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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 XXXII.

"How fresh it is! And how jolly to be back in the old place!" Leonard cried, as we walked out into the silent streets.

Half-past five. The best part of the summer day. There was no one stirring yet, save here and there an early housemaid brushing away the morning dew upon the doorstep. Our feet echoed on the pavement with a clatter from wall to wall as of many hundred feet, and when we spoke it was as if our voices were too loud as they reverberated along the houses. All just as it had been of old so many times when we two boys had run along the streets at six for a swim in the sea before school. Nothing changed save that the boy who used to run and jump, shouting in the overflow of strength and spirits, rejoicing in the breath of life, was become the splendid fellow who strode at my side. Of course I was just the same. A sleeping city and two boys going out to bathe. Nothing changed. The town asleep, and my brain filled with all sorts of weird fancies. I have read of deserted, and ruined cities in the far east Syrian plains, on the edge of the great and terrible wilderness where the lion of prophecy roams round the heaps of Kouyoujik. Some of these cities still stand, with their rooms and their staircases perfect as when the terrible inhabitants fled before some conquering Shalmaneser who came from the mysterious east destroying as he went. Now there is not a single soul left to mourn over the greatness of the past. You may hear the cry of the lizard, the shrill voice of the *cigale*; your feet echo as you stride along the silent footway, and you speak in a whisper, for this is an image of Death, the conqueror. As I go along with Leonard I somehow think of these old ruins. There is no connection between a ruined Syrian city and a sleeping modern town, except the stillness which smites the soul as you pass along deserted pavements between houses closed and barred, which might be houses bereft of their inhabitants, soulless, empty, haunted. Within, the children lying asleep; the little faces flushed with sleep, and the little limbs tossed carelessly upon the sheets, the wondering eyes just about to waken for the glories and fresh joys of another day. Within, the young men and the maidens, the old men and the ancient dames, each wrapped in the solemn loneliness of sleep, when spirits even of lovers dwell apart while the busy fingers of the restless Fates are weaving the many-coloured web and weft of life's short story. What stories behind those shutters! What dreams in those white-blinded rooms! What babble of infant voices to welcome the new-born day!

"What are you thinking of, Laddy? Dreamer, your eyes are always far away. This is just what we used to do years ago. Up at six and out across the common for a bath! And you always dreaming! Look! there is the early bird. Good morning, Molly. Fine morning for door-steps—good for the complexion."

"Get along o' your nonsense," said Molly, not displeased.

"She's quite right; you are an officer now, and it can't be allowed any more."

"Where is your mop, Molly?" he went on, with his light, boyish laugh.

"Mops have gone out," I replied; "so have patters."

"Have they, really? Not the dear old mop that they used to trundle up and down their arms? I'm sorry for it, Laddy. The domestic mop used to be as good a weapon for the defence of housemaidhood as any. And in a seaport town, too. Many is the time I have seen a too-demonstrative Jack discomfited by a timely dab in the face from a dripping mop. Slaps and scratches are poor things compared with a dollop of wet mop. Even a Billingsgate broadside is not so effective. Something might be done, I dare say, with a garden hose, but, after all, nothing like a mop and a bucket. And even patters gone, too,—the tinkling patten. I wonder no lovesick poet ever celebrated the musical clatter on the stones of the housemaid's patten. These are the losses of civilization, Laddy."

We passed through the gate, our heels clanking across the iron drawbridge. Beyond the bridge, and between the walls and the advanced works, was the guard-house, where stood a sentry, who saluted us with as much astonishment as discipline would allow, expressed upon a not remarkably mobile set of features. Why should an officer, who was not obliged to stand at a sentry box during the small hours, be up and out so early? What good, in such a case, of being an officer at all?

And then we passed the awkward squad on their way to goose-step drill. They saluted, too, as we passed. The salute of those days was a thing of ceremony—extension of right arm, doubling right elbow, hand square to the forehead, return double, drop of right arm. The Marines did it best, regulating the motions from a slovenly and irregular movement of the arm for a middy or a mate to a precise and clearly directed six-fold ceremonial, ending with a resonant slap of the right leg, for superior rank. They knew, the Marines, how to signify respect to rank. A popular officer, who was also an

Admiral, was saluted as he went down the street with a regular Kentish fire of open-handed slaps of right legs. That also is a thing of the past.

"I was like those honest fellows once," said the young Captain, gravely. "One of the awkward squad; sentry in the barracks; one of the rank and file; standing up to be drilled and ordered. Well, it's not a bad thing for a man."

"And the officers of the regiment, Leonard;—did that make any difference?"

"I became at once one of themselves—a brother officer. What else could their treatment be? I asked the Colonel, as a personal favour, to tell them who I was. Every regiment has its 'rankers'—every ranker has his story. I should be a snob if I were ashamed of having risen."

We crossed the broad common, where all the old furze had been cut down and cleared away to make room for military evolutions; and we came to the castle standing upon the edge of the sea. There was not a soul upon the beach, not even our old friend the cursing coastguard; we sat down under the slope of stone, for it was now low tide, and made ready for a dip.

"There go the last fumes of last night's long talk. Sitting up all night, even with Celia, *does* fog the brain a bit." Thus said Leonard, coming out of the water all glorious like Apollo. I suppose it is because I am so unshapely that I think so much of his beauty of form. Then we dressed, and Leonard took out a cigar-case, to my astonishment, for somehow I had never thought of him in connection with tobacco—heroes of imagination neither smoke nor drink wine, as we all know—and then lying back on the shingle, he began to talk lazily.

"I am rather tired of telling about myself, Laddy; it is your turn now."

Of course I knew it was coming, sooner or later.

"You do not expect to hear much about me," I said. "I am organist at St. Faith's; that is my official position, and it brings me in six-and-twenty pounds a year. For ten shillings a week I hear three services on Sunday and two in the week."

"Poor old boy!" said Leonard. "Can't something better be got?"

"I rather like the church work. Then I give lessons in music and singing, and out of them I make about two hundred a year more."

"I see. But the house does not seem much improved by this enormous accession of wealth."

"No. The fact is, Leonard, that the Captain takes all the money, and I never ask what he does with it. If I made a thousand a year I am certain that extravagant old man would absorb it all."

"Ah! The crafty old Captain! Do you think he invests it in Russian stock or Turkish bonds?"

"No. I think he gives it away. Where does he go when every morning he disappears for three hours? Answer me that, Capt. Leonard."

"He always did it and he always will. He is an incorrigible old mystery."

"In the afternoon he stays at home, unless it is half-holiday, when he goes out on the common to see the boys play, and talk to them with his hands behind his back. To be sure he knows every boy in the town."

Leonard laughed.

"I remember an incident or two—years ago—when we were children in the house. There was a woman—she had black hair, I know—and she used to come in the evening and ask for money. I suppose, from my personal experience, that she was drunk one night when she came, and went on—I forgot what about—like another Jezebel. She wanted money, and the Captain was so upset by her inconsiderate conduct that he—behaved as the Captain always does."

"What was that?"

"Went to the Sailing Directions. Remembered that every woman had to be forgiven at least seventy times seven, and so added one more to her score, which I should say must have already reached a pretty high total. He gives all of his money away, Laddy, and if I were you I would not work too hard, because he will only give yours away too. The kind old man! What else have you to tell us about yourself?"

"I've been taking care of Cis," I said, evading the difficulty.

"So I saw last night. Good care, Laddy. There never was a better brother than you."

But he did not know all; and I could not tell him how near I had been, once, to betraying his trust.

"Cis—Celia—Oh! Laddy!" He threw away the cigar and started to his feet, gazing out to sea.

"Did Heaven ever make a sweeter girl? Did you watch her face last night? And her eyes, how they softened and brightened!"

"Am I blind, Leonard?"

"Did you see how she lit up with pity and sympathy? Laddy, I must win that girl or I shall not care what happens."

"I have never ceased thinking of her," he went on; never since I left you five years ago. To be sure, when I was a private soldier, or even a non-commissioned officer, it seemed too absurd to think of her, but when my promotion came,

then the old thoughts revived. All through the war I thought of her. In those dreadful nights when we sat and slept in the trenches, knee-deep in trampled mud and melting snow, I used to let my thoughts wander back to this old place. Always in Celia's Arbour, lying beneath the elms; play-acting beside the gun—running up and down the slopes with little Cis, wondering what she was like. You with her too, of course, with your great dreamy eyes and trusty face—Laddy and Cis. I suppose it was sentimental, all of it; but I am different from most men. There is no family life for you and me to look back on except that. In those days—I am not boasting—I had no fear, because it seemed as if every day brought me nearer to her, and higher up the ladder. In case of death, I had a letter written to the Captain, enclosing one for you and one for Celia, telling you all about it. But I did not die. Then I had to come home and be near you, within a hundred miles, and yet not go to see you; that was very hard. When India came I lost my old fearlessness, and began to be anxious. It was want of faith, I suppose. At all events I escaped, and came out of the whole racket unwounded. Laddy, I should be worse than an infidel," he added, solemnly, "if I did not see in my five years of fortune the protection of the Lord."

"We pray—we who stay at home—for the safety of those who go abroad; and perhaps our prayers are sometimes granted. Is that sentiment, too?" I asked.

He was silent for a little space; then he shook himself as one who would change the current of his thoughts.

"Let us get back, old boy; the Captain will be up by this time. And now tell me more about yourself; there must be more to tell than that you have become a musician. Haven't you fallen in love, Laddy?"

"Fallen in love! Who is there to fall in love with a man like me? Look at my shadow, Leonard."

It was a gruesome-looking shadow, with high back and head thrust forward. I think that if Peter Schlemihl had been hump-backed he would have made an easier bargain for the rolling up and putting away of his shadow. A small annuity, paid quarterly, would have been ample on the part of the purchaser. And as for awkward questions—well—there are secrets in every family, and it would soon be understood that the absence of shadow must not be remarked upon. I only know that my own was a constant shame and humiliation to me. Unless I walked with my face to the sun, there was no getting out of the deformity.

"Bah! You and your shadow. Laddy, look in the glass. You have eyes that would steal away the heart of Penelope, and a musical voice, and you are a genius."

"Nonsense. I am a plain musician, and as for falling in love, have I not been every day with Celia? How could I fall in love with any other girl when I had known her?"

"That is true," he said reflectively. "That is quite true. Who could? She is altogether sweet and lovely. After dreaming of her every day for five years I am afraid of her. And you have been with her, actually with her, for five years."

I think he guessed my secret, for he laid his hand affectionately on my shoulder.

"Cis and I are brother and sister," I said; "that you know very well. But you are right to be afraid of her. Men ought to be afraid of such a girl. Only the priest, you know," I added, following up a little train of allegory that arose in my mind, "can touch the Ark of the Lord."

"You mean—"

"I mean that a man ought to be holy before he ventured upon holy ground."

"Yes; you are a Puritan, Laddy, but you are quite right. I have been saying to myself ever since she left us, 'She is only a woman after all.' And yet that does not seem to bring her any closer to me. It would bring all other women closer—but not Celia."

"She is only a woman to two men, Leonard, and to those two a woman of flesh and blood, with all sorts of hopes and fancies. One of these is myself, her brother, and the other—will be the man she loves. But there is a great trouble, and you ought to learn what it is."

I told him, in as few words as I could manage, part of the story. It seemed a breach of trust to tell him what I knew—though Celia only feared it—that this German had a hold upon Mr. Tyrrell which he threatened to use; but I was obliged to let him understand that Mr. Tyrrell wished her to accept the man, and I told how Celia suffered from the assiduity with which he followed her about, went to church with her, was everywhere seen with her, and how he hoped gradually to overcome, by quiet perseverance, the dislike which she, as well as her friends, would at first show to the marriage.

"He has not yet pressed for a reply," I concluded. "But he will very soon now."

"Why now?" I omit the remarks (which were un-Christian) made by Leonard during my narrative.

"Because you have come home. Because he will find out that Celia sat up all night with us talking. Because he will see her looking happier and brighter, and will suspect the cause."

"The cause, Laddy? Do you mean—"

"I mean nothing but that Celia is glad to see you back again, and if you expected anything less you must be very forgetful of little Cis Tyrrell. If you expected anything more, Leonard—why—perhaps you had better speak to her yourself."

"I remember Herr Bäumer," Leonard went

on. "He was always hanging about the streets with his blue spectacles and his big white moustache. I remember him almost as early as I remember anything. They used to say he was an exile from Germany for Republican opinions. During that year I spent learning French and Russian in the Polish Barracks he took an opportunity of speaking to me, was very friendly once or twice, and took a great interest in the Poles. I remember he wanted to know what they talked about. I wonder if he is a Russian spy?"

"Nonsense, Leonard. He dislikes the Russians."

"Does he? My dear Laddy, you know nothing about the country whose people are so pleasant, and whose government is so detestable. Russian spies are everywhere. The Russian Secret Service is like a great net spread over the whole world; they are the Jesuits of politics. Herr Bäumer may not be one of the black gang, but he may be; and if he isn't, I should like to find out what keeps a German in this place, where we have got a great dockyard, and where improvements and new inventions are always being tried and talked of, where there are several regiments, half our fleet, and a lot of Poles. Do you think it is love of the town?"

"I suppose he is used to it," I said.

"What kind of man is he?"

"He is a cynic. He professes to live for his own enjoyment, and nothing else. Says the rest is humbug. I have never heard him say a generous thing, or acknowledge a generous motive. Yet he talks well, and one likes to be with him."

"I shall call upon him," said Leonard. "As for his own enjoyment and the selfish theory of his philosophy, a good many Germans affect that kind of thing. They think it is philosophical and intellectual, and above their fellow creatures, to be wrapped in a cloak of pure selfishness. Well, Laddy, unless Celia wishes it—"

"She does not wish it."

"She shall not throw herself away upon this man. Great Heavens! my beautiful Celia," he said, "my beautiful Celia, to be thrown to an old—!" He checked himself. "No use getting angry. But if there is no other way of stopping it, we'll carry her off, Laddy, you and I together, and stand the racket afterwards. I can't very well call him out and shoot him. I don't mean that I see at present how it is to be prevented, but we will find out."

"Perseus," I said, "had to borrow of other people two or three little things to help him when he went on that expedition of his. You had better take the Captain, as well as myself, into your confidence. Here we are at home, and there is the jolly old Captain at the door, beaming on us like the morning sun."

"Come in, boys," he shouted, "come in to breakfast. Celia is ready, and so am I. Ho! Ho! I am so glad, Leonard. I am so glad."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A TRIUMPHAL PROCESSION.

These were the days of a grand triumphal procession, in which we lead our hero about to be congratulated by his friends. There were not many of these, it is true. That made it all the better, because the chances of the hateful passion of envy being aroused were lessened. To be sure, there were none who could be envious. Leonard's road to honour is a Royal road, open to all. But it is beset with difficulties. Stout is the heart and strong the will of him who dares to tread that pipe-clayed and uncertain way. None of the boys with whom we had been at school knew Leonard as a friend, or even as an old acquaintance. The reserved school boy who fought his way to freedom from molestation was not likely now to search out the lads who had once stung his proud soul by references to the price of soap. They were now chiefly engaged in promoting the commercial interests of the town, and would have saluted the young officer had they known who he was, hat in hand.

We went round, therefore, among our little circle of friends.

Mr. Broughton promptly invited us to dinner. There were present at the banquet—to furnish it forth all the resources of the reverend gentleman's cellar were put under contribution—the Captain, Mr. Pontifex Leonard, and myself. The dinner was simple, consisting of salmon, lamb, and chicken, cutlets, with early peas and asparagus. A little light Sauterne, which his reverence recommended in preference to sherry, as leaving the palate clean for the port, accompanied the meal. There was also champagne, which he said, was a wine as Catholic as the Athanasian Creed, inasmuch as it goes equally well with a simple luncheon of cold chicken, and with the most elaborate Gaudy. After dinner, slowly in deference to the uncorrupted digestion of youth, he ordered a dish of strawberries.

"It is not the right time to eat them," he said, in a voice almost as solemn for the occasion as that of Mr. Pontifex. "Their proper place is after breakfast. A good dinner port would be better. But young men expect these things. When you and I were undergraduates, Pontifex, we liked them." And then, while we absorbed the strawberries, he arose and brought from a sideboard, with great care and with his own hands, four decanters of port.

They stood all in a row before him, a label hanging from each. He put his hands out over them like a priest pronouncing a blessing.

"We ought, brother Pontifex," he said, "to have a form of thanksgiving for port."

"When I was a young man," said Mr. Pontifex, with a sigh, "I was called by some of my