



# THE CONSUL'S NIECE

A STORY OF THE SIXTIES

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"Gabriel Praed's Castle," etc.

This story is founded on the well known event of the late Captain Taylor Wood's taking the Confederate privateer Tallahassee out of Halifax Harbour by the Eastern Passage, while two American cruisers were awaiting her in the main channel.

Resume: Judge Fawcett, the United States Consul at Halifax during the American Civil War, was much disturbed when there appeared, in the British harbour, the Confederate craft, "Onondaga." He and his niece, Millie, attended a dance on board the English flagship, and the latter recognised in Jack Carter a young Southern lieutenant from the "Onondaga," her former playmate and lover. Millie discovers that the two Federal vessels are to seize the "Onondaga," and, regardless of honour, warns a Southern girl, Adeline Lester, the cousin of Jack Carter, that the Confederate ship is in danger.

"WHY don't you tell him yourself," she asked deliberately.

Millie gave her a glance of wrathful disdain.

"Don't be a fool," she said in the familiar words of childish squabbles. "How can I tell him anything? How could I ever speak to him?" she protested.

"He'd speak fast enough.

"No, he wouldn't. Besides," she hesitated, and then with a gulp brought out the bitter assertion; "he'd like it better coming from you."

The words had a wonderful effect.

With an agile swoop Adeline bore down upon her and had her in her arms.

"You beloved goose! So that's it! Did you not guess that I was so glad to see Jack because he brought me news of Tom Appleby—poor Tom, who is a prisoner with your horrid Yankees. Still, Jack told me he is alive, and I had been sure he was dead."

At this her voice failed, and the untidy yellow head drooped to her friend's shoulder, as a sob came.

"Oh, Millie, I'm so unhappy and homesick."

"Oh, and so am I."

And the two girls cried together, and comforted each other, as though no unnatural strife had come to separate them. Presently the buoyancy of youth reasserted itself and a mischievous laugh came from Adeline.

"Shall I tell you what Jack said on the flag-ship yesterday?"

"Do."

"If I had that long-nosed Englishman on board for a week, I'd teach him to take care of Millie Fawcett when I'm round."

A little gasp, half delight, half dismay came from Millie.

"Oh, Addie! He didn't think—did he?"

A masculine step on the stair and a decisive knock at the door made them start apart in dismay.

Adeline's hands went up to her disordered tresses as she whispered:

"That fool of a woman has let a man in. Come," she added in honeyed tones.

Was either of them really surprised to see Lieutenant Carter's spare, well set figure and clean shaven face with its steady blue eyes? What became of Adeline, whether she melted into space or more prosaically left the room, Millie never heeded.

She only knew that they two stood looking into each other's eyes as across a great gulf.

Was it fancy or did his face really harden into sternness?

At any rate, when he broke the silence his words were cold.

"You would not recognise me, yesterday.

"How could I?" she answered in genuine surprise that he should have thought such a thing possible.

"Did you want to?" he persisted.

"I don't know," she faltered helplessly—then, losing

her last semblance of composure, "Oh, it's all so wretched!" she cried in despair.

"God knows it is," he answered, his face taking on a haggardness unnatural to his youth.

The sight stirred all her latent tenderness, though the question she put was strange, would have been cruel but for its wistfulness.

"Then you don't like fighting against your country?"

There was a steel-like spark in his eyes as he answered:

"I am fighting for my country," then with a deep-caught breath, "But this is no use. Millie, do you really hate me?"

The words, the tone shook her sorely.

"No, oh no," she gasped. "I came here to-day to get Adeline to warn you that the Onondaga should not delay here an hour."

"Why not?"

With the question came the rigidity of a man on duty and he was all the keen officer, intent on information.

His aspect reminded Millie of her treachery to her uncle, but she held firm.

"Every hour you stay increases your danger," she insisted.

"How?"

"You can guess that I hear more than other people do. I know that you should be ready to fight against fearful odds as soon as you leave the harbour. I can't tell you any more. I may be a traitor in saying as much as this, but—oh, I couldn't bear to have you go out to—"

Her voice broke in sobs, and at the sound the barriers fell, and she was enfolded in arms clad in rebel grey cloth, while a gilt button left the mark of its obnoxious letters "C.S." against her cheek.

"Poor little Millie," she heard in deep tones of tenderness. "It's no use. War or no war, we belong to each other, don't we? Tell me, if I live through all this, and come to you at the end, either a defeated man or else one who has helped to defeat you and yours, will you still belong to me?"

She lifted her head to look up into the pleading eyes, and with all her soul she longed to answer "yes." But her honesty held her back.

"How can I tell?" she said in a troubled voice, then returning to her overruling fear:

"You will go now and tell the captain, won't you?"

"Yes, it's my duty to report what you say to him, though he must know that we are already followed here. Anyway, if we are betwixt the devil and the deep sea—not that I mean to call your venerable uncle names"—he put in with a frank laugh—"it isn't for the first time, and I guess the Onondaga and her captain are equal to it."

This becoming touch of pride seemed meet and right in Millie's eyes.

"But you mustn't worry your dear heart about me, Millie," he added softly.

"How can I help it?" and her hand clung to his as though it would never let go.

He touched her hair with infinite gentleness as he asked:

"Even if I am a rebel, you want me to do my duty, don't you?"

"Yes, Jack," came the mournful little answer, as