter which he had written to her in his exile. She knew, too, that Walter had served as a volunteer on the frontier, during the rebellion, but when she mentioned the facts, he affected to ignore them completely. Rosalba did not press him, but she always thought it was he who had done that noble deed, and she was equally certain that he had done it for her sake.

Her surmise was now confirmed.

Edgar begged that Walter should visit him before he died. It was in obedience to this request that Walter assisted at the death-bed marriage. After that ceremony was over, Edgar called him to his side, seized his hand, kissed it with tears, and thanked him for all his kindness. He further recommended Rosalba to his protection.

One of the relics which Rosalba preserved of Edgar was a beautiful bronze cross, which, as a memorandum in Edgar's pocket-book informed her, he had worn about him in all his wanderings. He had it on him when he died. Besides this, he left her the chamois belt, neatly folded in tissue paper. She had the curiosity to undo the seam of this, and there in a corner of the muslin lining she discovered the letters "W. P." Poor Edgar had never seen them.

Five years elapsed after these events. Five years of quiet and silence, during which Providence was slowly shaping things to soften a long sorrow, reward a patient hope, and give the world another example of a two-fold fidelity.

In 1852, the cottage where Rosalba and her mother dwelt was accidentally reduced to ashes, and the two found themselves obliged to seek another abode. They could have returned to the paternal mansion, but the brother who inhabited it had a large family, and they could not have been comfortable there. There was Agnes who lived in Montreal, but her husband, while he tendered an invitation to Rosalba, objected to receiving her mother who was now a confirmed invalid. It was an unworthy freak, and decided the matter. In addition to these annoyances, it must be said that Rosalba was sorely pinched for want of means. The burning of her cottage left her nearly destitute.

In her distress there was one to whom she could have applied with the assurance of prompt and abundant relief. But she refused to ask him. Nay, she was afraid to ask him. This will surprise to one who has understood the relations which necessarily existed between Rosalba and Walter Phipps.

But Walter did not wait her decision. He knew all that was going on. How could it be otherwise for him whose eye ever watched over her, and whose life was absorbed in the one thought of seeing her. He judged that now was his opportunity. He who had always been so reserved now suddenly resolved to present himself. If Rosalba had to change homes; if she had to search a new home, his was open to her for ever, and he would ask her to take it for her own.

Walter called on Rosalba, and never, in any of her interviews, had she been so moved on seeing him. He noticed her discomposure. Was it due to the cause which he suspected and which agitated his own breast? If it was, the way was open for him, and half of his suit was won.

It was a meeting of many tears and throbbings, evoking so many sad remembrances and fraught with such sweet, yet awful responsibilities. Walter imbosomed himself without reserve.

"I have always loved you, Rosalba!" said he.

And Rosalba wept all the more, for she knew how true that was. She knew how, that for very love, he had denied himself much intercourse with her, keeping aloof that he might not interpose himself between her and her own first love. How, that for her sake, he had befriended her Edgar on that lonely frontier, and again when he came home to die.

"I am getting old (he was forty-five) and wish to retire from business," paused Walter. "I would so like to have a companion in my lonely home. And now that your own health is weak and your mother a cripple, if you had a friend to aid you both?"

Friend! Companion! Walter touched lightly on those words, but they grated on the sensitive heart of Rosalba.

"Ah! Walter," she sobbed, "those are poor words; it is not a companion that you have deserved, but a fond, devoted wife. And you would be more than a friend to her, I know, you would be the tenderest of husbands."

"Dear Rosalba, I would not claim more than you could give, but with that I should be supremely happy. If I have not this, then I shall be a lonely wanderer all my days."

This was said with an accent of such pathos, that Rosalba could contain herself no longer;

and she exclaimed, holding out both her hands to his:

"He was my first love, Walter, but after him there was none in the wide world that I loved so much as you. This much you have a right to know, though I thought I should never have to say it. Now that he is gone, while I cherish his memory,—how should I ever forget it? the service and obedience of my heart and hands is yours. I had thought—I had hoped—though often it was a rebellious hope—that you would never ask me, but now that you have asked me—I cannot, I should not refuse. I am yours, Walter; do with me as you please."

She was calm now, and how tender were her eyes. She rose from her seat, knelt down before Walter, and bent her head into his hands.

If there was a happy man in the world then it was Walter. He pressed his two hands against that serene, beautiful forehead, bent it back in full view of his face, and imprinted a burning kiss upon it.

"Rosalba," said he to her a little afterwards, "but for the destruction of your cottage, I should never have asked you. That was a providence, was it not?"

"Yes!" she answered with a calm reverence.

Two weeks later, Walter Phipps and Rosalba Martin Varny were married in the parish church of Varennes. Though the ceremony was meant to be private, it was witnessed by many friends, and there was but one voice to proclaim that Rosalba had at last reaped the reward of her sufferings and her virtues. The new couple, accompanied by Mrs. Varny, retired immediately to Montreal, to take up the sumptuous residence prepared for them by Walter. He himself soon after retired from business, with a large fortune.

In due course of time, and as if thus visibly to sanction their union, one child was born to them. He was christened Edgar Martin Phipps.

In the private apartment of Rosalba, over Rosalba's prie-Dieu, there stands a crystal casket, containing these three articles:

A bronze cross—relic of Edgar's martyrdom.

A chamois belt—taken of Walter's gossamer.

A silver ear—memorial of Rosalba's heroism.

These explain and justify Rosalba's fidelity to two loves.

Here closed the manuscript. As the American rolled it up, he glanced at his friend, who had laid aside his book, and was reclining in his easy chair, waiting for the former's comments.

"Well?" said he.

"Where does Rosalba reside?" asked the reader.

"At the foot of the Mountain."

"Do you know her?"

"Intimately."

"Then you must introduce me to-morrow. I want to get her blessing."

THE END.

Guys in Disguise.

BY QUIZ.

Don't you remember

The fifth of November?

Holloo, boys! holloo, boys! and make your voices ring."

Street Rally.

Look upon this picture, and on this:

The counterfeit presentation of two—

SHAKESPEARE.

A young lady, some twelve months ago, in our presence, boxed her little brother's ears because, in explanation of a litter that he was making in the drawing-room with a motley mass of old clothes, broomsticks, a large turp, red paint, and spangles, he said—

"The fifth of November's coming, Annie. I'm only making myself a guy."

And she boxed his ears for him—actually boxed his ears for him—because (Frederick was expected every minute, by-the-by) he said "he was making himself a guy," when she had been doing the same thing any time since she left off pinafores.

But this, mind, we say on the authority of an elder brother, who was present, and who twitted her with having, while Tom tried his hand at his work only once a year, made herself a guy all the year round.

This he asserted as if it were an undeniable fact, but whether it was true or not is, perhaps, a question of taste. We can only give a few statistics. Anatomically, Annie was twenty inches round the waist; practically, seventeen inches and a half. Naturally, her hair was auburn, with a sun-burst; apparently, it was fresh from the silkworm; naturally, her whole head of hair might, doubled up, have been compressed into a half-pint pot; in effect it was extensive enough to have smuggled half a gallon of whisky in.