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BY CELIA'S ARBOUR.

A NOVEL.

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

CHAPTER XXVI.—(Continued.)

"I must," I said. "I have partly got over the revengeful madness which filled my soul when Wassielewski told me my story: I can think of a Russian, now, without wanting to tear his heart out. But the old man is right, I owe my life to the same cause in which my father and mother lost theirs. If I can do anything for Poland, I must. And if Wassielewski tells me that it will be good for my country if I go out to get shot in his name, why I must do that. And I have sworn to do it, on the cross that my father carved."

"Sworn! Laddy, of what power is an oath made under those conditions? You were mad when you swore that oath. That old enthusiast ought never to have told you the story."

"Cis, dear, if I were to break that oath I would break his heart. There is no way out of it at all." "I must go."

That was the real reason. Heaven knows that during the first transport of rage, while before my eyes moved, visible in all the details, the long line of carts full of children, escorted by cavalry, and followed by shrieking women, running blindly along in the snow, and among them my poor mother, there was no scheme of vengeance, however mad, into which I wouldn't have plunged with joy. With calmer thoughts came better judgment, and I hope I shall not be accused of insensibility because I listened to Celia when she said that the perils of hopeless insurrection were not what my mother's death called for. There is no blacker story in all the black record of Russia than that robbery and murder of those helpless children: no wail yet resounding within the vaults of space than my poor mother's last cry for her stolen child. And yet O sweet pure eyes! O tender face! O lips of soft and compassionate mould—would you wish in return for your death another tale of misery and retribution?

And if I did not go when the old man should think it the time to summon me, I should break his heart. It was the dream of his old age to carry back with him the son of his murdered mistress. He thought that because his own life had been spent in brooding over that cruel crime all good Poles at home had done the same thing, and he dreamed that he had but to show himself with me beside him to say, "This is the child of Roman Pulaski, tortured to death in the mines, and Claudia, who died of cold and fatigue trying to save the child," and that thousands would rise from all quarters to die for Poland. For at least he entertained no illusions of possible success. Poland could not free herself in all his lifetime; of that he was quite certain. All the more honour to those who, knowing the worst were ready to brave the inevitable.

When a man lives his thoughts incessantly upon one thing, when day and night he is always dwelling upon a great aim, there comes a time, unto him, when his mind is charged with images of the present and the future, the gift of prophecy. The mist which falls upon the spirit of the Highland seer is gloomy always, and full of woe. The prophet is always like him who would prophecy no good concerning Ahab, but only evil. As for me, I think

Too dearly would he won
The presence of another's pain
If purchased by mine own.

Six years ago, when the maddest of all modern revolts, that of the Commune of Paris, was staggering to its doom in blood and flame, there was one man among the leaders, Delescluze by name, who out of a life of over sixty years had spent between thirty and forty in prison, for the sacred cause of the people. Twice had he travelled backwards and forward on that cruel and stifling voyage between Brest and Cayenne. Many times had he been arrested on suspicion, he had been haled before judges, brow-beaten, scoffed and punished; had he been in Prussia he would have had the administration of sticks, with those cuffs, boxes of the ear, kicks, and addresses in the third person, which illustrate the superior sweetness and light of the land of *Goid*. Had he been in Russia he would have had the knout. As he was in France he only got prison, with sufficient food, and wretched lodging. There came the time of the Commune, prophesied by Heine, after the siege, when Delescluze for the first time in his life got his chance. It was really only the ghost of a chance, but he did his best with it. Of course he failed, as we know, and became, together with his party, a byword of execration, by him quite undeserved. When it was apparent, even to him, the most ferrent believer in the Commune, that there really was no longer any hope left, the poor old man was sent forth to meet Death. He would not wait to be brought before a Court Marshal, to have more questions to answer, more witnesses to hear examined, to listen to more speeches, to wait in suspense for the sentence which would do him to death, to go back to miserable prison, and sit there till the hour struck, when in the cold grey of the spring dawn he was to be placed with his back against the wall of La Roquette and receive the bullets of the soldiers. All this was too *scourisome*. But he had to die. His work in

the world was over. He had striven for the best; he had maintained his own ideal of purity and singleness of purpose; as he had lived for the Cause, so he would die amid its dying struggles. He descended into the streets, took off his hat, as one should in the presence of Death, of God, and of the Judgment, and walked along the way without a word till he came to the first barricade. Up to this he climbed, and then standing, his long white hair streaming in the wind, his sorrowful eyes looking upwards, his face full of that great love for humanity which made him half divine, he awaited the bullet, which was not long in coming.

When I read the story of the death of Delescluze, when I conversed with a man who actually saw it, I thought of poor old Wassielewski, for such was he, as unselfish, as simple, as strong in his conviction, and careless of himself, if, by spending and being spent, he could advance the Cause.

With brave words and a great pretence at cheerfulness I comforted poor Celia, and prophesied her release; but I could not feel the assurance I pretended. How could Leonard, if he were ever so successful, free her so as to leave her father safe from the German's revenge? How could he release me from the oath which bound me to the old Pole, and yet not darken the last years of his life with the thought that the child of the Laddy Claudia was a traitor to his mother's cause?

We had been living in a fool's paradise, expecting such great things; and now, at the very time when they ought to be coming off, we were face to face with the cold truth.

"We must not think of ourselves any more, Laddy," said Cis, as if reading my heart. "If Leonard can help us, he will. At all events, he will be on our side. I shall wait patiently until I am called upon to give my answer, and then, Laddy—and then—if for my father's sake"—she broke off and left the sentence unfinished. "You must both of you try not to think badly of me."

"We shall never think badly of you, whatever you do, Cis," I said, a little huskily.

"Come home with me, Laddy," she said, rising from the grass. "It is nearly eight o'clock. See, the tide is high; we shall have everything to-morrow evening just as it was five years ago: a splendid evening; a flowing tide; the light of a mid-summer sunset on the water; the buttercups and daisies out upon the meadow; the long green grass waving on the ramparts and grown up before the mouths of the cavern; you and I, dear Laddy, standing by the old gun, waiting for him. What was it, he promised? 'In velvet or in rags—in riches or in poverty, I will come to see you on the 21st of June, 1858.' And now it is the 20th. Laddy—tell me how he will come."

"We shall see him first," I said, "crossing the meadow, just down there. We shall know him by the backward toss of his head. Presently we shall see his brown curls, and then his eyes and his mouth. He will see us then, and his lips and eyes will laugh a welcome before he runs up a slope. Then he will spring upon us in his old way, and—and—when he said good bye, Cis, he kissed you."

"We are older now," said Cis. "And do not be silly, sir. As if men want to kiss like children!"

"It depends, my dear," I replied wisely, "on the object. However that will be the manner of his return. And then we shall all three march off to the Captain's, Leonard between us; and should be singing as we went, but for the look of the thing; Leonard will be asking us questions about the dear old Captain and everybody—wait—Cis—wait for four-and-twenty hours."

I went home with her. Herr Raumer was talking with Mrs. Tyrrell in the drawing-room. We had a little music. The German played and sang one or two of his Volkslieder in his most sentimental manner, but we listened very little. Mr. Tyrrell was in his office, and I crept down to see him.

He was sitting in an attitude of profound melancholy before a pile of papers.

"Shut the door, Laddy, boy," he said, wearily.

"Who is upstairs?"

"Herr Raumer, Mrs. Tyrrell, and Cis."

He sighed.

"He is beginning to worry about an answer. What would Celia say?"

"Celia would be made wretched for life. It cannot be. Is it quite, quite necessary?"

"There is one way out of it," he murmured.

"I stood still and looked at him."

"What is the one way out of it?"

"There are two ways—Death and Dishonour."

Let no one know, Laddy. Think of me as you must, only think that for no other cause would I ask this thing of my child. Poor Celia! Poor Celia."

He drew his hand across his forehead.

"I cannot sleep—I cannot work—I can think of nothing else. Do you believe I like to have that man here—that cold and selfish cynic—that I willingly tolerate him in my house, to say nothing of seeing him hang about my daughter?"

But I am a lost man, Ladislas. I am a lost and guilty man, and I must abide my lot."

A lost and guilty man! And this the most successful man in the town!

He pointed to the safe painted outside "Herr Raumer."

"The papers are there—locked up. If I only had the key for one minute Celia would be free."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE TWENTY-FIRST OF JUNE.

The day fulfilled its promise of the evening: it was one of those most perfect and glorious days which sometimes fall in June, and make that month, in full summer and yet with all the hope and promise of the year before it, the most delightful of any. I rose early because I could not sleep; but I found the Captain up before me, at work in the garden. But he prodded the ground nervously, and made little progress. At prayers he opened the Bible at random, and read first what fell before his eyes. It was a chapter of the Song of Solomon, and as he read his voice faltered.

"The watchmen that go about the city found me, to whom I said, 'Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?'"

Then he stopped, having read only the first four verses of the chapter; and to him, as to me, they seemed to be of good omen.

He did not mention Leonard's name, but he presently went up stairs, and I knew that he was gone to see that the room was in good order for him. He brought out certain articles of family plate which only saw the light on grand occasions; and I caught him making extensive and costly preparations with a couple of bottles of champagne. All day he was very serious. Nor did he, as usual, go out upon those mysterious rounds of his, of which I have spoken.

"Celia will come here to dinner, sir."

"Ay—ay—The earlier the better. Celia cannot come too early or too often." He sat down in his wooden arm-chair and began to nurse his leg in a meditative fashion.

"Laddy—Celia Tyrrell is a very beautiful girl."

"Have you only found that out to-day, sir?" I asked. "Why, she is the most beautiful girl in all the world, I believe."

"I was thinking—Laddy—if things are all right—and they must be all right, or else he would have written—when he comes home—he might—I know I should have done so at his age—he might—fall in love with her. She must have a good husband, the best husband that we can find for her. Look high or low, Laddy, I can see no one but Leonard that will do for her."

"But you have not seen him yet. And he may have fallen in love with some one else."

"Nonsense, boy. As if I did not know what he is like. Curs don't grow out of lion's cubs; you can't turn a white boy into a nigger; and a Portuguese, as every sailor knows, is a Portuguese by birth."

Then we began, as we had done the night before, speculating how the wanderer would return. He was above all things, according to the Captain, to be strong, handsome, and successful.

Celia came to our mid-day dinner, and when it was over we moved into the garden, and sat under the old mulberry tree. The sun was streaming full upon the sheet of water before us, and a light breeze rippled the surface.

We spread rugs on the grass, and all three sat down upon them. Celia lying with her head on the Captain's knees, while he sat with his back against the tree. It was peaceful and quiet save for the boom of the mill hard by, and to that we were accustomed.

The excitement of the day touched Celia's cheek with a light flush, and heightened the brightness of her eyes. I had never before seen her more perfectly beautiful than on that afternoon. The Captain's eyes rested on her face, and his hand was in her hair with a gentle caress.

"This was where you were sleeping," she said in a low voice, "when he first came."

We did not say "Leonard" on this day because all our minds were full of him, and a pronoun was just as useful as the noun.

The Captain nodded his head.

"Just here, my dear," he replied, "and just such an afternoon as this, without the breeze, and may be a thought warmer. It was in August, when the mulberries are ripe. I came out after dinner. My dinners were solitary enough then, before I had the boys to mess with me, and I sat under the tree and smoked my pipe. Then I fell fast asleep. What woke me was the mulberries dropping on my face, and then I looked up and saw the pretty rogue laughing at me, with his mouth full of mulberries, and his face and hands stained black with mulberry juice. Ho! Ho!" he began to laugh at once. What a boy he was! What a boy! Never any boy like him for spirit. A thousand pities he wasn't a sailor."

"And you never lost sight of him after that?" said Celia.

"No, my pretty—never after that. It was a matter of a year or two though before I found out that I was a lonely old bachelor, and wanted the boys with me. Wanted them badly, you may be sure. We had a good spell of fine weather, those years you were both of you at school, Laddy, hadn't we?"

"Indeed we had, sir."

"I was at sea when I was thirteen, and I hadn't much experience of shore-going boys till then. To be sure, I was always fond of watching boys at play, and talking to them—perhaps

throwing in a word on the subject of duty. But Lord! the things I learned from those two! The pretty ways of them: when they were next door to babies! and their growing up to be boys together bit by bit. Then how they grew to be self-reliant, and how we all grew to understand each other! My dear," the old man continued, simply, "if I were to give you what is best for all of us, man or woman, I would give you children. You can't distrust the Lord when you have felt what it is for the little children to trust and love you. I never had a wife, but I have had two boys all the same. Both good sons to me—Laddy, there, will not be jealous—and to each his gifts; but Leonard was born, like Nelson, without fear."

"Always a brave boy, was he not, Captain?" Celia murmured.

"It's a rare gift. Most of us learn by experience how to go into action without fear, and a fight is a red letter day for soldiers as well as sailors. But Leonard would have gone in laughing as a middy. It's a beautiful thing to see a plucky boy! You remember how he used to come home after a fight, Laddy? The other boys always struck his colours, eh—and generous and thoughtful with it, too. Why did I ever consent to his going away for five years?"

"Patience!" said Cis. "Tell me more about him."

We kept the Captain amused all the afternoon with yarns of Leonard's school life, while in the quiet garden the big humble bees droned, and the hollyhocks turned their great foolish faces to the sun, while the mill went grinding as the water ran out with the tide to the deep-toned music of its heavily turning wheels, and the golden sunshine of June lay upon the rippled waters of the mill-dam, and lit with flashes of dazzling light the leaves of the trees upon the little island redoubt.

At six I brought out a table and chair, and we had tea in the garden, always under the mulberry tree. Cis made it for us; she also made it so much better than we did.

And then the time began to drag, and the Captain to look at his watch furtively. Presently the mill stopped, and everything became quite still. That meant that it was seven o'clock.

Then Celia and I rose from the table.

"We are going for a walk, Captain," said Cis.

"Mayn't I go too?" he asked, wistfully.

She shook her head with decision.

"Certainly not. You have got to stay at home. We have got to go to the walls and—and walk about there—and talk. And we shall not be back till a quarter to nine, or perhaps later. Perhaps, Captain, we shall bring you some news—Oh! what news will it be?" she cried eagerly.

No one on the Queen's Bastion, when we got there; Celia's Arbour as deserted as any outwork of Palmyra; no one on the long straight street of wall between the gate and the Bastion; not even a nurse with children; and our own corner as grassy, as shaded by the great elm, as when, five years ago, Leonard bade us farewell there. Nothing changed here, at any rate.

"Laddy," whispered Celia, in awe-struck tones, "suppose, after all, he should not come."

"He will come, Celia; but we are an hour before our time."

"Oh! what a long day it has been! I am selfish. I have been able to think of nothing but my own troubles until to-day. And now they seem to be all forgotten in this great anxiety."

We walk up and down the quiet wall, talking idly of things unimportant, talking to pass the time.

Eight struck from half-a-dozen clocks, from the clock in the Dockyard, the clock on the Ordnance Wharf, the clock of St. Faith's, the clock of St. John's, from all of them. The splendid sun was sloping fast towards Jack the Painter's Point; the great harbour, for it was high tide, just as on that night when Leonard went away, was a vast lake of molten fire, with sapphire edging below our feet. We leaned against the rampart, and looked out, but we were no longer thinking of the Harbour or the light upon it.

Five years since he left us, a tall stripling of seventeen, to seek his fortune in the wide and friendless world. Five years. Celia was a little girl who was now so tall and fair. In her, at least, Leonard would not be disappointed. And I? Well, I suppose, I was much the same to look at. And for my fortunes, there was little to tell and nothing to be proud of. Only a music-master in a provincial town; only an organist to a church; a composer of simple songs to please myself and Celia. But what would he be like? What tale would he have to tell us? What adventures to relate? In what part of the world had his fortunes drifted him?

Five years. They make a girl into a woman; a boy into a man; five links in the chain of time; time to make new friends, to form and lose new loves; to strengthen a purpose; to make or mar a life. Had they made, or had they marred, the life of Leonard?

"What will he say when he sees us?" murmured Celia.

"He will remember, Cis, the words of Spenser."

Tell me, ye merchants' daughters, did ye see
So fair a creature in your town before?
So sweet, so lovely, and so mild as she,
Adorned with beauty's grace and virtue's store.

"Don't, Laddy, please. Let us talk only of him, until he comes."

"Where is he now?" she whispered, looking round. "On the road walking quickly so as to keep his promise to the minute? Is he in the train? Do you think he came last night and has been hiding away in a hotel all day for fear of meeting us before the time? Oh, Laddy, let