

The ESCAPE

A POST MARITAL ROMANCE
BY CYRUS TOWNSEND BRADY

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RAY WALTERS
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to Deborah, she fled along the coast. Fortunately the way was deserted. They saw no one, and for a long time did not pass any houses.

The dawn was gray in the east. Ellen judged it was about half after four o'clock. They had been gone two hours from the castle and a half hour from the carriage when the road swerved to the southward and led from the forest to a little fishing hamlet on the shore of Lyme bay. Nobody was as yet stirring in the town, although lights twinkled here and there in the windows, indicating that some of the fisherfolk were making ready for their day's labor.

Ellen was too desperately anxious to get away to stop to bargain with anyone for a boat. She ran down to the little wharf jutting out into the small inclosed harbor and rapidly selecting the best of the little vessels tied there, she hauled in the painter, drew it alongside the wharf, made Deborah get aboard, laid five guineas down on the wharf where the boat had been secured, in the hope that the owner of the boat would receive the money which was full value for the vessel, hoisted the sail, shoved away from the wharf, and under the influence of a gentle breeze ran rapidly out of the harbor.

As she cleared the headlands that marked the little haven, she found the wind fair for Portsmouth. She put the helm up, eased off the sheet, and ran away dead before it for the place where she would be. Her heart exulted. She had left Carrington, she had shaken off Strathgate and she was at home upon the sea.

"Heart up, Debbie!" she cried. "If this breeze holds, a day should fetch us into Portsmouth and another morning will see us safely bound for Philadelphia in my own ship. We are well rid of these villainous men."

"I would Sir Charles Seton were here!" cried poor Debbie, who had not the advantage of Ellen's extensive and intimate acquaintance with the male sex, and who, therefore, did not share her detestation of it.

"And what is he to thee, child?" asked Ellen gleefully.

"He said he cared very much for me," returned Deborah, "yesternight in the library over the good book of Master Baxter."

"'Tis a gallant gentleman, Debbie," returned Ellen. "But they are all that before marriage. My lord of Carrington I once thought was well-nigh perfect."

Ellen stopped suddenly and compressed her lips.

"But what did he," asked Debbie, "that you leave him thus?"

"I saw him in the arbor with his arms around Lady Cecily. She clung to his neck and he kissed her. I taxed him with it and he did not deny it. He hath mocked me and jeered at me and been ashamed of me ever since his fine friends came to Carrington—and we were so happy—so happy—before. Oh, Debbie, Debbie!"

And this heroine who had schemed and fought like a man for her liberty bowed her head upon the Puritan's shoulder and wept like any other woman. It was evidence of her quality, however, that during her weeping her hand did not leave the tiller and she still conned the little ship that bore Ellen and her fortunes.

Deborah consoled her as best she might, and in turn Ellen assured her that if Sir Charles really loved her he would follow her wherever she might go. Who shall say in that assurance Ellen was not persuading herself that if Bernard Carrington really loved his own wife he would not be far from Charles Seton on the chase across the sea?

CHAPTER VII.

My Lord Hears Ill Tidings.

The morning sun was streaming brightly through the windows when Carrington glanced at his watch as he opened his eyes, and was startled to discover that it was already seven o'clock. And he had meant to get up early that day to prepare himself the better for that interview with his wife. Hastily arising, he stole softly to the door opening into her boudoir, tried the knob gently and found that the door was locked. He listened, but could hear nothing. Imagining that she was still asleep, he summoned his valet, bathed and dressed himself with unusual care for the operations of the day, and then returned to the door of the boudoir. Again he knocked, and more loudly. Receiving no answer, he fairly thundered upon it with his feet, to be met with the same silence as before.

Pulling the bell, he summoned his own man once more and made his lady's maid be brought to him. In a few moments the startled woman presented herself before him.

Now, my lady's maid was more or less of a luxury. Whenever she could, Ellen attended to the details of her own toilette herself, but sometimes the complication of unusual apparel involved the necessity of assistance, and then the maid was ready.

"Your mistress," began my lord, imperiously.

"Yes, my lord."

"Did she send for you last night?"

Suddenly he bethought him of the door not often used that opened into the hall from her bedroom. He cursed himself for a fool for not having thought of it before. He ran thither at once in spite of the fact that his conduct was attracting the attention of the servants passing to and fro about their various duties.

He tried the handle of the door, which was shut, and found it was unlocked. He threw it open. The bed had not been tenanted, yet Ellen had certainly undressed, for the gown and other things she had worn the night before lay in a tumbled, confused heap on the floor just where she had kicked them off. Carrington stepped curiously over them. He lifted one by one the familiar articles of apparel. He was in a state of complete bewilderment. Suddenly the thought occurred to him that she might have laid down on the sofa in her boudoir.

Still clutching the slipper she had worn, which was the last thing he had touched, he threw open the door between the two rooms, only to discover that the boudoir itself was empty. My lady's desk stood open before him. A piece of paper caught his eye. He dropped the slipper, darted toward it, opened the paper, which was addressed to him, and read the following:

"The enclosed pays my last debt to Lord Carrington. When he reads this, I shall be on the way to my own land. With the money which he won, he can buy himself Lady Cecily without the formality of a marriage ceremony and in her arms he can forget the woman he shamed, whom he once loved and who once loved him."

From the paper as he had torn it open, an inclosure had fallen. He stooped and picked it up. It was the cheque on Ellen's bankers for twenty odd thousand pounds. My lord's brain reeled as he stared from the cheque to the note. It was as if he had been struck some powerful blow over the heart and was for the moment paralyzed. He sank down in a chair and gazed stupidly about him in great bewilderment.

Ellen was gone, actually gone. How could she for a moment have believed that there was anything between him and that painted old coquette, Cecily Carrington? How he loathed that woman! What had Ellen said; that one or the other of them must leave the house? Why did she not wait until morning? Why had she not given him an opportunity to show that, after all, it was she he loved, and none other? He had treated her abominably, his sweet, pure, lovely wife. What if she had lacked some of the petty accomplishments of her day? She was a woman nobly planned, and one of whom any man should have been proud beyond measure. He had been a fool. He would find her, tell her the truth, bring her back and drive out the whole wretched crew. They would be happy at Carrington again, as they had been happy before.

But it was no time for useless regrets now. The need for action was imperative. He started to his feet and ran toward the door that opened into his own room. He drew the bolts, swearing that if he ever got his wife back she should need no bolt to protect her but his love.

And then he heard his name called. "My lord, my lord!"

It was the aged butler coming up the stairs, white-faced and panting. "What is it, Jepson?" cried Carrington, confronting the man. "Speak out. What has happened?"

"One of the footmen, Thomas, my lord, has just come in from the stables. He says that he found the three stable boys who were there last night bound and gagged."

"What!" cried Lord Carrington.

"That's not all, sir," continued the faithful Jepson, "the coachman—"

"Has he gone?" queried the earl.

"No, my lord. He was bound and gagged, too, in the coach house."

"Who did it?"

"He says the earl of Strathgate."

"Good God!" cried Carrington, turning pale. "The earl of Strathgate!"

"Yes, my lord. And the bay team and light traveling carriage are gone from the stable."

"Impossible!" protested Carrington, fighting against the awful suspicion that entered his heart.

"It's quite true, my lord."

"Jepson," said Carrington, firmly, "send the coachman to me. Have one of the footmen ask Admiral Kephart to come to the library at once. Mount some one on a horse and bring the lodgekeeper here, also. And stay—"

he added as the butler turned away—"ask one of the women to summon Mistress Slocum as well. Now, say nothing about this to anyone else, but hurry as if your life depended upon it."

Carrington dashed back madly into his wife's room. He had known that she had hanging in her closet the sailor's suit which she had worn on her cruises with him. A dark suspicion had come to him. He tore open the door of the closet and tore from the hooks one after another the gorgeous dresses which hung there. He did not find what he sought. She had evidently worn it away. He turned from the room, ran through the hall and down the flight of stairs to

the library. The coachman awaited him.

"Who was with Strathgate when he bound you last night?"

"A young man, I take it, my lord," answered the coachman. "The room was dark, with only the firelight, and I couldn't see very well. Lord Strathgate threatened me with a pistol, or I'd have made outcry and resistance. He kept me covered with my head turned away. The young man handed him straps to lash me."

"You coward!" cried Carrington.

"I know it," returned the other.

"The idea," said the admiral, "of your giving a look to that painted old coquette, when you had such a woman as Lady Ellen for your wife."

"You can't say anything too harsh for me, admiral."

"I'm glad you are awake to the situation. Now the thing to do is to clap on sail in chase, overhaul her, bring her to, make your apologies handsomely and fetch her back to anchorage under convoy. Then we'll clear out this crew."

"It's too late!" cried Carrington, hoarsely. "Too late for that!"

"What do you mean?"

"She's gone."

"Yes," said the admiral, "the letter tells that."

"But not alone," groaned the young man.

"With whom, then?"

"With Strathgate. Damn him!" cried Carrington, gritting his teeth.

"Good Lord!" gasped the admiral, sinking down in a chair and passing his hand across his forehead. "It isn't possible."

"It's true."

"If you please, my lord," interrupted the maid, coming in unannounced in her excitement.

"What do you mean," cried Carrington, "by interrupting me in this way?"

"Please, my lord," cried the maid, terrified but standing her ground, "Miss Slocum's hat and cloak are gone, too."

"What?" roared Carrington.

"It's better than we thought, Bernard," said the admiral, rising and slapping him on the shoulder. "Heart up, my lord. It can't be so bad if she's taken the little American with her. That girl's as pure as the driven snow."

"And do you mean," said Carrington, turning fiercely upon the admiral, "to imply that Lady Ellen is net in the same class?"

"Tut! tut!" said the old man. "By no means. I only meant to encourage you. If Lady Ellen had intended to run away with Strathgate she would never have taken her friend along. She's used the man ignorant of the construction the world would put upon her action. We must find them at once."

"There's Seton!" ejaculated Carrington, peering through the window. "Charlie!" he called. Seton turned. "Come here quickly, bear a hand."

There was that in Carrington's voice which indicated some grave emergency. Seton ran across the lawn and vaulted right through the window.

"Lady Carrington's gone," said Carrington, bluntly. "Did you know anything about it?"

"You insult me!" cried Seton, fiercely. "How should I know anything about it?"

"You've been hanging around her ever since you came here. I've caught you a dozen times alone together."

"Lord Carrington," cried Seton, "I'll not be catechized and insulted this way another moment."

"It was you or Strathgate," continued Carrington, hotly, "one or the other of you, but Strathgate's got ahead of you. He's gone and Lady Ellen with him."

"Great heavens! You can't mean it!"

"It's true," said the admiral, stepping between the two angry men, "but they have Mistress Deborah with them."

"The dog!" cried Seton, "not satisfied with one, he must take two."

"Are you interested in the Puritan as well as in my wife?" cried Carrington.

"I'll answer that question, Carrington," said Seton, "when we catch up with the fugitives. I presume you're not going to let them go unpunished?"

"Not I," said Carrington; "I'll follow them to the end of the world, and when I eventually overhaul them, I'll settle with Strathgate. Then, if there's anything left of me, I'll settle with you."

"At your service," said Seton. "I presume that you start at once?"

"I do. Immediately."

"I shall do the same thing," said Sir Charles. "If I come across them first, I shall send word to you, and I trust that you'll do the same by me."

"Don't fear," answered Carrington as the other turned and dashed out of the room.

"You'll find me at Portsmouth, Carrington," said the old admiral. "I'll be glad to render you any assistance in my power. You won't fail to call upon me, will you?"

"I will not. Will you tell the duke and duchess and the others that they may take their own time in departing, but that they better be out of the house before I get back."

"Assuredly."

"Now, you will excuse me, I know," said Carrington, rising.

"God help and God bless you!" said the admiral as Carrington ran out of the room.

A few moments later, booted, spurred, cloaked, armed for his ride, he came down the hall. An early riser for her on that eventful day was Lady Cecily. Her maid had carried a strange bit of gossip to her. Her heart bounded at what she conceived the providential opening that it afforded

costume of the haste in which he had made his toilet.

"Admiral, you are the only friend I have in God's world, I believe."

"Well, I am your friend, my lord. Count on that without fail. What's the trouble?"

"Lady Carrington has gone. She left me this."

He drew from the pocket of his waistcoat the note, added the cheque to it, and extended them to the admiral.

The old man took them, read them slowly, folded them up and returned them to the injured husband.

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