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BY CELIA'S ARBOUR.

A NOVEL.

By WALTER BESANT AND JAMES RICE, AUTHORS OF "READY-MONEY MORTIMBOY," "THE GOLDEN BUTTERFLY," &c.

CHAPTER XXXVI.—(Continued.)

"He was, indeed," said Mrs. Brambler. "Poor Jem! And sang a most beautiful song when sober."

"Universally esteemed, my children, from the yardarm—to speak nautically—and the main-top mizenmast, wherever that or any other portion of the rigging is lashed taut to the shrouds, down to the orlop deck. His service was not long—only three weeks in all—and it was cut short by a court martial on a charge of—in fact, of inebriation while on duty. He might have done well, perhaps, in some other Walk—or shall we say, Sail of life?—if he had not, in fact, continued so. He succumbed—remember this, Forty-six—to the effects of thirst. Well, we must all die. To every brave rover comes his day." Augustus rolled his head, and tried to look like a buccaneer. "Your mother's cousin, my children, must be regarded as one who fell—in action."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

LOVE'S VICTORY.

And now my story becomes the journal of three days—every hour of which is graven on my memory. And I must tell the events which crowd that brief period as if I was actually present at all of them.

Our rejoicings and dinner-parties were all over. Outwardly, at least, we had all dropped back to our old habits. I had no lessons to give, because we were in holiday time, and divided my day between Celia and Leonard, unless we were all there together. But Celia was anxious; I was waiting with a sinking at the heart for Wassielewski's signal; and every day the face of Mr. Tyrrell grew more cloudy and overcast with care. He was mayor for the year, as I think I have said above, and had the municipal work in addition to the business of his own office.

The first of these three days was June the 28th—a week after Leonard's return. He had met Celia every day—sometimes twice in the same day; as yet he had said nothing.

"Suppose," he said, "suppose, Laddy, that I only put a case, you know—that I were to meet you and Celia in the Queen's Bastion; suppose there should be no one else in the place."

"Well?" I asked.

"Would it, I say, in such a contingency, occur to you to have an appointment elsewhere?"

I forgot whether Persens had fallen in love with Andromeda before the slaying of the dragon; if not, the agitation in the breast of the warrior must have been greatly intensified, especially when he found he had only just arrived in time. I told him that it was a clear breach of trust; that Celia was allowed to come out with me in a tunic understanding that there should be no love-making; that I was a male duenna: that I should be ever after haunted by the conscience of the thing; that I should be afraid to face her father; that Herr Räumer—but, after all, it mattered nothing what Herr Räumer thought; and—finally—I acceded, promised to efface myself, and wished him success.

I do not know how it was that on the morning of that 28th day of June Celia looked happier and brighter than she had done for weeks. She was dressed, I remember, in some light silver-grey muslin dress, which became her tall and scathe figure and the sweet calm face above it. I knew every shade of her face; I had seen it change from childhood to womanhood; I had watched the clouds grow upon it during the trouble of the last few weeks; I had seen the sunshine come back to it when Leonard came home again, to bring us new hope. The dreariness was gone out of her eyes, with the strange sad look of fixed speculation and the dreamy gloom.

"Yes, Laddy," she said, catching my look and understanding it. "Yes, Laddy, I am more hopeful now. Leonard has come home again. I do not know, but I am certain that he will help us."

On this morning there was a function of some kind—a Launch—a Reception—a Royal Visit—going on in the Dockyard. From Celia's Arbour we could see the ships gay with bunting; there were occasional bursts of music; it must have been a Launch, because the garrison bands were playing while the people assembled in the shed, the naval and military officers in full uniform; the civil servants in the uniform of the Dockyard Volunteers—not those of 1860, but an earlier regiment, not so efficient, and with a much more gorgeous uniform; ladies in full war-paint, each in her own uniform, prepared to distract the male eye from contemplation too prolonged of naval architecture. The Mayor and Aldermen in gown and gold chain, splendid to look upon, in official seats, ready with an address; and no doubt, though one could only see him, as well as the Corporation, with the eyes of imagination, there would be among them all Ferdinand Brambler, note-book in hand, jerking his head up at the sky and making a note; looking at his watch and making a note;

gazing for a few moments thoughtfully at the crowd and making a note—all in the Grand Historical Style—and not at all as if he was calculating the while what items of domestic consumption this ceremony would "run to."

Presently, turning from the contemplation of the flags and discussion of hidden splendours we saw, mounting the grass slope with the most hypocritical face in the world, as if his coming was by the merest accident, Leonard himself.

"You here, Leonard?"

"Yes, Celia." Now that I looked again, I saw that his face had a grave and thoughtful expression. It was that of a man, I thought, who has a thing to say. She read that look in his eye, I believe, because she grew confused, and held me more tightly by the arm.

It did not seem to me that there was any occasion here for beating about the bush, and pretending to have appointments. Why should I make up a story about leaving something behind? So I put the case openly. "Leonard has asked me to leave you with him, Cis, for half an hour. I shall walk as far as the Hospital and sit down. In half an hour I will come back."

She made no reply, and I left them there—alone. There was no one but themselves in the Queen's Bastion, and I thought, as I walked away, that if Heaven had thought fit to make me a lover like the rest of mankind, there was no place in the world where I would sooner declare my love than Celia's Arbour—provided I could whisper the tale into Celia's own ear.

Half an hour to wait. As the end of the long straight curtain, in the middle of which was the Lion's Gate, with its little octagonal stone watch-tower, and where the wooden railings fenced off the exercise ground of the Convalescent Hospital, I found the little Brambler children playing, and stood watching them. That took up fully ten minutes. Three tall, gaunt soldiers, thin and pale from recent sickness, were on the other side of the fence watching them too. One of them bore on his cap the number of Leonard's regiment.

I asked him if he knew Captain Copleston.

He laughed. "Gentleman Jack?" he asked.

"Why, who doesn't know Gentleman Jack? I was in the ranks with him. Always a gentleman, though, and the smartest man in the regiment. It was him as took the Rifle Pit. That was the making of him. And no one grudged him the luck. Some sense, making him an officer."

From which I gathered that there were other officers in the regiment who had not commended themselves to this good fellow's admiration.

The Bramblers, headed by Forty-six, now a sturdy lad of twelve, were celebrating an imaginary banquet, in imitation of last night's tremendous and unexpected feed. The eldest boy occupied the chair, and ably sustained the outward forms of carving, inviting to titbits, a little more of the gravy, the addition of a piece of fat, a slice of the silver side, another helping, pressing at the same time a cordial invitation on all to drink, with a choice of liquors which did infinite credit to his information and his inventive faculty, and sending about invisible plates and imaginary goblets with an alacrity and hospitality worthy of a One-eyed Calender at the feast of a Barmecide or a skper at a theatrical banquet. It was an idyllic scene, and one enjoyed it all the more because the children—their breakings-out were better already—entered into the spirit of the thing with such keen delight, because one knew that at home there was awaiting them the goodly remnant of that noble round of beef; and because the historiographically gifted Ferdinand had found fresh and worthy subjects for his pen, which might result, if judiciously handled, in many legs of mutton.

By a combination of circumstances needless here to explain, Forty-six subsequently became, and is still, a shorthand reporter. He does not go into the Gallery of the House, because he prefers reporting public dinners, breakfasts, and all those Functions where eating and drinking come into play. You may recognise his hand, if you remember to think of it, when you read the report of such meetings in the accuracy, the fullness, and the feeling which are shown in his notice of the viands and the drinks. It is unnecessary to say that he has never parted with the twist which characterised him as a boy, and was due to the year of his birth, and he may be seen at that Paradise of Reporters, the Cheshire Cheese, taking two steaks to his neighbour's one; after the steaks, ordering a couple of kidneys on toast, being twice as much as anybody else, and taking cheese on a like liberal scale. He is said, also, to have views of great breadth in the matter of stout, and to be always thirsty on the exhibition of Scotch whisky.

When I was tired of watching the boys and girls, I strolled part of the way back, and sat down on the grassy bank in the shade, while the thoughts flew across my brain like the swallows flitting backwards and forwards before me, in the shade of the trees and in the sunshine.

Leonard and Celia on the Queen's Bastion together. I, apart and alone. Of two, one is taken and the other left. They would go away together, hand in hand, along a flowery lane, and I should

be left to make my lonely pilgrimage without them. Who could face this thing without some sadness? All around were the sights and sounds which would weave themselves for ever in my brain with recollections of Celia and of Leonard and the brave days of old. How many times had she and I leaned over the breastwork watching the little buglers on the grassy ravelin beyond the moat practising the calls, all a summer afternoon? How many times had we laughed to see the little drummer boys marching backwards and forwards, each with his drum and pair of sticks, beating the tattoo for practice with unceasing rub-adub? Down in the meadows at my feet, where the buttercups stood tall and splendid, we had wandered knee-deep among the flowers, when Celia was a tiny little girl. The great and splendid harbour behind me, across which we loved to sail, in and out among the brave old ships lying motionless and dimasted on the smooth surface, like the aged one-legged tars sitting on their bench in the sunshine, quiet and silent, would for ever bear in its glassy surface a reflection of Celia's sweet face. Listen: there is the booming of guns from the Blockhouse Fort; a great ship has come home from a long cruise. Is every salute in future to remind me of Celia? Or again—do you hear it? The muffled drum; the fife; the dull echo of the big drum at intervals. It is the Dead March, and they are burying a soldier, perhaps one of the men from India, in the churchyard below the walls. Backwards with a rush goes the memory to that day when Leonard stood with me watching such a sight, and refusing to believe that such a man, poor private that he was, had failed. No doubt it was a brave and honest soldier—there is the roll of musketry over his grave—God rest his soul! Down below, creeping sluggishly along, go the gangs of convicts armed with pick and spade. No funeral march for them when their course is run; only the chaplain to read the appointed service; only an ignoble and forgotten grave in the mud of Rat Island; and perhaps in some far off place a broken-hearted woman to thank God that her unfortunate, weak-willed son has been taken from a world whose temptations were too much for his strength of brain. Why, even the convicts will make me think of Celia, with whom I have so many times watched them come and go.

And the life of the garrison and seaport town is in these things. The great man-o'-war, coming home after her three years' cruise; the launch in the Dockyard; the boys practising the drum and the bugle; the burial of the private soldier; the gang of prisoners—everything is there, except Wassielewski and the Poles.

All our petty personal life. Only there? Why, there is all comedy of humanity, its splendour, its pride, its hopes, its misery, its death.

I could look at none of these things—nor can I now—without associating them with the days and the companions of my youth.

Sad were the thoughts of those few minutes—a veritable *mauvais quart d'heure*—for I saw that I should speedily lose her who was the sunshine of my life. I thought only of the barren hours dragging themselves wearily along, without Celia. The rose of love that had sprung up unbidden in my heart was plucked indeed, but the pricking of its thorns in my soul made me feel that the plant was still alive. Was, then, Celia anything more to me than a sister? I never had a sister, and cannot tell. But she was all the world to me, my light, my life—although I knew that she would never marry me. What, I said to myself, for the half-hour was almost up—what can it matter so long as Celia finds happiness, if I do not? What selfishness is this that would repine because her road lies along the lilies while mine seems all among the thorns? After all, to him who goes cheerfully among the appointed thorns, a thousand pretty blossoms spring up presently beneath his foot. And among the briars, to lighten the labours of the march, there climbs and twines the honeysuckle.

While I was sitting, with these thoughts in my brain, this is what was going on at the Queen's Bastion.

Leonard and Celia face to face, the faces of both downcast, the one because she was a girl, and knew beforehand what would be said; the other, because he revered and feared the girl before him, and because this was the fatal moment on which hung the fulfilment of his life. Above them the great leafy branches of the giant elm, prodigal in shade.

Leonard broke the silence.

"I have been looking for this hour," he began, stammering and uncertain, "for five long years. I began to hope for it when I first left the town. The hope was well nigh dead, as a child's cry for the moon when he finds it too far off, while I fought my own way from the ranks. But it awoke again the day I received the colours, and it has been a living hope ever since, until, as time went on, I began to think that some day I might have an opportunity of telling you—what I am trying to tell you now. The time has come, Celia, and I do not know how to frame the words."

She did not reply, but she trembled. She trembled the more when he took her hand, and held it in his own.

"My dear," he whispered, "my dear, I have no fitting words. I want to tell you that I love you. Answer me, Celia."

"What am I to say, Leonard?"

"Tell me what is in your heart. Oh, my darling, tell me if you can love me a little, in return."

"Leonard—Leonard!" She said no more. And he caught her to his heart, and kissed her,

in that open spot, in broad daylight, on the forehead, cheeks, and lips, till she drew herself away, shamefaced, frightened.

"My dear," it was nearly all he could say—and they sat down presently, side by side upon the grass, and he held both her hands together in his. "My dear, my love, what has become of all the fine speeches I would have made about my humble origin, and devotion? They all went out of my head directly I felt the touch of your hand. I could think of nothing, but—I love you—I love you. I have always loved you since you were a little child; and now that you are so beautiful—so sweet, so good—my queen of womanhood—I love you ten times as much as I ever thought I could, even when I lay awake at night in the trenches, trying to picture such a moment as this. My love, you are too high for me. I am not worthy of you."

"Not worthy? Oh! Leonard—do not say that. You have made me proud and happy. What can you find in me, or think that is in me, that you could love me so—for five long years? Are you sure that you are not setting up an ideal that you will tire of, and be disappointed when you find the reality?"

"I'm appointed? He, and with Celia?"

He released her hands, and laid his arm around her waist.

"What a mistake to make! To be in love with a woman and to find her an angel. My dear, I am a man of very small imagination—not like Laddy, who peoples his Heaven with angels like yourself, and lives there in fancy always—and I am only certain of what I see for myself. What I see is that you are a pearl beyond all price, and that I love you—and, Celia, I am humble before you. You shall teach me, and lead me upwards to your own level, if you can."

When I came back, the half-hour expired, they were sitting side by side on that slope of tall grass still. But they were changed, transformed. Celia's face was glowing with a new light of happiness; it was like the water in the harbour that we had once seen touched by the rising sun; her cheeks were flushed, her eyes were glistening with tears; one hand lay in Leonard's and round her waist was Leonard's arm.

And for her lover, he was triumphant; it was nothing to him that he was making demonstrative love in this public place, actually a bastion on the ramparts of Her Majesty's most important naval station and dockyard. To be sure there was no one to see them but the swallows, and these birds, whose pairing time for the season was over, had too much to do fly-catching—the serious business of life being well set in for swallows in the month of June—to pay much regard to a pair of foolish mortals.

"Come, Laddy," he cried, springing to his feet and seizing her by the hand, while Celia rose all as blushing as Venus Anadyomene, "be the first to wish that Celia may be happy. She has been so foolish, this dear Celia of ours, this dainty little Cis that we love so much, as to say that she will take me just as I am, for better and for worse." He took her hand again with that proud and happy look of triumphant love, as if he could not bear to let her go for a moment, and she nestled close to him as if it was her place, and she loved to be near him. "There is a foolish maiden for you. There is an indiscreet and imprudent angel who comes down from the heavens to live with us on earth. Congratulate her, Laddy, my dear old dreamer. I am so happy."

Celia slightly drew her hand away, and came over to me as if for protection. I saw how her proud and queenly manner was in some way humbled, that she was subdued, as if she had found her master.

She laid her hand upon my shoulder, in her caressing way, which showed me that she was happy, and then I began to congratulate them both. After that I made them sit down on the grass, while I sat on the wheel of the gun carriage, and I talked sense and reason to them. I told them that this kind of engagement was one greatly to be deprecated, that it was highly irregular not to go first to head-quarters, and to ask permission of parents. That to confess to each other, in this impetuous way, of love, and to make promise of marriage were things which even Mr. Pontifex, when the passions of his youth were so strong as to make him curse the goose, had not to repent of. That Mrs. Pontifex had always recommended Celia to follow her own example, and wait till she was of ripe and mature years before marrying any one, and then to marry a man some years younger than herself; that they ought to consider how a soldier's life was a wandering one, and a Captain's pay not more than enough for the simple necessities; that they might have to wait till Leonard was a Field Marshal before consent could be obtained; that the Captain would be greatly astonished; that neither he nor I intended to allow Leonard to carry Cis away with him, for a long time to come, nor had we dreamed that such a thing would follow when we welcomed him home. Many more things I added in the same strain, while Leonard laughed, and Cis listened half laughing and half crying, and then, because the occasion was really a solemn one, I spoke a little of my mind. They were good, and bore with me as I leaned over the old gun and talked, looking through the embrasure across the harbour.

I reminded Leonard how, five years ago, he had left us, with the resolution to advance himself, and the hope of returning and finding Celia free. Never any man, I told him, had such great good fortune as had fallen on him, in getting all he hoped and prayed for. And then I