Written By Hawley Smart

"BROKEN BONDS"

Author of "Saddle and Sabre"

CHAPTER XX.—Continued.

The uninitiated would have been sorely perplexed to indicate upon what grounds Mr. Blades had so confidently announced that there was something from without awaiting him. There was apparently nobody in the quarry through which he was passing, except the various gangs of prisoners, and the warders in charge of them. Nothing to lead a bystander to suppose that an attempt to communicate with any one of the former was being made. Who was to make it? There was no one except those connected with the prison to be seen. That is the custom of those who undertake to supply these grey-coated outcasts with surreptitious luxuries. The "good people" who provide the convicts with interdicted comforts are as sensitive about being seen as the "good people" for whom poor Nance makes such unavailing search.

But if we follow the keen, furtive glances of Mr. Blades, we shall see that they are attracted to a small heap of waste by the side of the road. Waste is the chipping and splinters that are cut from the stone in shaping it into rough blocks after it has been raised. There are numberless heaps of such strewn on either side of the way, and it is curious why this particular pile should have such a peculiar attraction for the burglar. Wherein does it differ from any of the similar accumulations that surround it, one cannot tell; yet Mr. Blades has no doubt that, when he gets the opportunity of lifting the top stone or two, he will find a tiny parcel of letter beneath them.

Looking more closely, one perceives a small piece of broken crockery on the summit, on which again rests a small pebble; that is the sign—more properly, one should say a sign, for there are many such, all readily comprehended by the old hands within the prison.

But although a parcel may be thus deposited—though the spot where it lies concealed may be speedily recognized by the prisoner for whom it is intended, yet he has still to await an opportunity to possess himself of it. Bill Blades, marching with his fellows to the blacksmith's shop, admits ruefully that he does not quite see how he is to get at that heap of waste, except under the keen gaze of a warder. Were he working in the quarries, it would be simple. There is a risk, too, in delay of some other prisoner recognizing the sign, and, having, from the situation of his work, more favorable opportunities of finding and appropriating the parcel. Mr. Blades is far too experienced a man of the world to have any reliance on that musty old adage of "Honor among thieves."

"It might come to one all right, if it's only a letter," he mused; "but if it's anything else, the chance would be mighty poor." And though Mr. Blades has put Maurice Ellerton in the way of receiving a letter, yet his friendship does not extend so far but that he would infinitely prefer to find two or three sticks of tobacco on his own account, instead of that response for which Maurice so yearns. Such regard for one's own interest is not altogether peculiar to the confines of a prison.

Bill Blades, as he hammers and forges in the blacksmith's shop this morning, ruminates much upon how he is to find an opportunity for investigating that heap of waste, but all to no purpose. "Them warders are so plaguy officious," he mutters queruloously. "Why, if my boot-lace did happen to come undone just opposite that bit of crockery, one of 'em would be bound to stop and see how I tied it up again."

As he spoke, he was busy raking some cinders together, with which he replenished the fire. Suddenly something glittering caught his eye amongst the debris.

"Hallo! you're a find!" he muttered—"I'll have you!" He glanced stealthily round for a moment, and saw that no notice was just then being taken of his proceedings; he stooped, and in a second a bit of wrought steel about four inches long was concealed in the garter-band of his knickerbockers. "That's the making of a knife, any way," thought Mr. Blades, with a grin.

By the time the re-call bell rang he had made up his mind what to do. He saw, as he marched back to the hall, that the piece of crockery was still there. He determined to tell Maurice Ellerton about it. Maurice was working in that vicinity just now, and could, he thought, easily manage to approach the heap without attracting attention. As they file off to their respective cells for dinner, Mr. Blades, living in the same hall, has no difficulty in getting next Maurice Ellerton, and in that low tone peculiar to such places, communicates to him his discovery. Maurice's eyes gleam at the intelligence still he listens attentively to his companion's counsels, and very emphatic is Mr. Blades upon the wisdom of taking things cooly.

"Don't you be in a flurry," says that worthy; "bide your time, and if it's a note, why, your boot's as handy a place to stow it as any. If it's mere, slip it in the garter strap of your knickerbockers, and inside the leg, mind. The warders usually run their hands down outside, when they search us as we come in from work."

To all of which, delivered in a low voice, and with almost motionless lips, Maurice promised to pay due attention. Very curious is this bated language of the prison; characteristic of the criminals of all nations, in whatever tongue it may be couched. It is the art of modulating the voice so as to be almost beyond the knowledge of any but the person addressed, while the lips are so slightly moved that a bystander would never suspect them of speaking. It is extraordinary how soon prisoners acquire this manner of speech, although perhaps not to be wondered at since man has mostly a sore yearning to hold communication with his fellows. Debarred from open conversation, he soon acquires this semi-silent tongue. Maurice Ellerton had already graduated thus far in the freemasonry of crime.

At last the dinner hour is over, the cells are once more unlocked, the prisoners pour forth in obedience to the summons, and are marched off in their respective gangs to their work. Maurice's eyes rove keenly around as they enter the east quarry, and before his party is broken off to resume their accustomed toil, he has discovered the piece of delf that Blades had described him. His heart beats quick, although he expects but a letter. Yet how is he to get it! True, his labor takes him very near to that heap of waste, but still he will have to diverge some short distance to get to it, and the attention of the keen-eyed warder in charge would be instantly aroused at his straying those thirty yards or so from the chain of barrows it is his lot to be employed with. It is cruelly tantalizing, but he bears the advice of his astute friend, Mr. Blades, in mind, to be patient and wait his opportunity.

Three hours pass away, during which Maurice, wheeling incessant barrow-loads, is sometimes near, sometimes far away from that mysterious piece of delf. Once he found himself with an empty barrow within twenty yards of it. He lounged carelessly from his barrow: he was within six paces of it, when the stern voice of the warder called to him to keep by his work. Maurice began to despair. Help came to him in an unexpected shape. We may regret it, we may ignore, we may even deny it; but at the bottom of our dispositions, however kept in restraint by culture and education, there still exists "the animal" —those fierce passions which, when uncontrolled, reduce us to the level of the beasts. "The animal" at times seems to possess men of high position, as well as those who have barely risen above the brute creation. Henry VIII. and some of the Roman emperors are cases in point. The French Revolution (I speak of the first) offered hundreds of examples. Carrier, who inaugurated the republican wedding, is perhaps as good a type of the human tiger broken loose, rampant, and uncontrolled, as one could mention. What cold-blooded butchery happened when Carrier went down to the Loire, we have all read.

James Carnoul, chafing in his chains at Portland, is one of those men in whom "the animal" constantly preponderates, to the utter obscuration of his reason. There are times, when the fit comes upon him, that this man is as uncontrollable as a wild beast, and amenable to no other coercion than such as a Van Amburgh resorts to with his four-footed prototype. "Chafing in his chains" is altogether figurative as regards Carnoul. He has arrived at the distinction of a leg iron —a band of steel rivetted round the ankle, from which runs two long links, the other end attached to his waist belt.

Carnoul, upon this afternoon, has one of his outbreaks. It takes a somewhat ludicrous form. He is employed at a huge crane, adjusting the slings with which to raise the cut stone on to the trucks destined to carry it away. Suddenly "the animal" moved him to clamber rapidly to the top of this crane, from which exalted position he in powerful language consigned his fellows, the prison authorities, and the world generally, to perdition. He refused positively to come down. He sat there and cursed. In ferocious language he informed the warders that he would break the neck of any one who should presume to attempt to fetch him down. The situation was absurd. There were plenty of volunteers among the prisoners to aid the warders; but the latter were circumspect. The crane was upwards of thirty feet high, and a desperado like Carnoul might easily hurl any one approaching him to the ground. Still authority could not be defied in this wise. It was the criminal banning the representatives of the law from the summit of the saltpetre.

But wily men swarm up the guys connected with the crane; ropes are thrown dexterously from one to the other, and in a few minutes Carnoul is sufficiently pinioned to be approached; two or three minutes more, and handcuffed, and foaming with rage, he is marched off in custody of the warders to the punishment cells.

This incident had naturally attracted the attention of all engaged in the quarries. Maurice saw his opportunity, and walked swiftly to the piece of delf. He turned over the two or three stones beneath it, and found a small packet wrapped up in oil-cloth. Hastily concealing it, he joined the circle who were gazing at Carnoul, and witnessed the downfall of that worthy.

Very impatient now is Maurice that work should be over. He longs to find himself locked up in his cell, that he may examine his treasure; and never, perhaps, even when the toil had been the heaviest strain to his unaccustomed muscles, had he welcomed the sound of the recall bell so eagerly as tonight. Will he be satisfied? These much-looked-for letters sometimes carry sore disappointment when they come to hand.

Steadily the numerous parties of prisoners tramp through the quarries and disappear within the prison gate. The convict guards vanish through the black portal, and the wild grey chaos of broken stone lies silent. Not a living soul apparently amidst those pits, those heaps, those vast masses of wrought stone. The gigantic cranes loom out dark and weird in the failing light, like so many evil genii, fell guardians of the place. Suddenly from a heap of debris on the extreme verge of the quarry, rises an unkempt, poorly-dressed girl, and stretches herself with a sense of relief. She well may, for she has passed the day there crouching, watching—her eyes never intent on that piece of delf, or rather on the heap that she knows it is upon, for she is too far off to distinguish it.

"Well, I may go now," she exclaims wearily. "I can tell Miss Jennie that one of 'ems go it, anyway;" and with a shrug of her shoulders, Nance sped rapidly through the quarry, and wended her way towards Easton.

CHAPTER XXI.

May I Say It?

Dainty Ellerton has established himself at Weymouth, in lodgings near the harbor, and there broods much over the possibility of his brother's escape. The idea originally implanted in his mind by Miss Fielding has been fostered of late by Jennie Holdershed. He has constant interviews with Jennie, and the girl has already found that this subject has a strange fascination for him. There is perhaps a taint of the old smuggling blood in Jennie's veins. At all events, her sympathies are apt to be with those who are in antagonism with the law. She has her own views upon the feasibility of an escape from Portland, and, as we have already seen, deems it quite practicable, providing assistance is furnished from without.

To Dainty's jaundiced mind this is rapidly becoming an affair that it behoves him to attempt at all hazards. He argues sophistically that the stain on their name will be in some measure washed out when Maurice is rescued from a felon's doom; that, for the love he bears his mother, he is in duty bound to restore Maurice to her arms; that even Rose Fielding looks to him to set her lover free, for that Rose is in love with his brother, Dainty has now no doubt. All these reasons, conjoined with his morbid sensitiveness to society's nods and innuendoes, have determined him to snatch Maurice, if possible, from the fate to which the law has doomed him. This may sound unnatural, but it must be borne in mind that his brother's shame has affected Dainty Ellerton very strongly; that, in a somewhat different way, he feels it as acutely as his mother. Mrs. Ellerton can only think of the hardships that Maurice has to undergo—of the severity of his punishment. Dainty dwells more on the hopeless disgrace—on the total want of honor displayed by the brother he so looked up to.

It would be a great mistake to suppose that Dainty Ellerton's taking up his abode at Weymouth attracted any attention there. To begin with, when quartered at Dorchester, he had never much frequented the little watering-place, he had never been a lounger of the esplanade; and even when staying there the previous year, had passed his days in the country, fishing principally. The circumstances of a trial like Maurice's soon fade from the memory of the public; and, moreover, although Mr. Weaver, as an officer of the Portland garrison, had chanced to discover that Maurice was an inmate of the prison, yet Weymouth was quite unaware of that fact. The grim bastille keeps its own secrets, and is chary of admitting visitors. The outside world know little about who may be amongst its fifteen hundred inmates.

Dainty Ellerton passes his days at present between roving over the Isle of Portland and strolling about the neighborhood of Upway with Jennie. He has awoke at last to her beauty. Then the girl's genuine, honest sympathy for his trouble is inexpressibly soothing to him. He, so jealous and suspicious of the kindly attentions of society abandons himself with a sense of relief to Jennie's quiet, hopeful talk, and wonders how it was he never remarked her quick, graceful gestures before. She may not be accomplished, but she is, nevertheless, by no means uneducated, with strong common sense, and a keen sense of fun and humor, that gives much zest to her conversation. Better worth talking to, he thinks, than half the women you meet with in society. Moreover, love is apt to beget love, when the opportunity is vouchsafed it; and, without being a coxcomb Dainty is justified in thinking that Jennie cares a good deal about him. Jennie, with her frank, impulsive manner, and her every thought reflected in her bonny face, is not apt at concealing her feelings. She was in love with him before, and she is so sincerely sorry for him now. Her woman's wit quickly shows her how deep this wound was. She recognized at once the great change that had come over him—how the "insouciant" hussar of a year ago had changed into a moody, suspicious irritable man. She soothed him, amused him—more still, she acquired his confidence. Dainty spoke to her as he had never spoken yet to any one of his brother's crime; told her, what he had never even breathed to his mother or cousin, that his present life was insupportable, that he must desert the army. Jennie listened in silence; she did think herself that it would, perhaps, be best for him to throw the old life behind him, and to start afresh in another land, but Jennie keep her thoughts to herself. She did not feel qualified to give an opinion on that subject. A preposterous piece of modesty, such as rarely hinders our acquaintance from bestowing advice upon.

But Jennie knew what she could do. She saw what she might be to him now. She felt that it did him good to talk to her. She could combat this morbid idea that his brother's disgrace extended to himself, though, it was true, she made little impression on this subject. Dainty would shake his head drearily, and reply:

"You don't understand the world, Jennie. Society is always ready to believe that a great criminal's connections only want opportunity to display similar proclivities."

"Then society is unjust, and I would have none of it if I were you," retorted the girl spiritedly.

"Society has saved me the trouble, and will have none of me," replied Dainty, with a faint smile.

This was, as we know, both unjust and untrue. Frank Ellerton's friends had been sincerely sorry for him, and had been even marked in their attentions; but Dainty had viewed all such kindness through a distorted lens, and had rejected them as well-meant efforts to drive even the hearty sympathy of his regiment with distrust. Then, again, Jennie knew that she could be of real assistance to him in communicating with his brother; and that, if the at present somewhat undefined idea of Maurice's escape should ever take definite form, she could be of still greater use to him. Every inch of Portland was familiar to Jennie, and, what was of still greater importance, every nook and cranny of its shores, its frowning rifts and caverns in the neighborhood of the Bill to the more practicable shingle about Church Cove and the King's Pier, from treacherous Chesil Beach to the peaceful landing-places of Castletown, all were well known to Jennie. This idea, that Maurice should break his bonds, is fermently rapidly in two heads—heads likely to endeavor to give a practical turn to it, if they can persuade Maurice to fall into their views. In the meanwhile, clearly the first thing to be done is to open communication with him, and discover what he has to say upon the subject.

That idea, however, will have to take possession of a third head before it has the remotest chance of being realized. Maurice is no more capable of devising an escape from the prison than an infant. Clearly, too, his getting without the walls must be of his own doing. Even Jennie, sanguine and full of schemes as she is, when she talks the matter over with Dainty, can suggest no possibility of assisting him till he shall stand outside Portland prison. That first indispensable part of the drama must be conceived and carried out from the inside. Is it likely that a man such as Maurice can plot and put in execution so difficult a design? The few that have broken bonds from Portland have been astute, practised criminals, and have in most cases been favored by circumstances. Still, think the conspirators, we would fain know what he thinks of such a scheme.

Jennie's womanly instinct had not deceived her when she divined that Dainty would probably wish that his presence in the neighborhood should not be known to Mr. Weaver. Still, but for fortune favoring him, it would have been almost impossible but that he should have run against that officer in the course of his constant visits to Upway. But, as it happened, Mr. Weaver had been summoned suddenly to Ireland, in consequence of the death of his father, and so that impetuous, blundering young Irishman was for the present out of the way. It would be a nice question to decide which of the two was most gratified by this fortuitous circumstance. If Dainty was nervously apprehensive of meeting Mr. Weaver, most assuredly Jennie sometimes thought how dreadfully, poor fellow, he would have been in the way, had he been still at Portland. It was very nice to hear him sing the praises of the man she loved, when that man was far away; but when she could talk to the man himself, Jennie felt she could dispense with the chorus.

It was curious to mark the change that was rapidly stealing over the relations of these two. Only a year ago, and Dainty had indolently and carelessly accepted the girl's only too palpable admiration for himself, constantly finding fault with her, often snubbing her, often smiling at her enthusiasm; laughing at her for her wild, passionate love of the beautiful. For Jennie had a keen eye for the fair pictures of nature's painting, in which that neighborhood abounds. She would lie on the grass drinking in the panorama of Weymouth Bay, or would stand on the dizzy verge of the West Cliff at Portland with the rain in her hair, and watch the fierce rollers come tumbling into the bay at her feet, while the clouds scudded and gathered fast before the tumultuous, shrieking south-west wind, as, like a petulant child, from soft sobbing and moaning, it screamed itself into a very paroxysm of passion. All these changes were very sweet to Jennie. She loved the ocean as those born by it ever do. She entered into its varied moods—could be lazy and listless as itself when the channel showed scarce a ripple; could exalt when the white-crested waves came thundering against the granite cliffs, and Portland's Race was a sheet of foam. Those nursed within "boom of the billow" never forget its lullaby. Dainty, of the "nil admirari" school, perforce, of training, although not in the least intended to be such by nature, had often made the girl's cheeks tingle by his satirical comments upon her enthusiasm. She only gave expression to what she honestly felt. But Dainty, accustomed to hear artificial rhapsodies on such points, was wont to be somewhat intolerant concerning them, and mocked such outbursts accordingly. He did not, it is true, know how his idle gibing stung.

Now all this was changed. Imperceptibly it was Jennie who took the lead in their talk shyly somewhat, perhaps, at first, but gaining strength and confidence every time they met. Dainty never laughed at her outbursts of enthusiasm now, and a deference indescribable, but which no woman ever failed to mark and judge, has crept into his manner regarding her. His lips linger fondly over her name when he pronounces it; his voice softens as he speaks of her. He consults her continually. He is getting into the habit of bringing all his annoyances to her. And Jennie's bright grey eyes shine with a marvelously softened light. There is a bloom on her cheek, a beating at her heart, that, verily, she does not quite understand. Even that bibulous, vision-seeing uncle of hers compliments her upon her appearance, and tells her she looks like a rose.

When the light of love glows in a woman's eyes, it is marvelous the change that it makes in her appearance. The plainest woman is transfigured, and, at all events once in her life, approaches to good looks. But when a handsome girl is touched with the enchanter's wand, it is then that you see beauty in its meridian, let men write or sing what they will about such culmination later.

Dainty has received Maurice's note after some delay. It has been forwarded from his regiment, with other letters, to the post-office at Weymouth; having been detailed about thus in pursuit of him, because the mysterious agent who conduct that surreptitious Portland underground mail had no other clue to his whereabouts. It does not say much. Maurice, when he wrote it, had not got that little packet which, after such watching and anxiety, he had at last snatched from its concealment. He only says that it is possible to write to him in this manner—that he is heart-broken, hopeless, desponding—that the dull routine and monotony of the prison life are more than he can bear—that to be shut out from all intelligence concerning those near and dear to him, is punishment so severe that he will do anything sooner than endure it longer. "It is possible for you, Dainty," he pleads, "to alleviate this in some measure. If ever you loved me, I implore you to let me hear from some of you, once a month, or so. You cannot imagine what the only a few lines are to me. A letter, however short—a note, now and then, from you, Rosie, or my mother, too, will be bliss. Deeply as I have sinned—and, God help me, dragged all your names through the mire with my own—yet I have been heavily punished. Not a thing have I to look forward to, midst all the abyss of years that lie before me, but an occasional letter. Do not kill this hope that has but just dawned upon me. It was but a few days ago that I discovered such a possibility existed; and I am indebted for the forwarding of this to one of my more practised brethren in crime. I shudder when I write the words; and yet what better am I than he? Between the forger and the burglar there is little to choose. Still the unhappy wretch who pens these lines is your brother, Dainty, for our old love, and the old days, in the name of that mother whose head I have bowed with shame, but who has so nobly assured me, both of her continued affection and forgiveness, be generous—I ask only a letter!"

Dainty drew a long breath as he finished this epistle. "Thank heaven!" he muttered, "the poor dear old fellow has got that, at all events." And he fell once more to musing over whether it were possible to rescue Maurice from his dreary lot; and then he thought he would go out to Upway and tell Jennie all about it.

He rarely went to the cottage now; he disliked meeting the Captain. The veteran had never taken to him, and formerly had made slight scruples of showing his aversion. But the old mariner had an innate strain of chivalry in his disposition, that forbade him to be hard upon a man who had experienced a fall in the world. Of course he knew the trouble that had come upon Dainty, and, upon the few occasions upon which they had met, nothing could exceed Captain Holdershed's studied courtesy. But unfortunately that was even more distasteful to Dainty than his former somewhat repellent demeanor. The Captain's overstrained politeness, well as it was intended, only served to remind him more painfully than ever of the disgrace that had befallen him. It was calculated to do so; for the Captain thought it right to put on a most lugubrious expression of countenance whenever he chanced to meet Dainty—to go through most ludicrous attempts to modulating his voice, which resulted usually in his speaking in a hoarse whisper, supposed by that gallant officer to be indicative of sympathy and commiseration, and finally to gulp down the sea-songs in which he was accustomed to indulge in a manner peculiarly marked and exasperating to a man like Dainty. The old sailor was unable to control his propensity for Dibdin, but always pulled himself up suddenly, and looked as shocked as if he had been guilty of such indiscretion at a funeral.

Dainty did as he had done many times before—seated himself by the "Wishing Well," and bid Nance go and fetch Miss Holdershed.

"I'll do your errand," said the child, as she slipped the shilling Dainty had given her into her pocket; "for if I don't, you'll just walk up and fetch her yourself. But I'd never move a foot to bring you together, if I thought I could keep you apart. You're her doom—I know it, Mr. Ellerton; I have seen it there," and Nance pointed solemnly to the deep clear waters. "If you mean her wrong, look to yourself. I am but a girl, but a girl's hand is strong enough to right a woman's wrong, if her heart don't fail her; and mine won't. Nobody ever was good to me but she, and I'd die for her thrice over, if I could."

"Nonsense, Nance," replied Dainty. "I am afraid you don't like me, though I've been kind to you in a way, too. But you must know that I should be the last person in the world to injure Miss Holdershed——"

"If I thought you would willingly," replied the girl, moving close to his side as he sat carelessly on the low stone parapet, and dropping her voice to a fierce whisper, "I'd stab you where you sit this minute!" And as she spoke, she drew from her pocket one of those spring dagger-knives, and snapped it open before him.

Dainty never moved. For a second the child's eyes flashed with a fierce light as she looked at him; then closing her knife with a click, she returned it to her pocket and said mournfully, "The Lady has said so; it is written in the waters. If I could but see the good peacemaker, they'd be parted no more." She paused for a few seconds, then exclaimed briefly, "I'll fetch her," and sped away upon her errand.

"That girl could be dangerous," thought Dainty. "I suppose she's a little touched in the head, for there was a gleam in her eyes, for about a minute, that looked as murderous as anything I ever imagined. The little spitfire! However, she's much mistaken if she thinks Jennie Holdershed will ever come to harm. Rather than I would sooner cut my right hand off than throw a gloom over her bright face."

And yet he knows that Jennie loves him; that he is teaching her to love him more day by day. How is that to be? Is he prepared to married the daughter of a poor Portland farmer? And if not, what but sorrow and sadness can come to Jennie of their constant intercourse. That he is gradually conceiving a deep feeling for her, Dainty is also to some extent aware, although he dissembles much to himself on that point; persuades himself that he is compelled to see her on Maurice's account, and yet he is conscious how often Jennie's graceful image floats across his mind, intermingles with the smoke-wreaths of his solitary pipe.

I doubt whether women quite comprehend how a lonely cigar at times advances their interests. Man is given to much meditation under such circumstances, and when he is in love, who can doubt what form such meditation will take?

But now Jennie, in her sailor hat and close-fitting serge dress, comes tripping gaily down the path, her hair just a little disordered; for those rich brown tresses always are so difficult to keep neat, and Jennie's deft fingers to restrain their exuberance—escaping here and there in spite of binding, knotting, and braiding; and yet, who that saw the girl could have wished it otherwise? There's a glow in her cheeks, and a pearly light in her eyes, as she extends her hands to Dainty and exclaims, "News of some sort, Frank? What is it?"

"I have a letter from Maurice to show you," he replied, as he took her somewhat sunburnt little hands in his. "I want you to see it." A glow fondly into her face as he spoke, and the girl's color rose as she met his glance.

"It is very sad," she said, after reading the note, "to think of one dear to you being so miserable. Poor fellow! I don't think he would risk something for freedom?"

"He must—he shall!" replied Dainty sternly. "I intend to venture everything. But you! it is not right that you should be mixed up in this affair."

"I intend to be, all the same," replied the girl, with a quick little nod of her head. "I claim a right to give such help as I may."

"How so?" he asked gravely.

"Because—because," replied Jennie, blushing, "it is my whim, and—well, is not that reason enough for a woman?"

"It might be for some, but not for you."

"Frank, you try me hardly, unfairly," replied the girl vehemently, as she once more raised her eyes to his. "Is it not enough that I wish to give you what assistance I can?" It was ungenerous, she thought, that he should press so closely. He knew why only too well. Did he wish to put her to the shame of owning her love before he had confessed his own? and Jennie turned from him angrily with burning cheeks, as this idea crossed her mind.

But his hand clasped hers, and in low, passionate tones, he murmured into her ear:

"If I press you hardly, darling, it is because I hope to make you confess that it is for love of me you would do this. Won't you say so, Jennie, dearest?"

She turned towards him quickly, as she replied:

"You know it is, Frank. You know I have loved you from the first. How can you tease me so?"

"I shall never tease you again, my own," returned Dainty, as he clasped her in his arms and kissed her lips. "I hoped I had won you, Jennie, but was not quite sure."

"Oh!" replied the girl, as, with her head resting on his shoulder, she smiled up in his face, "I am afraid you had very little doubt about it. I wish that I had kept my secret better."

"Isn't it better, pet, to have no secret to keep?" retorted Dainty, as he once more kissed her.

"Perhaps so," replied the girl gaily, as she slipped from his embrace. "If you keep them as I have done, it is best to have none, undoubtedly. But come and sit down, Frank, and let us think over this letter."

So they sat down on the low wall, beneath the shade of the beech and horse chestnut; and the stream rippled, plashed, and gurgled over the stones, in soft, loving, laughing accompaniment to their talk—as sweet a melody as two lovers could wish to hear, in those pauses so incidental to such converse. They, perhaps, talked rather more about themselves than the topic which they had nominally decided to discuss; but that is not much to be wondered at. One thing was clear, they agreed: Dainty must have an answer from Maurice before they could take any further steps. It was necessary to be quite sure that communication with him was thoroughly established.

At last Frank Ellerton rose to depart. The girl clung lovingly to him as she bade him adieu.

"Good-bye, dearest," she murmured. "I shall see you again soon—shall I not?—if it is but to assure me this afternoon has not been all a dream."

"Yes, the day after tomorrow," replied Ellerton, laughing. "Do you think, Jennie, I could keep away longer?"

"I don't know," replied the girl; "you contrived to keep away for a year, remember, and I began to think I should never see you again."

"That was because I was a fool, Jennie, and didn't know the prize I'd left behind me."

"And perhaps you won't value it much now you've found it," she replied half in jest and half in earnest.

"Take care of your lips, sweet; there is but one way to close them when they give utterance to such blasphemy."

And Jennie paid due penalty for her last remark.

"Once more good-bye. May I say it?"

"You won't be angry?"

"No. What is it?"

"Then good-bye, Dainty dearest," and Jennie fled rapidly in the direction of the cottage.

To call him by that name had long been a strange fancy of hers, but she had never ventured to do so, although she had called him by his Christian name from their first meeting. Still she knew that all his intimate friends, and even his own family, usually called him by this nickname, and many a time had she also to herself. "Was it an odd whim of hers? I can't say. But I don't think a woman would deem it so.

CHAPTER XXII.

Blades Meditates Change of Air.

James Carnoul, marched off, handcuffed and raging, after his escapade in the quarries, gives a curious instance of the untameable disposition that is characterized men of his stamp—of how impossible it is to reclaim them—of how near akin to the brutes, even in civilized countries, a human being may be found. This man, bear in mind, is not utterly uneducated. You cannot consider his savage temper on the ground of ignorance, on the theory that he has sprung from the gutter, and has grown up untaught, uncared for. Whatever his antecedents may be, he has evidently read the world, can both read and write passably, and use good language when he chooses. One day Carnoul picked up, during his toil in the quarries, a half-fledged bird, and carried it home with him. He begged hard to be allowed to keep it, and, though contrary to rule, his request was acceded to. The governor thought it might soften the tiger heart of this man if he had something to tend, to care for, that depended upon him for its very existence.

Rare, indeed, was the sight of a bird in those fields of grey stone, save the screaming gulls that floated high overhead, and even his fellows took great interest in Carnoul'et pet. He watched over it devotedly, succeeded in rearing it, and so tame did it become, that it would perch on his head, on his shoulder, come to his whistle, and always welcome him with a flutter of its wings, and a chirrup of delight, when he returned from his labors. One would have said this man loved the bird that he had succoured, and the little foundling undoubtedly did love him, and showed it as far as lay within a mere lark's capabilities.

Before he was taken to "the separates," or punishment cells, Carnoul asked permission to obtain some necessaries from his own cell. This was granted, and the bird twittered and fluttered in a tumult of joy at the appearance of his master.

"Let me say good-bye to him," said Carnoul doggedly.

The warders assented, and raising his handcuffed wrists, Carnoul opened the cage. The bird flew out, perched on his shoulder, nestled against his cheek, and chirped its satisfaction. Raising his open hands, Carnoul gave a low whistle, and the lark fluttered down and perched upon them, looking up at him with its bright, bead-like eyes. Another second, then the cruel fingers, closing like a vice, crushed the life out of it, and, with a savage exclamation, Carnoul threw his dead favorite upon the floor.

What can you do with a criminal of this type? The lock, the lash, bread and water, alone keep such men in subjection.

When Maurice Ellerton found himself in his cell, with the bolt once more drawn upon him, he drew forth his prize, and sat for some minutes gazing at it. He turns the little packet over and over in his fingers, as a miser might handle his adored gold. He has so little to look forward to, that this trifling interruption of the hideous monotony of his life is an event that makes him almost tremble with anticipation. His hands shake slightly as he slowly undoes the string; then he unfolds the oil-cloth in which the packet is wrapped, in such deliberate fashion as one has seen an epicure sip a wine of rare vintage. He seeks to prolong his enjoyment. At length he comes to the letter. It it without signature, but he recognizes his brother's handwriting at a glance. A smile plays about his mouth as he reads it. Not very much in that letter, either, and somewhat cautiously worded to boot.

But there is such honest sympathy for him breathed in its every line, as makes it very sweet to Maurice. Dainty tells him that to think of his misery is insupportable; that he has come into the neighborhood to see if it be not possible to communicate with him oftener, and that he is assured it is so; that he writes this to test the good faith of those who have undertaken to deliver it. Let the writer be but once assured that this note has reached its destination, and Maurice will hear constantly from him by the same channel.

"I write somewhat guardedly this time," says Dainty, "as those to whom I commit it may be more sanguine of success than the result may warrant; and yet they declare that this is certain to reach your hands. Let me only know that it does so, and then, dear Maurice, you shall hear more fully from me.—D." Such was the signature. A postcript informed him that all letters addressed to Thomas Turnbull would be brought to the writer.

Dainty, under Jennie's directions, had spent money freely, though not lavishly, in certain quarters that she had indicated. "Not too much," had urged Jennie, "or you will make them so reckless in the hope of gain, that it will ensure discovery, or their pockets being so well lined will attract attention. Be liberal, but don't exceed what I tell you. That is quite sufficient to enlist all engaged in this work, and they are not very many, in your behalf. They will keep sharp enough look-out for a free hand, never fear."

Most of these hybrid smugglers are now on the qui-vive for anything addressed to Thomas Turnbull, and keen and practised eyes scan the quarries nightly, when the moon allows them to do so. At risk of repetition, let me once more point out that these stonefields are without the prison, and perfectly open to the public; indeed a footpath runs throught them.

Maurice has read and re-read Dainty's note perhaps a dozen times. How either isolated men or women will re-peruse letters from those they love, when their lot is very different from a prison! In far-away foreign stations, how precious are the loving words of sympathy to the struggling toilers of both sexes, who look forward to the mail as the one sweetener of their lonely, arid existence—the one thing that reminds them that there are those who have an interest in their fierce battle with the world, that there are eyes still which sparkle at their success, that will weep salt tears at their rebuffs! Little wonder that Maurice, with that vista of years staring him in the face, should linger fondly over his brother's letter.

But discipline, whether it be in camp or prison, cannot afford to make allowance for feeling, so Maurice dreamily sweeps up his cell, and pushes his little broom beneath the door. The latter has an aperture at the foot, of some three inches or so, for purposes of ventilation, which allows this; and it is one of the regulations of the place that the prisoners shall do so. A sharp imperitative tap. Maurice answers briefly, "Here," withdraws his broom, and is left to his meditation or slumbers.

He throws himself upon his bed, but though generally his day's toil suffices to lock his eyelids almost immediately, yet tonight he cannot sleep. He is still thinking of Dainty's letter. Yes, he must answer that letter at once. Tomorrow he will consult Blades about sending his reply. That worthy can, of course, manage it. Then he shall hear again shortly. Dainty, he fancies, has something more to tell him that he dared write this time. What can it be? Not much that can benefit him, but it is such a treat to get news of them all. Maurice tosses restlessly on his narrow pallet, and longs for daylight. Usually his last thought is that the dread summons to rise and dress will greet his ear all too soon. For is there not oblivion of his misery in sleep? Tonight it is otherwise, and it is not till towards morning that Nature asserts her ascendancy, that the weariness of the body conquers the unruly mind.

"Want to talk to you," says Maurice, with motionless lips, in an undertone, they troop out to parade next day, preparatory to being marched off to their respective labors.

"Very good," replied Mr. Blades, with a quiver of his left eyelid, in a similar tone. "Want a leetle more advice, eh? Got your parcel all right? Anything to share with a chap?"

"There was nothing but a letter."

"Don't think much of your pals, you know. Never mind, we'll have a real jaw on Sunday."

"But I want to send an answer," muttered Maurice.

"Well, write it and give it me, and tell 'em tobacco in the stick comes grateful, and perwents the wind blowing such billet-dows about. Mum—ware hawk!" and Mr. Blades' face became suddenly stricken with stony stupidity.

"No talking there," exclaimed a warder, as he threw a keen eye in their direction; but Mr. Blades' countenance was blanker than any wall.

No further conversation of any moment was achieved between the two during the week; disjointed snatches, such as the above, of course there were. Maurice wrote his letter, and consigned it to his more practical comrade to dispatch. This also Bill Blades, in mysterious undertone, informed him had been duly accomplished. That worthy's position in the blacksmith's shop gave him considerable facility in that respect. His work always lay in the same spot, while Maurice could never be quite certain where he would be employed. Had Dainty's letter been intended for, or meant to pass through, the hands of Blades, it would have been hidden in a very different place. It was always uncertain whether a prisoner would be enabled to approach any given heap of stone in the quarries. He might work within sight of it, know it was there, but find it quite unattainable, nevertheless. Round the narrow range of the blacksmith's shop it was very different. It must go very hard with a practised hand like Blades if he could not contrive, in the course of the day, to approach the sign he recognized, under some pretext. Maurice would probably never have obtained his letter but for Carnoul's outbreak. The next day, though working in the same vicinity, he never had a chance to get anything like so near that memorable heap of "waste." But when the traffickers in this business once establish satisfactory communication with a prisoner, it becomes comparatively easy. As it was, except for Blades' keen eyesight and a good deal of luck afterwards, that letter had probably never reached Maurice's hands.

(To be continued.)

BREAKFAST IS READY

This is the key-note of the morning. The woman who has no maid feels luxurious when she has Orange Meat.

If you save your coupons, save those in Orange Meat packages, and you may win $30.00 and the choice of valuable premiums.

The largest number of coupons mailed by any one person on or before March 30th, 1907, and addressed to Orange Meat, Kingston, will receive a prize of $30.00. All letters must reach the office of Orange Meat, Kingston, on or before April 9th, 1907, when the prize will be awarded.

Vanc

In the course of a most i speech at the provincial teac vention, held in Revelstoke Principal Sullivan of th school gave a whimsical a the creation. It illustrates ish Columbia, and Vancouver particular, are extremely fav from an agricultural and tural standpoint. He said creation was started in C the Almighty followed a cou the world thus making this the latest and most compl "And," continued Mr. Sulli was so pleased with the r he barricaded it with th mountains as the abiding His chosen people." Though tleman mentioned may have correct in his reasons for th ful wealth of British Colum is not the slightest doubt ment as to the effects is w the truth. And, to continue phor, Vancouver Island mu best part of the province. too much to say that it is.

At the outset it must be s Vancouver Island will never gion of big ranches. No one at all studied the resources ard the opinion that, with th exception of the foothills of tral range of mountains, the available for the pasturage bands of cattle. And, ever areas exist, the salubrity o mate renders them too val the meagre utilization only in cattle ranges.

It is to intensive farmi classes that the island will be devoted, and, even at th a satisfactory start has bee this direction. To properly soil considitons requires m space than can be given he following extract from one o bulletins issued by the Bureau of Information, "Bu umbia: its present resource ture possibilities," long sinc print, says:

"Vancouver Island may be geologically as a group of gnessic rocks, embracing ce tiary areas and worn down action, so that in one place gravel mountains, in another boulder clay, are to be fou in a third a regular serie sandstone salternate with cliffs of trap. Upon such su surface generations of fir flourished, and by their de gradually deposited a mou creasing thickness sufficient vide suitable grounds for o of vegetation, until the co become covered with a den of timber, varying according situation and adaptability to of each particular kind. the ridges the pines and ma of undergrowth have held best suited to a rocky sub moisture in the rocky subs the boulder clay, alder, p willow have contended s against the larger trees; s the gravel has afforded moisture for the conifers, but more slow growing oa had no chance for existen dense pine forests, have gain hold, and stud level plai with native grass. Maples have succeeded, in some p burnt out pines; indeed, in the same sequence of soft timber might be expecte coast as is known to have on that of the Atlantic, w oaks and beeches have fo successive order."

With such what might b ante-agricultural history th Vancouver Island falls natu three great divisions. In value commercially they may as a (a) vegetable humus, black vegetable mould m