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Nebraska Advertiser

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RACHEL: THE MISER'S DAUGHTER. CHAPTER XXII. (Continued.)

As soon as his mother was laid to her rest, Charles set out on his travels, keeping up the house and home just the same, with the dim hope that he might find Rachel waiting for him there on his return. Then he wandered hither and thither, like a perturbed spirit. But rest and pleasure fled before him, and at the end of three months he was home again.

It was gloomy enough here with Rachel; but it was gloomier still where she had never been. His friends tried to tempt him out, but he had only one answer for them all. "When my wife returns I will make merry. Until then, I have not the courage even to see gay."

And so autumn and winter passed away, and the early spring came, with its biting winds and cruel wrecks out at sea. The Secret Band, encouraged by the impunity it had hitherto enjoyed, had become the terror and scourge of Yarmouth, and the good people of Yarmouth went in terror of their lives. As a rule, robbery and spoliation, may be captively until a large ransom was paid, were the chief sins the Secret Band had to answer for, avoiding personal violence in every case where the resistance to their decrees was not too determined; but now and then a man or woman would disappear as if by magic.

At last, the Mayor who had been re-elected, and was half-way through his second year of office, thought it advisable to exert himself for the safety of the inhabitants. He made a representation to Government, and the consequence was that Yarmouth was garrisoned by a small body of troops, whose business was to discover the haunts of the Secret Band, and bring them to justice.

Timid folks slept sounder after this, although hitherto the troops had just enlivened the town, and brought no great benefit. It was probable that the psantries were either cowed by the robbers, or were in their pay; for when questioned, or even threatened by the soldiers, they preserved a sullen silence, or had an air of ignorance which might or might not be assumed, so that the pursuers were foiled at all points.

The old part of it was the secrecy with which the Secret Band conducted all its movements, never leaving a clue by which it might be traced. The soldiers would near the spot a couple of hours after a deprecation had been committed, and find no sign of the deprecators.

They would hear that the Secret Band had taken refuge in an old castle ruin, and would arrive there to find the hearth cold where a fire had but recently blazed, and not a trace of the robbers themselves. Colonel Vane had boasted freely that he would have them all in prison, and, perhaps, some of them hanged, before a week had gone by; and, lo! a month had passed since he came to Yarmouth, and his boast was no nearer fulfillment than it had been the first hour.

He pretended to defy the power he could not conquer, but he was destined to have his taunt thrown back into his teeth, after a manner he had not anticipated. He was riding on the outskirts of the town one afternoon, unattended, walking his horse leisurely up a hill which led into Yarmouth. There was a small bog on his right, and on his left a high hedge.

CHAPTER XXIII. ENTRAPPED. It is now time to clear up the mystery of Rachel's sudden disappearance, and make our readers acquainted with her fate. We know how little she valued her father's wealth; and yet, for her husband's sake, and for the sake of the children that might yet be born to them, she thought it her duty to make every effort for its recovery.

When, therefore, she was called down to see a man who assumed to possess the miser's will, and also his same bantering tone, through which gleamed, off and on, a suppressed leaven of ferocity. "It was rather a pity, too, considering your kind intentions in our behalf. We have all been hoping daily to see you in our quarters."

"It would have been the worse for you if you had," growled the old soldier, with unabated pride. "I shouldn't have come as a friend." "No; you would have come as a prisoner." Colonel Vane made a sudden dash for liberty here, hoping to surprise them in loosening their hold; but the hand at his collar simply moved on to his throat, and the bracelets tightened about his wrists.

"Hold, Colonel if you value your life! We are not men who boast, but men who act!" "You are onwards, anyhow; or you would not care to fight with such immense odds in your favor," said the Colonel, without quailing. "I don't know," replied the man, whom the other judged to be Captain, from a certain authority in his bearing, and the fact of his always acting as spokesman. "We fight for a high stake, remember, and can't afford to be very punctilious in little matters of etiquette. Some of these days, perhaps, we shall meet on equal ground, and then I'll give you the lie to that assertion, and show you that I am cautious for others, and not for myself."

"If I thought it would ever be my fate to meet on equal ground with a robber and an assassin, I'd shoot myself before that hour came, and die thankfully." "Who says I am an assassin?" asked the man, in a voice that quivered in spite of himself. "Where is Rachel Gooch?" The robber hesitated a moment, and then answered, boldly, "I know nothing of Rachel Gooch. Her death does not lie at my door."

The two men behind made a movement of impatience, as if they were irritated at the risk their chief was incurring by this delay; and one growled something in his beard, unintelligible to the Colonel, although the quick result was that he found himself off his horse, and on the ground, whilst pockets were coolly rifled of their contents, the Captain leaving this work to his men.

Then they stripped him of the best part of his clothing, strapped his legs and arms together with cords, bound him to a tree, and the Captain, who led his horse by the rein, mounted calmly, and turned its head from Yarmouth town. "I'll give you just a week Colonel Vane," he said, as he lifted his hand high over his head, and bowed down to his saddle-bow. "I'll do it?" "The Colonel ground his teeth in impotent rage. 'Beware when we do meet—that is all!'"

"You are such a good Christian, Colonel, you will have forgiven me long before that. Good night." The two men melted away oddly into the shadows, their Captain rode off in triumph, and Colonel Vane was left to anything but pleasant reflections. The night winds were bleak and cutting, and seemed to pierce to the marrow of his bones. But the ingenuity of his position was even worse to bear than any physical discomfort. He dreaded that any one should come to the rescue, although he knew that a night passed in this way would inevitably cause his death.

But as time went on, all his scruples turned into fears. The sky became a cold, clear gray, lightened by innumerable stars, and a painful sensation was creeping slowly upward to his heart. It was just martyrdom this, with out the martyr's crown for a reward. Hark! He heard voices, and roused himself with effort—lifting his voice in a hoarse shout. The voices came nearer—they even answered him. He shouted again and again, and his joy may be imagined when presently he found himself surrounded by his own men, and felt the cords loosening about his frozen limbs.

My father is dead, sir; and, consequently, his name has no right in this discussion. And indeed, if he were alive, he never did you any wrong. "Pardon me. A man who has so much wrongs those who have nothing, by the mere fact of his wealth. Why should I be poor, and he rich?" "I don't know; but these differences have existed from the beginning. It does not make me envious because there are so many in the world of much higher rank than myself. And now, sir, will you have the goodness to tell me where I am, and why we have stopped? I am anxious to get back to my husband as soon as I can."

"It is my duty to warn you that you will not see him for many a long day unless you accede to my terms." "What are they?" "First, look at me well." He removed the large whiskers and black wig he wore, and confronted her steadily, with the faint reflex of a smile on his lips. "Don't you recognize me now?" "You are the Captain of the Secret Band?" "Just so."

"You have done me and mine harm enough already," said Rachel, passionately. "You ought to remember how you took advantage of my ignorance and credulity to lead me into compromising my father's safety, and risking his life. You represented yourself to me as Lord Marbury." "I never dreamed you would believe that." "Why not? I might be accustomed to misers; but I never came across a man who set himself systematically to deceive."

"According to your own account, you were very ignorant. But would you oblige me by getting down? We can talk and walk at the same time." "Where are you going to take me?" "To charming quarters, I do assure you. Only, in order that the surprise may be more agreeable, you must kindly allow me to bandage your eyes." "Supposing I refuse?" "I hardly think you will be so unwise. I should be sorry to use force to a lady; but if you compel me—"

"How am I to know that a cry may not bring succor?" "You are quite welcome to try the experiment." His evident security showed Rachel that a demonstration of this kind would be mere waste of breath; and, therefore, remembering that he had once spoken as if severely were forced upon him by others, against the grain, she ventured to appeal to his feelings. "This had no better effect for the robber-captain only shook his head. "I was rather new to my work in those days, but I have received a rather rough hint or two since, that a man who is Captain of the Secret Band can't afford to be squeamish. You see it just comes to this; that, having once belonged to them, knowing all their secrets, I should not be safe at large. Therefore, I am either their master, or a prisoner who is best out of the way. Do you understand?"

"I think so." "Therefore, you will sympathize with my preference for an uncertain life instead of a certain death." "But I cannot sympathize with this special act of treachery of which I am the victim!" said Rachel, stooping her head resignedly, that he might bandage her eyes. "Neither can I understand what the Secret Band are supposed to gain by my capture." "You know where your father's treasures are concealed, probably?" "On my honor, I do not."

"Then your husband has already possessed himself of them?" "No; we are both of us ignorant of their whereabouts as the child unborn. My thought would have kept up the face of this long search without reason, when we had every right to be successful?" "It was to cheat and mislead us." "I think you must know better than that. If once we had found the money, we should have taken care that it did not fall into other hands."

"How?" "We should have sent it to a banker, probably." "Banks have been robbed." "True; but not often." He was silent for a few minutes, and then he added, in a softer tone: "You will not be ill-treated with us, and you will have my wife for a companion; but I must warn you that Lieutenant Gerel is your bitter enemy; and as he has a good deal of evil influence over the men, you must take care how you offend him."

"Why is he my bitter enemy?" inquired Rachel, dubiously. "Because you have managed to talk him upon all occasions. Look at his hand, and you will understand several things I dare not tell you. However, your woman's wit has foiled him once, and may foil him again. You see, I am not altogether depraved, or I should not have spoken as I have— for my leniency to you before was well-nigh costing me my life. Indeed, this mission was given to me as a test and I have been carefully watched from the minute I set out. That man to whom you gave the message for your husband was a spy; and if there had been the smallest sign of relenting in my face it would have been the worse for me."

drudgery. I have been here six months now, though the band has been away several times; but these are their head-quarters, so they always return. "I wonder your retreat has never been discovered." "You wouldn't if you saw it from the outside. It is, in reality, a natural cavern in the rock, of such dimensions that it easily suffices for the accommodation of the whole band.—Supposing we were discovered, the pass is narrow, a few men might guard it against a hundred; but I don't think there is any fear of that. The place is only accessible at low tide, and there is no clue to its exact whereabouts even then. We have a couple of boats lying at anchor close by, and in one of these I make my frequent journeys into Yarmouth, land in a quiet spot on the beach, and return in the same way, without, I am sure, exciting the faintest suspicion."