

A REGIMENTAL ROMANCE.

Captain Ruthven had put the last careless touches to his toilet, and stood leaning on his elbow and looking at himself in the glass with a handsome and insolent smile.

"I don't know, Ayres; I sometimes wish we had remained in the West. Awful climate! See how they are dying. Facing bullets is one thing; facing Yellow Jack quite another. We shall be ordered to New Orleans next week—mark it."

Lieutenant Ayres stood up and glanced at his watch.

"It is quite nine. Are you ready? The dancing has begun long since."

So the two officers set out for the ball. The lieutenant's conjecture proved correct; the festivities were in full progress, and, as they entered the room, the dancers were whirling through a Strauss waltz.

"Who would imagine the fever only a few hundred miles away!" murmured Ruthven, with his satirical smile, as he watched the scene.

"But it is for the benefit of the sufferers."

And he, also, was watched. More than one dark-eyed Southern beauty noted his arrival and thought of the vacancies still on her card. The Fifth was noted for its handsome officers, and not unjustly, as one might see by glancing through the room; but Ruthven was the peer of them all. There was something wild and fierce, almost cruel, in the splendour of his features—proud, and sad, and sarcastic.

He looks on dreamily, and you would not suppose he cares for the scene or any one figuring in it; but a faint flush has risen to his olive cheek, and his heart has thrilled within him.

The dance ends, and he crosses the room to where sits the famous beauty and heiress of the Ravieres plantation, Miss Douglas, who is fanning herself, a little exhausted. The little dried-up old lady beside her is in a great flutter, and smirks and fans herself violently. It is Madame Noiret, the governess.

Miss Douglas receives the handsome soldier haughtily, and he begins talking about the ball.

"Many more than I thought there would be. The dread is growing, and I do not wonder. How many new cases yesterday?"

"Are you afraid of the fever, captain?" asks Madame Noiret.

"I am—frankly," he laughs. "I can scarcely conceive a more miserable fate. We are expecting to be ordered to New Orleans, and you can fancy my sensations over the prospect."

"I am so accustomed to the fever," says Madame, with a shrug, "that I never think of it. This season is no worse than some others I have passed through. You would be much regretted, captain, if anything unfortunate should happen to you. I have heard that you are the favourite of your regiment, and they tell me that one of your men is passionately attached to you. He was pointed out to us on parade this morning—the drill, I believe, you call it. A fine fellow, whose life, they tell me, you saved—O'Leary."

"Yes, I did O'Leary a service, and he has been much attached to me ever since; it is quite true. Miss Douglas, may I have this quadrille?"

Miss Douglas danced with Captain Ruthven half a dozen times that evening, and they had several quiet and doubtless romantic talks together in out-of-the-way places. This, however, surprised no one; the beautiful heiress had shown something of a preference weeks before.

Ruthven was in great spirits; and yet was there not an odd sort of turbulence in his gaiety, such as people show who would drown a secret care? Now and then he sighed heavily, and more than once glanced stealthily at his watch.

Ayres caught him in the dressing-room leaning on his hand and in a dark reverie, so that he did not even hear the lieutenant as he entered, nor until he had touched him on the shoulder, when he started and flamed up savagely. But it was only the ebullition of a second.

"What are you doing here?"

"Is it you, Ayres? I was just debating whether I should go out and have a smoke," and he got up. "If any one asks for me, make an excuse."

They chatted a little longer—the ball, the ladies, the prospect of these gayeties ending very shortly—and Ayres went away again. Ruthven watched him to the door, and, having made sure that he was really gone, took a note from his pocket and crossed over to the light. The message was written on pretty and perfumed paper, but in a curious scrawl, and began thus:

"DEAREST CAPTAIN RUTHVEN—Meet me to-night before twelve, at the usual place, or you will be sorry. I have made up my mind at last about what I shall do—it is—"

He suddenly crunched the paper in his fingers and thrust it into his pocket, and, with a pale imprecation, murmured:

"She would dare anything—it is the Creole blood. I must see her!"—he strode to the door and a fierce and ill-boding frown lit up his dark features—"and have it over." And with this he went out.

It was a lovely Southern night—a brilliant moon and hosts of stars—and the air was heavy with sweet odours. Even in his black and bitter mood, Ruthven felt something of the languor and poetry of the air and scene. A beautiful world—why should so many hearts in it ache? A bird was singing in the silent canebrake, and he stopped to listen for a minute, and then glided on again; and at length getting off the high-road, entered a clump of timber.

This thicket was darker, and he felt his way

more cautiously, and once put his hand within his breast and touched something there, and so got on and on, until at length he re-emerged into the moonlight and found himself beside a stream of dark and sluggish water.

Here he was met—a very handsome Creole girl, who had been standing on the bank, in some reverie of her own, turned and seemed doubtful whether to advance. Ruthven stopped short, with a sour and sarcastic smile.

"So, Miss Cora, you see I had your note and have complied with your request."

Her large dark eyes searched his face anxiously; but at the same time there was a sort of defiance in them, and she tapped her little foot nervously.

"You did well to come, sir. I am almost heartbroken, Captain Ruthven, and I wish to know what you are going to do. I am a desperate girl, and that note only said what I meant."

"I sent you word by O'Leary what I meant. I have no idea of being annoyed further. I will give you money, Cora—I have already said so. You can't have been fool enough to think I would marry you. I intend to marry Miss Douglas—and now you know it."

She uttered a little cry and placed her hand to her side.

"Rather than see it I'll do what I wrote in the note," she said, passionately.

And Ruthven instantly stepped towards her.

An hour later the captain was dancing again with Miss Douglas, of Ravieres, and when the waltz was over he went out and hunted up his orderly, O'Leary, and they rode to the barracks together.

Captain Ruthven was oddly gay; he sang—a sweet and melancholy tenor—and after a while bethought him of the soldier in the rear.

"O'Leary, are you asleep? Dull work, I dare say, you found it waiting for me. How did you pass the time?"

The man, who had ambled up, muttered something, but so indistinctly that the captain gave a quick, surprised glance at him.

"I see," said Ruthven, gravely, "how you passed the time," and his high spirits subsided, and he sang and talked no more. His faithful O'Leary was grossly unsuited, and could scarcely keep his seat—the first occurrence of the kind in his history.

And now in the next four or five days it got pretty well about that the handsome Captain Ruthven and the beautiful heiress of Ravieres were to be married. It was a great match for the penniless soldier, and he should have been very happy; but he was not. He was *distracted* and anxious, and the more so as news came of the spread of the fever. And, indeed, the whole regiment had its secret anxiety on this point, no one knowing what minute orders might come for a movement to New Orleans, where people were dying like sheep. The men had been through Western campaigns, but here was another sort of foe, more treacherous than the Indians—an invisible enemy whose very breath was poison and whose touch was certain death. And a little demoralization followed, whisky was smuggled into the barracks, and some of the best men were occasionally fuddled, and, strangest of all, it became pretty well known that the captain's favourite and the regimental paragon, Charley O'Leary, was drunk every day, and cared no longer for himself or for what his comrades thought of him.

Such was the situation when, one evening, Captain Ruthven, walking into the barracks, was stopped by Major Poindexter, an old regular, with a pink face and snow-white hair and moustache.

"Captain Ruthven, I have been waiting for you," he said, nervously; and some others came up, all with grave looks, and even the sentinel at the gate, forgetting his duty, halted and listened. "There is some bad news. A Creole girl named Cora Vaudray has been foully murdered. Her body was washed ashore last night, and—"

In fact, sir, lately, people have connected your name with hers. I am sure there can be nothing in the story; but, sir, they say you had an assignation with her on the night of the ball. If it be true, you are ruined, for that was the night she was killed. You did not have a meeting with her, captain?"

Ruthven was pale as death—but only as any man might be on hearing such intelligence. His looks did not falter in the least, as he answered:

"It is, unfortunately, true that I did have a meeting with her on that very night, and a bitter quarrel. The unfortunate creature was infatuated with me, and when I told her of my intended marriage, she reproached me bitterly."

"Great heavens, sir! in that case you will surely be held for murder, and what will you do?"

"I will show that she took her own life," returned Ruthven, with a stern and pallid smile; "and for proof will produce—this!"

He drew forth Cora Vaudray's last note to him, a part of which the reader has already perused; and the remainder ran thus: "I have made up my mind at last about what I shall do—it is to kill myself; but before I take that last desperate step, I shall have arranged for a revenge most pitiless. Nevertheless, I love you—it is love that is relentless, and not thy poor CORA." The last few words were in French.

"I met her," pursued Ruthven, "and she upbraided me bitterly. I asked her what revenge she meditated. She said that she would inform Miss Douglas of our intimacy; I replied that I had already done so. She felt then that she was powerless, I suppose; I offered her money, which she refused, and we parted. I do not feel myself

to blame. She was infatuated with me to the point of insanity; but I did not encourage it."

The inquest followed, and the same testimony. Cora Vaudray had been well known; also something of the extravagance of her passion for the handsome captain; and, considering all things, an end of this sort was quite in keeping with her previous history.

Ruthven appeared on parade next morning, looking pale and moody. A far larger crowd than usual had assembled to see the soldiers go through their drill, and every eye was fixed on the captain as the regiment drew up, his company at the head.

It was a brilliant and stirring scene—the waspish rattle of the drums, the shrill melody of the fife, the stern cries of command, the shifting evolutions of the ranks. But in a very few moments it became apparent that, as the foremost lines marched, wheeled and counter-marched, something disordered the harmony of their movements. Ruthven issued his orders in a sharp and savage undertone, chafing with impatience; and those who followed the lurid gleam of his eye saw that it took always the one course, and suddenly the cry of "Halt!" rang out and passed down the lines, and an instant stoppage and stillness followed. Something was wrong—what was it? Ruthven, pale as death, and with wild and savage rage, with his drawn sword quivering in his angry clutch, thrust himself among his men and struck one of them two or three times across the head with its broad blade. The soldier fell back a few steps—it was O'Leary, red-faced and unsuited. But the next instant his powerful arm lunged forth, and he struck Captain Ruthven in the face, cutting his cheek open and staggering him.

The man was seized, but not before he had made an attempt to shoot himself with a revolver which he had about him.

A great deal of surprise and comment, of course, followed. O'Leary had been noted for his dog-like attachment for Ruthven, who had saved his life once in the West at the risk of his own. The only plausible explanation was that the man must have been insane from drink.

O'Leary's fate was already settled, the penalty being death, and in this case there was no mitigation. The sentinel on guard over him reported that he had not spoken, but sat crying violently. A great hush hung over the barracks, and the men lounging about their quarters talked in undertones, uttering a short laugh at some sally, as people will do under the gravest circumstances but growing still as death, and a little paler, when an officer passed.

And about four o'clock that afternoon Captain Ruthven visited the prisoner. As he entered the guard-house he closed the door behind him, and when O'Leary heard the footstep he turned round. It was the saddest fact that Ruthven had ever looked upon. The two watched each other in silence for about a moment, and then said the officer:

"O'Leary, what has been the matter with you lately?"

"You know, sir. I followed ye that night, Captain Ruthven, and saw all that passed. Something told me when you went from the ball-room, where it was you were going, and, as you stood by the water and spoke to her in the moonlight, I was watchin' and listenin' and heard every word. Oh, I loved her dearly, Captain Ruthven!" and he clasped his hands in wild agony. "And I loved you, sir, and to have saved you the crime o' that night it would have been happiness to die. I saw her pitiful face turned up from the water to the sky, and you a'standin' over her wid no look o' mercy in yours. Oh, sir, I've been mad ever since, and ye cannot blame me."

"Hush!" said Ruthven, awfully white, and shaking like a man with the ague as the dreadful scene was again conjured up. "You had no business to strike me, O'Leary; there is not a hope for you."

"There is one, captain dear," and he lowered his voice; "ye can bring me that as will make the court-martial unnecessary, and no one would suspect you. Jist a little vial, sir, and in a few minutes all's done and troubles over."

"I could not do it, O'Leary. I have enough on my soul already," and Ruthven shuddered and threw a haggard glance at the door, outside which the sentinel was mechanically pacing.

"What matters it, captain, dear? At the court-martial you must appear agin me, and it will be your words that will send me to my death. Sorry I am I raised my hand agin ye, sir; but I was mad when you disgraced me before them all, knowin' about you what I did. I wish to heaven you had run me through;" and the wretched man leaned with his face to the wall and wept bitterly.

Ruthven looked at him a moment or two with a dismal gaze, the beauty of his countenance taking strange and weird lights from the tragedy of the situation; on his exquisitely-moulded features the intermingled tints of pride and remorse, fury and despair—a fallen angel.

"I will do what I can, O'Leary," he said at last, his voice more saddened and subdued; and turning suddenly he went out.

That evening he appeared as usual at the Ravieres plantation. The parlours were crowded and Miss Douglas radiant. The affair of the morning was discussed a little, and then some one mentioned the rumors, current to-day, on apparently better authority than ever, that the regiment must move to New Orleans.

"Are you sure of this?" said Ruthven, sharply, from his place at the piano, and bend-

ing a rather stern and anxious gaze on young Delaney, who had promulgated the report.

"One is never sure of a rumour; but this arose, I believe, from a remark dropped by the colonel of your regiment, Captain Ruthven."

Ruthven turned away with a troubled expression, and some of the people in the room smiled and exchanged glances. Ruthven's dread of the fever was well known.

After a while he was missed from the room, but no one remembered seeing him go out.

About ten he returned, and, music being in progress, no inquiries were made; and when the song was over, Lieutenant Ayres appeared and was warmly greeted.

"It is hail and farewell, ladies and gentlemen," said the lieutenant, laughing, "for marching orders have been received. The colonel announced the fact publicly to-night."

"Where do we go, Rogers?" asked Ruthven.

"To New Orleans—or, rather, to the grave, most of us, I fear. The telegraph declares a startling increase of mortality since the last two days."

Ruthven dropped into his seat with a singular gesture, noticed by every one.

Miss Douglas flushed and trifled nervously with her fan.

"I suppose you do not fear the fever, Captain Ruthven, although one might prefer not to die of it."

He looked up with a pallid smile.

"It does not matter much to me where the regiment goes," he said; "because this afternoon I resigned my position."

"Resigned!" murmured all, thunderstruck.

"I resigned undoubtedly, and my letter is in the colonel's hands."

Miss Douglas was transfixed.

"I suppose you are jesting, captain. No soldier was ever known to resign on the eve of battle," and she laughed a musical but nervous little *roulade*.

"I am afraid of the yellow fever," he said, with a sort of dogged defiance of shame itself, "and I confess it. It has been my resolution from the first not to go to New Orleans. My courage has been tested in battle, but this—is this a foe against whom one has no chance?"

Miss Douglas turned away, almost fainting. Little Madame Noiret sprang up and ran to her, and caught her arm. Amid a breathless and dismal silence they left the room.

Ruthven looked round awkwardly, with a shamefaced laugh, but Ayres and the others turned their backs on him. He walked to the door, and there paused and looked round again. His face was ghastly white—the apotheosis of misery; and so he went out, and no one there ever saw him again from that night.

About four or five weeks after this a strange nurse at Granada, who had been remarkable for his devotion to the sick, was taken ill and at once pronounced a hopeless case. No one knew anything about him, except that his name was Bennett, and that he had been sent to Granada by the Howards. He said that he had had the fever before, but the physicians who examined him after he was taken down pronounced it impossible. Even in that dreadful season of excitement and despair, Bennett's extraordinary beauty was noticed, as well as his fearless devotion to duty. He was very gentle and patient with the sick, but had a stern way and a sharp tone of command with the nurses when they grew negligent, which seemed to show a man accustomed to be obeyed at a word. His erect and soldierly bearing was also remarked, and many conjectured that he had seen long service in the civil war.

He died delicious; but the Sister of Mercy found a package in his bosom, which she carefully fumigated and then transmitted to the United States War Department.

Outside certain persons in authority at the seat of government, no one ever learned what was in this package; but some time afterward, Private O'Leary, of the Fifth Regiment, United States Regulars, who had been condemned to death for striking his superior officer, had his sentence commuted to imprisonment.

If the vanished Captain Ruthven had any other motive for resigning, on the eve of the departure for New Orleans, than a fear of taking the yellow fever there, his comrades never learned the fact. Although his testimony at the court-martial of O'Leary was missed, that of the other witnesses was quite sufficient to insure the condemnation which followed. Why the sentence was commuted is one of the many secrets of the War Department.

LITTLE four-year-old Gussie has a papa with a fine beard and moustache. The other day he had his moustache taken off. When he came home in the evening she met him as usual, but as soon as she saw his altered looks she ran crying to her mother, and with real grief exclaimed: "Oh dear! what shall I do; I don't know my papa!"

"WHAT is the price of this bracelet?" asked a tourist of an old trinket-seller in Brittany. "Is it for your wife or your sweetheart?" she responded. "For my sweetheart." "It's ten francs." The tourist turned on his heel, when the old woman said, "You've no sweetheart, or you'd have given the ten francs without a word. You may have it for three." "I'll take it," he said, handing over the money. "You haven't any wife, either," exclaimed the old woman; "for if it had been for her, you'd have beaten me down two francs. Oh, you men—you men!"