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BY CELIA'S ARBOUR.

A NOVEL.

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

CHAPTER XVII.

AN OLD PROMISE.

After a disquiet and uneasy night, haunted with Cassandra-like visions of coming trouble, I arose, anxious and nervous. "Am I going to kill the girl? Wait till she was eighteen!" What could these words mean except one thing? To connect Celia, even in thought, with this smooth and cynical old German was worse than any union of May and December. Innocence and trust; belief in high aims and pure motives on the one hand—on the other that perfect knowledge of evil which casteth out faith. A maiden whose chief charm, next to her beauty, to the adept of sixty, was her strange and unwanted ignorance of the world and its wickedness. And yet—and yet—we were in this nineteenth century, and we were in England, where men do not give away or sell their daughters, unless in novels: how could it be possible that a man of the world, a successful man, like Mr. Tyrrell, should contemplate, even for a moment, the sacrifice of his only child on such an altar?

As our misfortunes always fall together, I received, the next morning, on my way home from giving my last lesson, a second blow, from an equally unexpected quarter. This time it was from Wassielewski. The old man, who had been dejected and resigned since the failure of his schemes in 1854, was walking along upright, swinging his arms, with an elated air. When he saw me he threw up his long arms, and waved them like the sails of a windmill.

"It is coming," he cried. "It is coming once more. This time it will be no failure. And you shall take your part. Only wait a week, Ladislav Pulaski, and you shall know all. Silence, until you are admitted into our plans."

He shook my hand with a pressure which meant more than his words, and left me, with his head thrown back, his long white hair streaming in the wind, tossing his arms and gesticulating.

I had almost forgotten that I was a Pole, and the reminder came upon me with a disagreeable shock. It was like being told of some responsibility you would willingly let sleep—some duty you would devolve upon others. And to take my part? Strange transformation of a cripple and a music-master into a conspirator and a rebel.

For a week nothing was said by Mr. Tyrrell, and I was forgetting my anxiety on that score when, one afternoon, I went, as usual, to see Celia. There were, as I have said, two entrances, that of the front door, which was also the office door, and that at the end of the garden, which was used by Celia and myself. This afternoon, by some accident of choice, I went to the front door. To the right was Mr. Tyrrell's private office; as I passed I saw that the door was open—that he was sitting at his table, his head upon his hand in a dejected position, and that beside him, his back to the empty fire place, stood, tall, commanding, as if the place belonged to him, Herr Raumer.

He saw me, and beckoned me to enter the office.

"Here is Celia's private tutor, adviser, and most confidential friend," he said, in his mocking tones. "Here is Ladislav Pulaski. Why not confide the task to him? Let him speak to Celia first, if you will not."

What task?
Mr. Tyrrell raised his face, and looked at me. I think I have never seen a more sorrowful face than his at that moment—more sorrowful, or more humiliated. I had always known him bold, confident, self-reliant, of a proud and independent bearing. All that was gone, and in a single night. He looked crushed. Now, it was as if another spirit possessed the well-known features, for they were transformed. What had this man done to him—what power over him did he possess that could work this great and sorrowful transformation?

Herr Raumer had taken off his blue spectacles and his sharp keen eyes were glittering like steel. If the man was cynical, he was also resolute. Years of self-indulgence had not softened the determination with which he carried out a purpose.

"Ladislav Pulaski," he went on, seeing that Mr. Tyrrell did not speak, "knows Celia better than you, even—her father—or than myself, her future husband."

"Her what?" I cried, as he announced the thing in a calm judicial way, like the voice of Fate.

"Her future husband," he repeated. "The words are intelligible, are they not? Celia will become my wife. Why do you look from Mr. Tyrrell to me in that extraordinary manner? Is there, then, something monstrous in the fact?"

"Yes," I replied, boldly. "Celia is eighteen, and you are sixty."

"I am sixty-two," he said. "I shall live, I dare say, another eight or ten years. Celia will make these ten years happy. She will then be at liberty to marry anybody else."

"What you hear, Ladislav," said Mr. Tyrrell, speaking with an effort, and shading his eyes

as if he did not venture to look me in the face; "What you hear from Herr Raumer is quite true. Celia does not know yet—we were considering when you arrived how to tell her—does not know—yet—our friend here insists upon her being told at once. The fact is, my dear Ladislav," he went on, trying to speak at his ease, and as if it were quite an ordinary transaction. "Some years since—"

"Ten years," said Herr Raumer.

"Ten years since, our friend here did me a service of some importance."

"Of some importance only, my dear Tyrrell?"

"Of very great importance—of vital importance. Never mind of what nature."

"That does not matter at present," said Herr Raumer. "Proceed, my father-in-law."

"As an acknowledgment of that favour—as I then believed—yes, Raumer, it is the truth, and you know it—as I then believed, in a sort of joke—"

"I never joke," said the German.

"—I promised that he should marry Celia."

"That promise I have never since alluded to until last night," Herr Raumer explained. "It was a verbal promise, but I knew that it would be kept. There were no papers or agreements between us; but they were unnecessary. As friends we gave a pledge to each other. 'My dear Tyrrell,' I said, 'you are much younger than I am; almost young enough to be my son. You have a daughter. If I am still in this town when she is eighteen years of age you must let me marry her, if I am then of the same mind.' My friend here laughed and acceded."

"But I did not think—I did not understand—"

"That is beside the mark. It was a promise. Celia was a pretty child then, and has grown into a beautiful woman. I shall be proud of my wife. Because, Tyrrell,"—his brow contracted—"I am quite certain that the promise will be kept."

"The promise did not, and could not, amount to more than an engagement to use my influence with Celia."

"Much more," said the other. "Very much more. I find myself, against my anticipations, still in this quiet town of yours. I find the girl grown up. I find myself getting old. I say to myself—'That was a lucky service you rendered Mr. Tyrrell.' And it was of a nature which would make the most grateful man wish silence to be kept about it. And the promise was most providential. Now will my declining years be rich in comfort."

"Providentially or not," said Celia's father, plucking up his courage; "if Celia will not accept you, the thing is ended."

"Not ended," said Herr Raumer, softly. "Just beginning."

"Then God help us," burst out the poor man, with a groan.

"Certainly," responded his persecutor. "By all means, for you will want all the help that is to be got. Mr. Pulaski, who is entirely *ami de famille*, is now in a position to understand the main facts. There are two contracting parties. One breaks his part of the contract—the other, not by way of revenge, but in pursuance of a just policy, breaks his. The consequences fall on the first man's head. Now, Tyrrell, let us have no more foolish scruples. I will make a better husband for your girl than any young fellow. She shall have her own way; she shall do what she likes, and dress—and—all the rest of it, just as she chooses. What on earth do women want more?"

I felt sick and dizzy. Poor Celia!

Herr Raumer placed his hand upon the bell.

"I am going to send for her," he said. "If you do not speak to her yourself I will do so. As Ladislav Pulaski is here to give us moral support—the man could not speak without a sneer—it will be quite a *conseil de famille*, and we shall not have to trouble Mrs. Tyrrell at all. You can tell her this evening, if necessary."

He rang. Augustus Brambler, as the junior clerk, answered the bell. I noticed that his eyes looked from one to the other of us, as he took the message from the German, in a mild wonder. Augustus ran messages of all sorts with equal alacrity, provided they were connected with the office. He would have blacked boots, had he been told to do so, and considered it all part of the majesty of the law.

When Celia came Herr Raumer made her a very profound and polite bow, and placed a chair for her.

She looked at her father, who sat still with his head on his hand, and then at me.

"What is it, papa? What is it, Laddy?" she asked.

"Your father has a communication to make to you of the very greatest importance," said Herr Raumer, softly and gently. "Of so great importance that it concerns the happiness of two lives."

I hardly knew the man. He was soft, he was winning, he was even young, as he murmured these words with another bow of greater profundity than would have become an Englishman.

Then Mr. Tyrrell rose to the occasion. Any

man, unless he is an abject coward, can rise to the occasion, if necessary, and act a part becomingly, if not nobly. You never hear of a man having to be carried to the gallows, for instance, though the short walk there must have a thousand pangs for every footfall. Mr. Tyrrell rose, and tried to smile through the black clouds of shame and humiliation.

"Celia, my dear child," he said, "Herr Raumer to-day has asked my consent to his becoming, if you consent, my son-in-law."

"Your son-in-law, papa?"

"My son-in-law, Celia," he replied, firmly; the plunge once made the rest of the work appeared easier. "I am quite aware that there are many objections to be advanced at the outset. Herr Raumer, you will permit me, my friend, to allude once and for all to—"

"To the disparity of age?" No woe of five-and-twenty could have been more airily bland, as if the matter were not worth mentioning seriously. "The disparity of age? Certainly. I have the great misfortune to be forty years older than Miss Tyrrell. Let us face the fact."

"Quite so. Once stated—it is faced," said Mr. Tyrrell, gaining courage every moment. The objection is met by the fact that our friend is no weak old man, to want a nurse, but strong and vigorous, still in the prime of life."

"The prime of life," echoed the suitor, smiling.

"He is, it may also be objected," said Mr. Tyrrell, as if anxious to get at the worst aspect of the case at once; "he is a foreigner—a German. What then? If there is a nation with which we have a national sympathy, it is the German nation. And as regards other things he has the honour of—"

"Say of an Englishman, my friend. Say of an English lawyer and gentleman."

Mr. Tyrrell winced for a moment.

"He is honourable and upright, of an excellent disposition, gentle in his instincts, sympathetic and thoughtful for others—"

"My dear friend," the Herr interposed, "is not that too much? Miss Tyrrell will not believe that one man can have all those perfections."

"Celia will find out for herself," said her father, laughing. "And now, my child, that you know so much, and that we have considered all possible objections, there remains something more to be said. It is now ten years since this project was first talked over between us."

"Ten years!" cried Celia.

"As a project only, because it was impossible to tell where we might be after so long a time. It was first spoken of between us after an affair, a matter of business, with which I will only so far trouble you as to say that it laid me under the most lively obligations to Herr Raumer."

"Remember, my dear, that the gratitude you owe to this gentleman is beyond all that any act of yours can repay. But we do not wish you to accept Herr Raumer from gratitude. I want you to feel that you have here a chance of happiness such as seldom falls to any girl."

"In my country, Miss Tyrrell," said Herr Raumer, gravely, "it is considered right to the suitor to seek first the approbation of the parents. I am aware that in England the young lady is often addressed before the parents know anything of—of—the attachment. If I have behaved after the manner of my people, you will, I doubt not, forgive me."

I ventured to look at Celia. She sat in the chair which Herr Raumer had given her at the foot of the table, upright and motionless. Her cheeks had a touch of angry red in them, and her eyes sought her father's, as if trying to read the truth in them: "You should know, dear Celia," Mr. Tyrrell went on, "not only from my friend's wish, but also mine, I—I—I think, that we can hardly expect an answer yet."

"Not yet," he murmured; "Miss Tyrrell will give me another opportunity, alone, of pleading my own cause. It is enough to-day that she knows what her father's hopes are, and what are mine. I would ask only to say a few words, if Miss Tyrrell will allow me."

He bowed again.

"Ten years ago, when this project—call it the fancy of a man for a child as yet unformed,—came into my brain, I began to watch your progress and your education. I saw with pleasure that you were not sent to those schools where girls' minds are easily imbued with worldly ideas—good Heavens! was Herr Raumer about to put on the garb of religion?—"Later on I saw with greater pleasure that your chief companion and principal tutor was Mr. Ladislav Pulaski, a gentleman whose birth alone should inspire with noble thoughts. Under his care I watched you, Miss Tyrrell, growing gradually from infancy into womanhood. I saw that your natural genius was developed; that you were becoming a musician of high order, and that by the sweetness of your natural disposition you were possessing yourself of a manner which I, who have known Courts, must be allowed to pronounce—Perfect. It is not too much to say that I have asked a gift which any man, of whatever exalted rank, would be proud to have; that there is no position however lofty which Miss Tyrrell would not grace; and that I am deeply conscious of my own demerits. At the same time I yield to no one in the resolution to make that home happy which it is in Miss Tyrrell's power to give me. The slightest wish shall be gratified; the most trifling want shall be anticipated. If we may, for once, claim a little superiority over the English, it is in that power of divining before hand, of guessing from a look or a gesture, the wishes of those we love, which belongs to us Germans."

It was the first and the last time I have ever heard this mysterious power spoken of. No doubt, as Herr Raumer claimed it for his countrymen, they do possess it. Most Germans I have ever seen have struck me as being singularly cold persons, far behind the French in that subtle sympathy which makes a man divine in the manner spoken of by Herr Raumer.

The speech was lengthy and wordy; it was delivered in the softest voice, and with a certain impressiveness. Somehow—so far, at least, as I was concerned, it failed to produce a favourable effect. There was not the true ring about it. Celia made a slight acknowledgment, and looked again at her father.

Then Raumer turned effusively to me.

"I have no words," he said, "to express the very great thanks which I—which we—owe to you for the watchful and brotherly care which you have given to Miss Tyrrell. It is not in the power of money—"

"There has never been any question of money," said Mr. Tyrrell, quickly, "between Ladislav and us."

"I know. There are disinterested people in the world, after all," Herr Raumer said with a smile. "You are one of them, Mr. Pulaski. At the same time," he added airily, "you cannot escape our thanks. You will have to go through life laden with our gratitude."

Celia got up and gave me her hand.

"You do not want me to say anything now, Papa," she said. "We will go. Come, Laddy."

We closed the door of the office behind us, and escaped into the garden, where the apple blossoms were in their pink and white beauty; through the gate at the end, to our own resort and rest, by Celia's Arbour. We leaned against the rampart and looked out, over the broad sloping bank of bright green turf, set with buttercups as with golden buttons, across the sunny expanse of the harbour. The grass of the bastion was strewn with the brown casings of the newly-born leaves, the scabbards which had kept them from the frost. We could not speak. Her hand held mine.

Presently she whispered—

"Laddy, is it real? Does Papa mean it?"

"Yes, Celia."

"And yesterday I was so happy."

Then we were silent again, for I had no word of comfort.

"Laddy," she cried, with a start of hope, "what is to-day? The first of June. Then in three weeks' time Leonard will be home again. I will give no answer for three weeks. Leonard will help us. All will be right for us when Leonard comes home."

CHAPTER XVIII.

FROM THE ORGAN LOFT.

In three weeks. Leonard would be home in three weeks. We had been so long looking forward that, now the time was close at hand, the realization of its approach came on us like a shock.

We stared at each other.

"Three weeks, Cis! How will he come home?"

"I do not know. He will come home triumphant. Laddy, a moment ago I was so wretched—now I am so hopeful. He will come home and help us. We are like shipwrecked sailors in sight of land."

We did not doubt but that he would be another Perseus to the new Andromeda. What was he to do, more than we could do ourselves, we did not know. But he would do something. And that conviction, in the three weeks which followed, was our only stay and hope. We could not take council with the Captain, and even Mrs. Tyrrell was not informed of what had happened. She was to be told when Celia gave her answer. Meantime, Celia's lover made for the moment no sign of impatience. He came to the house in the evenings. He listened to Celia's playing and singing; he ventured with deference on a little criticism; he treated her with such respect as a lady might get from a *preux chevalier* of the old school; he loaded her with *petits soins*; he never alluded in the slightest way to their interview in the office; his talk was soft, and in presence of the girl he seldom displayed any of the cynical sayings which generally garnished his conversation; and he assumed the manner of a Christian gentleman of great philanthropic experience, and some disappointment with human nature. I was a good deal amused by the change, but a little disquieted, because it showed that he was in earnest. There was to be no brutal force, no melodramatic marriage by reluctant consent to save a father from something or other indefinite. He was laying siege in due form, hoping to make the fortress surrender in due time, knowing that the defences were undermined by the influence of her father.

The Sunday after the first breaking of the matter he astonished me by appearing in the Tyrrells' square pew. I saw him from the organ-loft, and watched him with the utmost admiration. He was certainly a well set-up man, tall and straight. His full white moustache gave him a soldier-like look. He wore a tightly-buttoned frock, which was not the fashion of the day, with a rosebud in the button-hole, and new light lavender gloves. The general effect produced was exactly what he desired, that of a man no longer young, but still in vigorous life; a man remarkable in appearance, and probably remarkable, did the congregation know it, for his personal history. In church he laid aside the blue spectacles which he always wore in the street. His manner was almost theatrically rev-