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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 XLVIII.

AN UNEXPECTED FRIEND.

"All friends here!"

Leonard sprang to the door and threw it open. In the doorway stood—good Heavens!—was it Herr Ranner himself, wrapped in his long cloak, a military cloak which fell to his heels, and was thrown over his left shoulder? A figure the same height as the spy, and having a black felt hat pulled forward over his face.

"The spy's cloak," said Wassielewski quietly, and without the least symptom of alarm or discomposure. "And his hat. But I killed him."

The figure cautiously removed the hat. The action disclosed a head covered with short thick and stubby red hair, a face whose expression was one of cunning, impudence, and anxiety all combined; such a face as you may meet on the tramp along country roads, one that glances upwards at you as you pass the owner supine in the shade, or that you may see sitting outside a village beer-shop, or where the more adventurous class of tramps, vagrants, and gipsies most resort. Not the thin hatchet face with receding forehead and protruding lips which belong to the lowest class of London habitual criminals, the face of a class whose children will be *crooks*, the face which is the result of many generations of neglect, overcrowding, and vice. There was the face of a strong and healthy man, and yet the face of a study regime. And in removing the hat, the fellow looked round with assurance and nodded cheerfully to Wassielewski.

"His cloak," said Wassielewski, pointing to the garment, "and his hat. But it was I who killed him."

"Right you are, guv'nor," responded our new visitor cheerfully. "His cloak it is. Likewise, his hat it is. And I see you a killing of him. But don't you be frightened, mate. All friends here!"

He turned his impudent face to us, as if we were a pair of accomplices.

"About the putting of that chap," he jerked his finger over his shoulder, "out of the way—I don't want to say nothing disagreeable. There's lots of ought to be put out of the way, only there's the scraggle after it—can't I do hope, guv'nor, as you won't be scraggle. Bless you, there's a many gets off, only the papers don't say nothing about it. And don't you frighten yourselves, young gents both. I've got a word to say as all please all parties, give me time to say it. Lord help you, I feel like a pal a ready to this old guv'nor here—and do you think I'd split upon a pal? Gar!" he made a gesture indicative of contempt for those who split on pals—"and if you could oblige me with a drop of something to drink and a bite of supper, and praps a mouthful of baccy, I could say that word in a more friendly way. Lord! let's all be friends."

He sat down at the table, and throwing off the cloak disclosed the uniform of a convict.

"Things are getting mighty pleasant," said Leonard. "Pray, are there any more of you outside? Who is going to turn up next?"

"No one, noble Cap'n. No one—I'm by myself, and I wish to remain as such. There ain't no more of us—and we don't want no more. As you see, a convict I am and a convict I've been for the best part of a twelvemonth, working in that blasted dockyard of yours. Is that rum in the decanter?"—the Captain's spirit case, in fact, stood on the sideboard, with a ham placed there for his supper, and not removed. "Give me a drop, my noble Cap'n; I haven't tasted rum for—not too much water—Lord! it's delicious," he gasped, as he drank off half a tumbler full, which Leonard gave him. "Another glass? And is that ham? I've really got something important to tell—jest a morsel of that ham. There's no ham to be got in quod. Ham and rum—Moses! what a chance!"

We gave him the ham and a plate, and constrained our impudence while he sat down and made a supper. He devoured hurriedly, and yet took a long time, because he devoured an immense quantity. Either Nature had gifted him with a profound appetite, or the diet of the hulks was meagre. In either case, I never saw a man put away such an enormous quantity of provisions at one time. He wolfed the meat as if he had never tasted meat before, and drank as much rum and water as Leonard would give him. It was like a horrible nightmare to see that man calmly devouring his food while we waited his completion, as if a homicide was a matter that could wait to be talked about till things of greater importance such as supper were first discussed. But his appearance served one cause. It helped to calm one's nerves after the first shock of Wassielewski's story. The old man sat silent and steady, looking at the stranger with a little curiosity. He finished at length, and then, taking one of the Captain's pipes, without asking leave, filled it with tobacco, lit it, and began to smoke and to talk in an easy companionable way.

"Yes," he said complacently, "I'm a con-

vict. One-and-twenty years I've got. And if I'm caught it will be a life sentence. I desay—with a flogging. I've had nearly a year, and might have got out six months ago, but it was a pity not to let the chaplain have a chance. Pro-fesh burglar. Cracker of cribs. That's what I am. Bagger of swag. That is my calling—it bath bin." I think he persuaded himself that he was quoting from the poets, because he repeated the line. "That is my calling, it bath bin. I was lagged last summer for a little business in the country, and came down here with a few other gentlemen also in misfortune to work out the one-and-twenty years."

"One-and-twenty years! What do they think of it, them beaks with the wigs? One-and-twenty years! It drops out as glib as—as—this here rum and water. Home they goes to their port wine and their sherry wine, and off we goes to the skilly and water. One-and-twenty years! Why don't they take and hang a man at once? Well—see here, now, there ain't a crib, not one solitary crib you can pint to in this blessed world that I can't crack. And so I've cracked even that convict crib that they thought to make so precious tight. Cracked it, I did, like—like—egg—and here I am. First, aboard a bulk. That's poor work, because you've got to swim ashore when you do get out, and when you are ashore what's a man worth in wet clothes? Besides, I can't swim. If everybody knew what was comin' in the future, everybody 'ud learn to swim. As long as I was aboard the bulk I was sad. Seemed as if a fellow hadn't got a chance. When we come ashore, I began to pick up my spirits, looked all about, and I made up my little plan at wunst, after a month or two—picking up a nail here and a nail there, and havin' the use of my fingers, as one may say, and not being altogether a blooming idiot—why—here I am."

"Yes," said Leonard, "you certainly are here. But, as we don't care about the society of burglars and escaped convicts, perhaps you will go on to say what you have to say, and relieve us of your company."

"Quite right, my noble lord," replied the burgherous professor cheerfully. "Quite right, and just what I should have expected of such an out-and-out, tip-top swell as you. It ain't the society you're accustomed to, is it? And yet you can't, I should say, as a general rule be fond of entertainin' slaughterers and killers, can you? Now, what I've got to say is just this here. I see the whole light from the beginning to the end. Where was I? Curled up in the shade I was, behind a tree, wishing that there moon—here he used a strong adjective which, with other strong adjectives, I suppress, even though their absence detracts from the fidelity of the story and the splendour of the style—"would hide his face behind a cloud. Then a fellow might ha' had a chance. There is a 'ouse in this town, which I know of, where I'd a bin taken in and kept secret and comfortable for a bit, perhaps; naturally I wanted to get to that 'ouse. A moonlight night and the month of June, without a atom of red dark. Ah! give me a good December night; as black as your hat; and a sweet crib to crack in the country, with only a woman or two in the place. Dear me! Well gents both, as I was a lying there, wishin', as I said, I see a brace of men get over the gate and make for the middle of the field."

"Three men," said Wassielewski, "and a lady. Two were spirits."

"Now don't you interrupt, mate. I know nothing about spirits. I ses to myself, 'What's hup?' I ses, 'Cause something was bound to be up when two gets into a field a midnight and stand face to face in the moonlight.' 'It can't be,' I ses, 'that they're looking after Stepney Bob—that's me, gents both, 'cos he ain't missed yet, and won't be missed before five o'clock in the morning. So I concluded to keep quiet and see. Next moment, one of 'em clucks his hat and cloak—this hat and this cloak—on the grass, and then I see the two knives flash in the moonlight, and the fight began. One was a tall thin man with long white hair—that was you, mate—and 'tother was a tall stout man with short white hair. That's the dead 'un—him as owned this cloak and this hat."

"I have seen 'em fight at the Whitechapel Theatre—one, two, three, give and take, while the music plays—and I don't suppose there's a proper way of getting through a long evening than the gallery of that 'ouse when there's a good fightin' piece on. But such a fight as this here I never see before on no boards whatsumever. For one, he began to cuss and swear, and danced about flourishing his knife, making lunges—like that—the gentleman illustrated his narrative with a supper knife—and never managed to hit the 'tother at all. Reglar wild he looked. Couldn't fight for rage. Lor! put such a chap as that before Ben Caunt, and where'd he be in a pig's whisper? Never done no mischief with his knife. The 'tother, this here old cove—there now, it was a real treat to see him. The moon was in his face so as I should have thought it blinded him; but he

took no notice; only looked his man straight in the eyes—that's the trick that does it—never said ne'er a word, and kept on parryin' them lunges quiet and beautiful—like this—more illustration with the knife."

"A matter of six minutes it might have lasted, that fight, or perhaps ten, because you don't count the time when you're lookin' at a fight. And then all of a sudden like, I see this same old cove put out his fist with the knife in it—and the 'tother falls back upon the grass. That was all, wasn't it, mate? He got up once on his arm, but he fell back again. And he was dead, wasn't he, mate?"

He stopped to take breath and another pull of the rum and water.

"Another dollop o' that cold ham on the sideboard, little guv'nor, would be very grateful, it would, indeed, after the patter. Thank ye kindly. Now I'm better."

He actually devoured another plateful of ham before he would go on again.

"Well, what I come for to say is this here. After the 'tother 'un rolled over I see the old cove here walk up and down the meadow slow, as if he was thinkin' what to do next. 'Why don't he bolt?' I ses. 'Why don't he clear his pockets?'"

"I was walking to the gate with Roman Pulaski," explained Wassielewski.

"No—not a bit—never went near his pockets. He goes on walkin' up and walkin' down, mutterin' with his lips. Presently he makes for the palin's. Instantly began to crawl through the grass. When he got over the rails and walked away I was free to look after the 'tother. Quite dead he was, dead as a doornail."

"The Lord delivered him into my hands," said Wassielewski.

"And then I saw what a blessed Providential Go it was for me," the convict went on. "First I picked up his cloak, this most beautiful cloak, which you see goes right down to my heels, and covers up the uniform lovely. Then I picked up this here hat, which is a tile as good as new, and fits me like as if it was made for my head and not for his'n. A better tile I never swagged. Then I remembered that, if I had a little money, it wouldn't be a bad thing. So I searched his pockets. There was a purse and there was a lot of letters and papers. I left the letters and I opened the purse. Twelve golden sovereigns and some notes—for I won't deceive you, gents, both. What d'ye think I did? I ses to myself, 'If they bring it in murder agin the old 'un, they shan't bring it in robbery too, 'cos robbery is one thing and murder's another. These two things ought never to be combined.' I ought to know, 'cos I've cracked cribs since I was big enough to walk, and might ha' murdered dozens of innocent and couiding women, asleep in their beds. But I never did. No, never. So I takes all the sovereigns in the purse, and in his waistcoat pocket I leaves three or four shillin's, and I leaves all the rest, the flimsies, a lovely gold watch, a sweet chain, and a diamond ring. It went to my 'art not to have 'em, but I thought of this jolly old game rooster, and I left 'em."

"Chivalry," said Leonard, "is always a pleasant thing to meet with, even—go on, most excellent burglar."

"The knife was in him, and his own knife was in his hand. What do you think I done next? I takes the knife out of the wound, and sticks it in his hand, 'stead of his own, and I've brought along his own, and here it is."

He laid the knife upon the table—it was a long pointed knife, like a stiletto—of foreign shape and make. I did not ask Wassielewski if it was his, but gave it to Leonard. "One more thing," this philanthropist went on, "one more thing I done. There were marks of feet, and the grass was trampled. So I dragged him away, and laid him under the trees at the side of the field. They'll never think of looking in the middle and findin' marks of a fight. After all that, I shouldn't wonder—I rally shouldn't—if they brought in a Folar D.C. But my advice to you, a game old cove as deserves to get off and die in the sheets, a laughin' at 'em all, is this, whatever the worldet, you up and leg it, and then bring in a *death*. You ain't the sort to get off in a hurry; you walked so precious slow down the street that I had time to do all that and catch you up before ever you got out o' sight. I dodged yet all the way here, and sneaked in after you. Cos, I ses, I'd like to let him sleep comfortable if I could; ses I."

After all, one could not but feel grateful to this enthusiastic lover of a fight, in spite of the horrible circumstances of the case, and the tragedy which had just taken place. Somehow its outlines looked less horrible told by this gaol-bird than when Wassielewski related the story.

"And now I'll go," he said, getting up, and wrapping his cloak about him. "I can tramp it up to London, and hide all the day somewhere. No one won't suspect Stepney Bob beneath this military cloak and this out-and-out tile. Once back in Whitechapel, I know a place or two where they won't nab me for a spell. I don't think, and praps I'll step it altogether. And then you'll, may be, hear of me cracking cribs for the Americans. Good night, gents both. Good night, matey. Don't ye be down on your luck. But take my advice and leg it."

"Stay," said Leonard. "It's a delicate thing interfering with your arrangements, and on actions might be misunderstood, but if I may advise—"

"Go on, guv'nor."

"I would suggest that if you are not missed you will not be suspected, and a first-class traveller to London by the mail train of one-thirty, disguised, as you say, in that excellent cloak,

would have a better chance of reaching Whitechapel safely than a tramp."

Stepney Bob was struck with the suggestion. "That's true," he said, thoughtfully. "The train 'ud be in by four, and I shan't be missed till five. And in case o' accidents, I suppose—he looked hard at Wassielewski—"I suppose that there ain't no one here who'd be so generous and so werry thoughtful as to step half a mile out o' the town and take a pair o' shears, and nip the strong-adjec-tived telegraph wires. Now, that 'ud be a job worth braggin' about. Come now, they'd make a song out o' that job, I'd bet a trille, and you'd be sang up and down the streets; all Whitechapel should ring with it, and the Dials too, and Ratcliffe Highway. Think o' that, mate."

No one volunteered to cut the telegraph wires, and after a little more rum and water Stepney Bob decided on going, and disappeared after a cautious inspection of the street.

"It would read sweetly in the paper, wouldn't it," said Leonard, "how Captain Coplestone and Ladislav Pulaski spent the night in assisting the escape of a convicted burglar, known in the profession as Stepney Bob—however."

"And what will you do, Wassielewski?"

"I shall do nothing. My work is over. I shall start for Poland—to-morrow. Ladislav Pulaski, if you marry and have children, teach them always that they are Poles. I was wrong in trying to get you with us. I see now that I was wrong. You will never fight for Poland. Another life is yours. God bless it for you—for the dear memory of your mother."

He laid his hand upon my head, rested it there for a few moments, and then went away, walking slowly and heavily, as if wearied of the weight of his life's work.

"Bear up, Laddy," said Leonard. "Come—be a man—poor old Wassielewski is not responsible for his actions. Go to bed, and to-morrow we will act."

"I feel somehow as if the blood of that man was on my head, Leonard. It is through me that he was detected."

"Some people would say that the finger of Fate was in it, Laddy—I say that it is a fitting end to a life of spying, watching, and informing. I wish all secret service agents could be got rid of in a similar way. Meantime we must wait for to-morrow—I must think what we had better do."

"I cannot go upstairs, Leonard. I feel as if that dead body were lying in my room, waiting for me. Do not leave me to-night."

I could not bear to be alone. My nerves were like cords tingling and vibrating. I was in the presence of death and the other world. My brain was reeling.

Leonard carried me upstairs, I think, and laid me on the bed, when presently, while he sat beside me, as if I was a sick girl, I fell into a deep sleep and dreamed that Wassielewski and I were trudging together along a road which I knew to be in Poland; and that before us stood our home—a stately mansion, and on the steps were Roman and Claudia Pulaski, holding out arms of welcome. And as I looked, Wassielewski suddenly left me, and I was alone. But he had joined the other two, and now all three were standing together waiting for me. Whenever, now, I dream of the past or of that fatal day, it is to see those three waiting still for me to join them.

ROUND THE DOMINION.

THE New Brunswick Legislature met last week.

SEALS are very plentiful in the Gulf this season.

THE gold quartz excitement is on the increase at Caribou.

TROUT from 15 to 18 pounds in weight are being caught in the mountain lakes near Quebec.

NOVA SCOTIA has a deficit of nearly \$118,000 for the past financial year.

THE Irish societies of Quebec will celebrate the centennial of Robert Emmet by a grand torchlight procession.

QUEBEC physicians are forming a mutual protection association—a "black book" being one of the prominent features.

THE lake is open to near the Penitentiary at Kingston, and, most remarkable, a small sloop has been engaged in the fishing trade all winter, and up to the present.

THE Shellburne, N.S., election for the Local House has resulted in the return of Mr. White. Opposition candidate, by 99 majority over his opponent, Mr. Robertson.

MONTREAL merchants are moving towards getting the Grand Trunk to extend the same privileges, as regards reduced fares, to country merchants buying their spring stocks, as were allowed last fall.

SEVERAL of the Montreal financial institutions which have not already transfer books open in Ontario, are making arrangements to have them opened, owing to the proposed tax on such transfers now under consideration by the Quebec Legislature.

THE loss by the floods at Belleville is estimated at \$20,000. Nearly all the barns and stables on the river bank, and a number of boat-houses and pleasure boats have been destroyed, and the river is blocked with ice for half a mile from its mouth.

NOTICE TO LADIES.

The undersigned begs respectfully to inform the Ladies of the city and country that they will find at his Retail Store, 196 St. Lawrence Main Street, the choicest assortment of Ostrich and Vulture Feathers, of all shades; also, Feathers of all descriptions. Repaired with the greatest care. Feathers Dyed as per sample, on shortest delay. Gloves Cleaned and Dyed Black only. J. H. LEBLANC. Works: 547 Craig St.