TWO

## THE RED ASCENT

## BY ESTHER W. NEILL

## CHAPTER XII JESS ENTERTAINS

The summer fashion, common in the county, of reducing rooms to funereal darkness, and shrouding furniture in drab petticoats, had not been followed in the Fielding household. When chairs and sofas household. When chairs and sofas looked uncomfortably warm, they were covered with art-linens as beautiful in coloring as the brocade or velour beneath; the paintings on the walls were not befogged with layers of mosquito netting; the valuable art objects were not stowed away; the doors and windows were left wide open, then carefully were left wide open, then carefully creened, and, where the sun was too bright, awnings had been added, or tall shrubs had been arranged to produce shadow without gloom.

As Richard entered the long, cool library, and looked at the rare volumes that stretched from floor to ceiling, he felt that he had returned to a cherished world from which he had long been banished. To own books, to buy them without to own books, to buy them without stint, this had always been one of his day-dreams. The few vol-umes that he had been able to purchase in the past had meant denial of his actual necessities. He had delved into vault-like secondhand shops where dim gas-jets seemed to burn unremittingly, and he had spent hours poring over the musty shelves, while the thin, faded proprietor eyed him suspic-iously. He had bought his favorite authors in ragged cloth and paper, bringing them into the daylight half-ashamed that he could provide be too sure of me-' them with no worthier habiliments. Poets, saints, and sages-here they were, familiar friends arrayed as they deserved to be, attesting to the art of book-binding. "I'll never leave," he said. "I'll

stay here for a year or two. He sank down in an armchair by the table, oblivious to the fact that the ladies were standing, and pick-ing up a volume of Ruskin he began ing up a volume of Ruskin he began apparently unconscious of the fact that he was not alone.

Leave him," said Jefferson ling, "We'll go eat our lunchsaid Jefferson smiling. eon and forget him." "Forget him?" repeated Miss Fielding. "Yes, that's what he de-Fielding. "Yes, that's what it is serves. We will try to forget him

if we can. There was something about her tone that arrested Jefferson's attention, and he asked curiously, "You

beast

length

same

two are old friends ?" "Friends? Well, I don't believe he would acknowledge it. This is his first visit, and you see how he behaves. Her half-laughing words found

a boy :

their way to Richard's ears. "Forgive me," he said, getting up. "I'm a barbarian when I get among books. I haven't seen any for so long. I believe the sight of such riches want to my head." of such riches went to my head. ' she ad-

'It is a fine library," she ad-tted. "It was owned by an immitted. practical dreamer, who spent his days and nights shut in from the world while his sons gambled his fortune away, until there was nothing left but the books. Then, when the old dreamer was dying, he sent for father. 'These books have been my only friends,' he said, 'I have spent a lifetime among them. Now I must sell them to some one who will promise to keep

with good will toward the guests she had captured. "It was very unflattering, Prunesy," she explained; "but I had to bring my company by force." "Don't say that again," pleaded Betty. "You know I wanted to

Betty. come come. "Bless you, child, I believe you did, but then you weren't going to law. I know it's very bad form to law. I know it's very bad form to mention it, but Dick here thinks lady. "It's a long time ago," said Jessica, " and, of course, if father has no right to the land he will give the bar of the land he will give he has a claim to our Texas land, and this is Mr. Wilcox, his lawyer,

employed to prove it." Miss White dropped her fork. It rattled against her plate, and left a it back. I know I'm not going to quarrel about it. I'm tired of dent in the flowered rim. "What-what's that ?" she asked,

and her voice quavered. "Prunesy, dear, I know my un-forgivable manners have always given you grave concern; I know I shall be a source of great embarrass-ment to my husband, if I ever find one." a my of the heid, doing nothing. "Aren't you getting your similes slightly mixed ?" asked Richard. "Well, perhaps," she admitted. "If you didn't have a sense of humor to save you, Dick, your solemnity would make you unbear-ably dull. Don't worry. Punesy ably dull. Don't worry, Prunesy. Are-are you looking for one ?"

asked Jefferson audaciously. "Of course. All girls look more

I'll take you with me. If I'm reor less, though they won't acknowl-edge it. Women keep on hugging the delusion that they are sought— sought by half a hundred suitors, when half the time they don't have duced to a state of penury I'll study trained nursing or keep a candy shop, and sell innocuous lollipops to children. But Miss White was not listening. one to their names until they go and look for him."

"Forged !" she repeated again dully. "Did any one ever accuse your grandfather before ?" "My dear Prunesy, I never knew my grandfather, and I don't know and look for him." "My dear — my dear !" remon-strated Miss White. "I'm sure—" Sure of what Prunesy ? Times

that I regret the slight divergence in our ages that kept us apart. From all I ever heard of him, he have changed since you were a girl. You wore hoop-skirts and an ador-able scoop-bonnet, and if you hadn't seems to have been a sort of thug, lived in cold-blooded Massachusetts no doubt you would have been a beating his way through the world, coquette instead of a conservative. Don't be sure of anything, now, except your eternal salvation. Don't

"Then you had better pray for But, my dear, you know you have been greatly admired." Jessica laughed : "Oh, I know it's unconventional to talk about

I have to retire to a cave or a hut

She turned the conversation to other things. She criticized Richard's speech; then, finding that her one's matrimonial chances, but you know, Prunesy, and I don't mind confessing, that I have not seen any praise worried him, she invented more fulsome compliments. No one noticed when little Miss White, pale, trembling, and without apology, arose from the table and hastily left the room.

my money. The German professor who wanted my help in the house. Jefferson was in his happiest mood. To have the company of his best friend, combined with the That college boy we met on the steamer — he needed a mother. And that bald-headed old bachelor society of pretty girls, seemed to him a most fortunate occurrence. who wanted to be rejuvenated by some young companionship. Men are selfish. I'll stick to you and He was charmed, and at the same time puzzled, by Miss Fielding. Dick and she were such old friends, why had not Dick mentioned her

Beppo, Prunesy." "Fortunate Beppo," murmured Jefferson. "Is he man or bird or name before? Was Dick's indifference to her overtures real or fancied "He's over there," she said, pointfor she was certainly making overing to a canary that hung in a gold tures of friendship that any other cage by the window. "He will man would have found irresistible. ng to a canary that hung in a gow if the window. "He will come if I call him." She gave a faint whistle. "Oh! I forgot the cage is fastened. Open it, Dick. Remember how you used to charm birds in the old days when you were bar? Leurose you have grown be did not stop to analyze, Jefferson he did not stop to analyze, Jefferson I suppose you have grown strove to preserve Richard's pin-nacle of prudence; he began to tell intellectual, too bookish, for that sort of thing now." He rose to do her bidding. Unabsurd stories of their college days

fastening the gilded door he made a that accentuated Richard's position strange sound with his lips, and the bird fluttered to his finger. of aloofness. It was a gay party, and the guests did not leave until twilight. "See," he said triumphantly, holding the bright bird at arm's

Have you had a good time "I don't believe the mind said Jessica at parting, as she stood for a moment with her hand in has anything to do with sympathy." "I wish you wouldn't talk ab-stractions," said Betty. "Sit down, Dick, and finish your luncheon. I think hearts and heads are the Richard's. "I tried to make you feel uncomfortable. It's my way of getting even." "For what ?"

"For you being an ice man," she Richard smiled, and said good-by ening to choke the roses.

"My dear Betty," laughed Jessica, we couldn't be as unanatomical as Richar

## THE CATHOLIC RECORD

Miss White looked up, and fingered her dessert spoon nervously. "I wish you would tell me exactly what you mean," she began. "Is —is there any doubt as to your Texas claim, Jessica ?" "U did the girl still

Texas claim, Jessica ?" "I don't know," said the girl still smiling. "Dick and Mr. Wilcox are the conspirators. They say grandfather forged the title." "Forged !" repeated the old lady. Isoundrel; I haven't any use for any of his brood." Jefferson opened his lips to pro-test, but realizing that any contra-diction would increase the Colonel's tion to county politics

tion to county politics. The Colonel at once waxed eloquent. The laryngitis days of forced silence has left him more than usually loquacious. Jefferson was a flattering listener, and the having money anyhow. I don't want to sit forever on a hilltop like a lily of the field, doing nothing." Colonel had not yet recovered from his sense of surprise that Dick should make such an agreeable and presentable friend during the years that he had seemed barred from all ly, he replied : normal desires by a bulwark of oks.

books. It was not until after 3 o'clock in the afternoon that Richard felt free to obey Miss Fielding's sum-All kinds of trifling tasks had claimed his attention. The very slowly here, but you must never speak to me of religion. Besides, I am not of your faith." hogs had rooted into the cantaloupe patch and had to be driven out, and "You are not a Catholic?" inquired the priest. "Have you the sty boarded up at the bottom to prevent further devastation ; a pest

of some sort was on the potatoes, and he had spent two hours in an atmosphere of Paris green; Aunt Dinah complained that a part of her not just told me that you are called De Ragignan? That should be a stove pipe had fallen down, and that the kitchen was full of smoke; he

wrestled with this unaccustomed problem until his hands and face were as black as a chimney sweep's and he had to go for a bath in the swimming pool before he was rec-

beating his way through the world, and flogging my poor father when-ever he felt in the humor. "But if he forged ?" repeated the "But if he forged ?" repeated the bridle-paths until he reached the bridle-paths until he mines. The black barrenness of the mines. the repose of his soul. I'm sure he needs it." capits of the milers, built like lean-tos in the shadow of the hill, looked unbearably warm for human habitations. The July sun, slanting toward the west was beating down upon the worn door-sills, where half-naked children played listlessly. In front of one or two of the cabins an imaginative woman had struggled for a bit of green in her garden, and the few sickly plants

that had struck root below the layers of coal dust bloomed bravely, making the dullness around them more complete.

the creaking of the machinery in the old shaft house sounded a dis-cordant note among the bird calls. man went on. Spangles passed quickly up the of it road, around the bend of encircling trees, into the carefully-planned Italian garden now blooming with rare exotics. Jessica was waiting with each

her visitor in a rustic arbor, which was overgrown with climbing roses I've been watching you for some time," she said, making a place for him on the bench beside her. "See, if you part these rose vines, you can look down the road all the way to the mines. When

the new houses are built the valley will not seem so dismal. He realized vaguely that she was

derness and sympathy instead of dancing light; she was dressed in and a hearty clasp of the hand. some thin blue stuff that accentu-ated the bronze in her hair; her

The silence continued for some time.

some one who will promise to keep the collection complete.' So father bought even the bookcases, and then had the walls of the room the the to the continually getting in the way of heads, but then I suppose that

me

"'Ah! So are we all,' I emarked. 'Let me see you make remarked. the Sign of the Cross.' "He at once complied, using of

course, the Roman Catholic form, first placing the hand on the forehead, then on the heart, then on the left shoulder, and then on the right. "That is not the way,' I said A RUSSIAN SOLDIER'S You must make it in this fashion -first placing my hand on the right shoulder instead of the left, as is the custom in the Russian

An old man lay dying in a French hospital. To him came the priest of the parish, with kindly inquiries and the advice that he make his peace with God, as his end was approaching. To the first 'ne responded in a polite manner, but the admiration was not so well received. Knitting his brows fierce-

received. Knitting his brows fierceyonder tree !' I cried, now furious, but still with no intent to bring the "Do not approach me on that subject, Father. I am old enough and ought to be wise enough to incident to a fatal ending. Th soldiers seized him. 'Hang him' The 'He is not worth the I continued. know my own business on that score. I shall be grateful for an occasional visit, for the time passes powder and shot you would waste upon him.' Then, with a less angry voice, I turned to him again, saying, 'One more chance. Make the Sign of the Cross in the manner I have

told you.' "He shook his head. "Determined to conquer him, I

cried out-Wait, men-wait! Do not

spoil a rope with him. Take him to explain the river.' The soldiers prepared to obey

"'Look!' I exclaimed, catching

"The lad simply shook his head.

'They lifted him from the river

'Captain,' he said, giving me a

served to impress it

Catholic name." "It is—I can not explain further," said the sick man, petu-lantly. "But let it be sufficient I led the way. It was bitterly cold weather—the ice was two feet thick lantly. "But let it be suffici that I am not a Roman Catholic. The priest understood the reservan the narrow but deep little stream. He came without resistance, stand

tion. "He has the features of Russian, with his French name,

STORY

ing calmly, with hands folded over his heart, while the soldiers began thought. "Probably it is a sguise." And he passed on. to break the ice with their heavy boots, finishing the work with the ends of their bayonets. Very soon they had made a hole about twice disguise.' The good father came the next

day and the next, chatting pleasantwith the old man each time. the thickness of a man's body. though never alluding to the subject of religion. But it was the month of November, and he had an ject him by the shoulder and making him bend over the black orifice. 'You see that water? You see extraordinary devotion to the souls in Purgatory. To them he recom how swiftly it is running to the mended his dying fellow-creature, sea? Unless you make the Sign of the Cross they will throw you into and in a short time had the satisfaction of seeing his prayers it, and you will be swept away. And your father and mother will answered in a most singular

never know what has become of One morning as he was passing, the sick man called him. "Father," he said, " are you coming to sit with me today ?" you.' "Father and mother I have

none,' he replied. 'But if they were living, they would not, for all the riches of this earth, have had But it was a short stretch of sterility. All the wooded hills seemed full of life and color, and "I fear not," returned the priest. "I transt only be 'good-morning," as I am obliged to go out of town." me deny the religion they taught

me to revere. And now I say to you, once and for all, captain, shall not make the holy sign eithe in my fashion or yours. To do the first would only expose ridicule; and to do the second would

be to me but a mockery." "Boy !' I cried out, almost beside myself with rage and that

humiliating feeling which comes to one when he sees himself baffled by an apparently insignificant object, 'until now I have been playing with always address myself to him as though he were still in Purgatory. you-trying to frighten you ; but it "Continue to pray," said the priest. "Your friend will not desert you wherever he may be." is so no longer. Unless you make the Sign of the Cross in the manner

commanded by his most sacred majesty, the head of the Russian Several days had elapsed when the cure once more made his appear-ance in the hospital. The old man Church, I swear to you that before ive minutes have passed you shall had been much in his thoughts be drowned in that river. " 'Do your duty at once!' I cried to the two soldiers by whom he was

held on either side. "Father," said the sick man, I would like very much to have a talk with you. When shall it be?" bank. swift but penetrating glance, 'in Purgatory a soul will soon be pray-

ing for you.' "These were his last words—the \*\* T next moment the waters closed over



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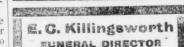
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y in the a distant with a soul in Purgatory," the old rd calls. man went on. "What do you think "It is a habit of my own,"

answered the priest, with a reassur-ing smile. "I am glad we share it

with each other." "The one to whom I pray has long since been in heaven, no doubt," said the other. "But I

in a softer mood than he had yet seen her; her eyes were full of ten-once to the ward in which he lay.

hands played idly with some wisps of honeysuckle that had crept sinu-ously along the lattice work, threat-ening to choke the roses. Dichord was silently comparing Dichord was silently comparing

his own tastes, his own ideals. But father has had to fashion his mind prefer the 'brilliant matrimonial and build his room to fit.

Richard. Do what ?"

"The provide the standard the s

I thought some of us were ready-made," she laughed. "As with

Go or

1.

" No, I'H not talk about myself. Prunesy says I talk too much. What Prunesy says I talk too much. What I need is criticism. I've never had enough of it. In fact, I've had so little that I don't receive it patient-by I'm headstrong, domineering, '' I think I should prefer his head,'' she said at length. '' You are right, my dear,'' said I'm headstrong, domineering, little Miss White with startling emphasis. "A man who loves with thoroughly unpleasant when I get ready. Didn't I bring you all here emphasis. his head knows the reason why, and if he loves with reason—" today in spite of your protests? Perhaps after luncheon you will forgive me."

Forgive you ?" repeated Jeffer- said Jefferson. "You never heard me proson.

Nor me," said Betty.

"Well, then it was Dick. One "Now that's the would fancy that he was half-afraid "Now that's the last thing I ex-"Because," interrupted Betty, you don't know anything about it.

of me. Richard stood in the doorway holding aside the light portiere for the others to pass. "Perhaps I am," he said lightly. Her face flushed. She looked at him but made no really and the

never had anything to say to the when you were at college, and I'm sure since you have been home I him, but made no reply; and the sure next moment she was busy placing her guests, and introducing little Richard pushed back his cha who presided over White, Miss Dixon's line are all sentimentalists,' the silver tea urn.

the silver tea urn. It was a merry meal. Jefferson's joy was contagious, Betty loved the good things of life, and openly con-fessed that she was "dreadfully the said good-humoredly. "There's a dy don't know one kind, you may know another, but I know there's the said good-humoredly. "There's the said good-humoredly. "There's you don't know one kind, you may the said good-humoredly. "There's the said good-humoredly. "There's the said good-humoredly. "There's the said good-humoredly. "There's you don't know one kind, you may know another, but I know there's the said good-humoredly. "There's the said good humoredly. "There' tired" of home products. Grape fruit, olives, salted almonds, bon "Dick won't be personal," sight fessed that she was tired" of home products. Grape fruit, olives, salted almonds, bon bons, all the luxuries of the table were partaken of with unfeigned delight in their novelty. Miss off in the nebula of speculation. If bet won't be personal," sighed "Don't be personal," sighed "But bave him cornered, he goes floating off in the nebula of speculation. If be to out "But be the source of the table have him cornered, he goes floating "But be to out "She delight in their novelty. Miss White kept her gold-rimmed specta-White kept her gold-rimmed specta-cles focused upon Jessica, and adoring look of maternal solictude "There are still the Texas lands,"

in her watery-blue eyes; Miss Fielding seemed brimming over vous twinkle in her eyes.

then had the walls of the room built to fit. It's a topsy-turyy story, for a man usually selects his own library, and his books typip nation," he said, "but I believe they know everything. Who was the fellow that wrote 'Woman is them," suggested Jeff, " would you the fellow that wrote like a shadow, fly and she follows, opportunity' to have a heart or a follow and she flies?

build his room to fit." Don't we all do that ?" said chard. "A heart," answered Betty bad, Jeff. Besides, French epibad, Jeff. promptly. "My dear child," said Miss Field-

'But isn't all love unreasonable ?"

Richard.

Why ?

I don't think so," answered

You !" exclaimed Jefferson.

You never knew any girls; you

French." "My fragile French—" began - a guillotined groom to begin Jeffers

What's the matter with your You know what I mean, Jess. French? Didn't I teach you my-Would you rather a man loved you self

with his heart or his head ? For a moment Miss Fielding fed use it," he said.

CHAPTER XIII

IN THE ARBOR Early next morning

Richard was busy in the garden, he ceived a fragrant note from Miss Fielding, asking him to call as soon as he conveniently could, and beg-ging him not to allow Mr. Wilcox to

start for Texas until the next day. The postscript added: "Can you imagine Prunesy the heroine of a melodrama? Where does one buy ollipops wholesale ?

The possibilities that this final sentence implied haunted him all day, and he was so distracted at luncheon that even the Colonel noticed his abstraction, and called him to account.

"You're about to put the sugar spoon in the gravy. For the Lord's sake, what's the matter with you, Richard pushed back his chair. You people south of Mason and Dick

'I've just had a most extraordinnote from Miss Fielding," he "I believe she has discovered ary said. something about the Texas land

claim.

'Don't believe her," stormed the

'But she seems to think it will be to our advantage. "She wants to compromise, that's what she wants to do. She's afraid

of a lawsuit. She knows they will in jail.

bantering way: Your promptness is very flatterall day 'I did not know the sun had set," grams sound more sensible in he said quietly. 'Weren't you interested in my

revelations I haven't heard them yet." 'Don't you want to hear them ? "Of course.

Does it seem amazing that I tell Jefferson laughed. "That's the reason I'm afraid to you ?" "Nothing that you do seems

amazing." "Is that a compliment ?" "I don't know," he answered truthfully. "It happens to be the truth. when

'Do you know that this is the first time you have been to see

"I thought I was here yesterday

You were brought yesterday." And today

"You were summoned," she laughed. But there was a lack of spontaneity about it that he noted dimly. "I sent for you because dimly. Prunesy told me a story last night, and I want to tell it to you." He made no reply, waiting pa-tiently for her to go on. From the first she had bewildered him, and tions. now, as he sat watching her, her companionship seemed very pleasant and desirable. Or — was it? Perhaps, after all, it might be the charm of this rustic retreat after

his long hot ride up the hill. "Did you notice that Prunesy was agitated yesterday?" she began.

"And she left the room before we were quite through luncheon?"

I did not notice. I knew that something had haphe wants to compromise, that's she wants to do. She's afraid awsuit. She knows they will Her grandfather ought to be l."

promptly.

him! Father, from that day this, his dying promise has seldon been out of my mind. Try as would I could not banish it; th swept paradise. He had always patience. I have a confidence found sharp contrasts mystifying. make, if my courage does not fail 'Pray to your soul in Purgatory remorse which I felt for my crime

Then she began again, in her old while I am gone," suggested the priest, with a pleasant smile, as he I have been waiting for you left him to make his customary

An hour later he seated himself close to the beside of the sick man. "Father," said the patient, "I "Father," said the patient, "1 am not a Roman Catholic, but a Catholic of the Russian Church." I suspected as much," said the

"My mother was a French woman, For several years I have been premarried while very young to a Russian officer. She never really sumptuous enough to hope perhaps that pure and faithful soul sent by me too early to its Maker has kept its dying promise. At first I rejected the thought; of late gave up her religion, although wardly conforming to her husband's faith. I know this through having observed that when alone she always it has served to console me. made the Sign of the Cross 28 Roman Catholics do. The knowl-edge irritated me, as soon as I had almost become a superstition with me that the poor child whom

murdered is in some sort a guard begun to understand the difference, for I admired my father above all human beings, and his religion was ian angel; little appreciated until now, it is true, although for some years past—since I have grown old mine. However, I loved my mother and have seen the world and myself very much, and her secret was safe as they really are-I have got into with me, though because of it my dislike for everything Catholic was intensified. She died when I was the way of asking his intercession. "There is no superstition about it," said the priest. "In my twenty-one years of age. I also opinion, you have been wonderfully favored. I have not the least

entered the military service, and led from the first a very hard life. doubt that the dear child has never I was not lacking in bravery, and received several honorable promoceased to pray for you; not from Purgatory, but in heaven, at the feet of the Master whom he Finally I was placed in command of a company of troops sent with others into Poland in order to would not deny. Bless God, my friend, and thank Him for His great keep the refractory Catholics in order. I was pleased with the appointment. They gave us less mercy.

trouble than we expected. "One day while we were exercis-

"That is not all," said the old man. "I have long struggled against a desire to be received into the Roman Catholic Church. Two ing we came across a little herd-boy, about fourteen years old, and I thought it would relieve the thought it would relieve the fourteen and the fear that I was monotony to have some sport with him. We suddenly enclosed him in entirely unworthy to offer myself. a circle, presented arms in order to frighten him, and called out in the gruffest tones I could assume: to you on the subject. It came, I think, only a couple of days after

"'I am a Catholic, he replied, promptly.

more deeply on my memory. It was the darkest deed of a reckless and 87 YONGE ST., TORONTO irreligious life. It is not necessar to relate to you why and how Phone Main 4030 became an exile; but, after checkered career, it became incum Hennessey bent upon me to leave my native country. I came here, taking my mother's name. I had a small income which has served my needs. " Something More Than a Drug Sto CUT FLOWERS DRUGS PERFUMES ANDIES Order by Phone - we Deliver Painting and Decorating of Churches, Altars, Statues, etc. It has JOHN UYEN 39 Briscos St., London, Ont. Phone 5763-J



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