

The Two Vanrevels

By **BOOTH TARKINGTON**,
Author of "The Gentleman From Indiana" and "Monsieur Beaucaire"

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(CONTINUED.)

Miss Betty bit her lip, frowned, turned away and, vouchsafing no reply, walked toward the house with her eyes fixed on the ground; but just as they reached the door she flashed over him a look that scorched him from head to foot and sent his spirits down through the soles of his boots to excavate a grotto in the depths of the earth, so charged it was with wrathful pity and contempt.

"Yes!" she said abruptly and followed Mrs. Tanberry to the dressing room. The elder lady shook her head solemnly as she emerged from the enormous folds of a yellow silk cloak. "Ah, princess," she said, touching the girl's shoulder with her jeweled hand. "I told you I was a very foolish woman, and I am, but not so foolish as to offer advice often. Yet, believe me, it won't do. I think that is one of the greatest young men I ever knew, and it's a pity—but it won't do."

Miss Betty kept her face away from her guardian for a moment. No considerable amount of information had drifted to her from here and there regarding the career of Cradley Gray, and she thought how intensely she would have hated any person in the world except Mrs. Tanberry for presuming to think she needed to be warned against the charms of this serenading lady killer who was the property of another girl.

"You must keep him away, I think," ventured Mrs. Tanberry gently.

At that Betty turned to her and said sharply:

"I will. After this please let us never speak of him again."

A slow nod of the other's turbaned head indicated the gravest acquiescence. She saw that her companion's cheeks were still crimson. "I understand," said she.

A buzz of whispering, like a July beetle, followed Miss Carewe and her partner about the room during the next dance. How had Tom managed it? Had her father never told her? Who had dared to introduce them? Fanchon was the only one who knew, and as she whirled by with Will Cummings she raised her absent glance long enough to give Tom an affectionate and warning shake of the head.

Tom did not see this. Miss Carewe did. Alas! She smiled upon him instantly and looked deep into his eyes. It was the third time.

She was not afraid of this man flirt. He was to be settled with once and forever. She intended to avenge both Fanchon and herself. Yet it is a hazardous game, this piercing of eye with eye, because the point which seeks to penetrate may soften and melt, leaving one defenseless. For perhaps ten seconds that straight look lasted, while it seemed to her that she read clear into the soul of him and to behold it through some befooling magic as strong, tender, wise and true as his outward appearance would have made an innocent stranger believe him, for he looked all these things, she admitted that much, and he had an air of distinction and resource beyond any she had ever known; even in the wild scramble for her kitten he had not lost it. So for ten seconds, which may be a long time, she saw a man such as she had dreamed, and she did not believe her sight, because she had no desire to be as credulous as the others, to be as easily cheated as that poor Fanchon!

The luckless Tom found his own feet beautiful on the mountains and, treading the heights with airy steps, appeared to himself wonderful and glorified—he was waltzing with Miss Betty! He breathed the entrancing words to himself over and over. It was true he was waltzing with Miss Betty Carewe! Her glove lay warm and light within his own. His fingers clasped that ineffable lilac and white brocade waist. Sometimes her hair came within an inch of his cheek, and then he rose outright from the hilltops and floated in a golden mist. The glamour of which the incroyable had planned to tell her some day surrounded Tom, and it seemed to him that the whole world was covered with a beautiful light like a carpet, which was but the radiance of this adorable girl whom his gloves and coat sleeve were permitted to touch. When the music stopped they followed in the train of other couples seeking the coolness of out of doors for the interval, and Tom in his soul laughed at all other men with illimitable condescension.

"Stop here," she said as they reached the open gate. He was walking out of it, his head in the air and Miss Betty on his arm. Apparently he would have walked straight across the state. It was the happiest moment he had

ever known.

He wanted to say something wonderful to her. His speech should be like the music and glory and fire that were in him. Therefore he was shocked to hear himself remarking, with an inanity of utterance that sickened him:

"Oh, here's the gate, isn't it?"

Her answer was a short laugh. "You mean you wish to persuade me that you had forgotten it was there?"

"I did not see it," he protested lamely.

"No?"

"I wasn't thinking of it."

"Indeed! You were 'lost in thoughts of'—"

"Of you?" he said before he could check himself.

"Yes?" Her tone was as quietly contemptuous as she could make it. "How very frank of you! May I ask are you convinced that speeches of that sort are always to a lady's liking?"

"No," he answered humbly and hung his head. Then she threw the question at him abruptly:

"Was it you who came to sing in our garden?"

There was a long pause before a profound sigh came tremulously from the darkness, like a sad and tender confession. "Yes."

"I thought so," she exclaimed. "Mrs. Tanberry thought it was some one else, but I knew that it was you."

"Yes, you are right," he said quietly.

"It was I. It was my only way to tell you what you know now."

"Of course!" She set it all aside with those two words and the slightest gesture of her hand. "It was a song made for another girl, I believe?" she asked lightly and, with an icy smile, inquired further, "For the one—the one before the last, I understand?"

He lifted his head, surprised. "What has that to do with it? The music was made for you; but, then, I think all music was made for you."

"Leave the music out of it, if you please," she said impatiently. "Your talents make you modest! No doubt you consider it unmanly in me to have referred to the serenade before you spoke of it, but I am not one to cast down my eyes and let it pass—no, nor one too sweet to face the truth, either!" she cried, with sudden passion. "To sing that song in the way you did meant—oh, you thought I would flirt with you! What right had you to come with such a song to me?"

Tom intended only to disclaim the presumption, so far from his thoughts, that his song had moved her, for he could see that her attack was prompted by her inexplicable impression that he had assumed the attitude of a conqueror, but his explanation began unfortunately.

"Forgive me. I think you have completely misunderstood. You thought it meant something I did not intend at all, and"—

"What?" she said, and her eyes blazed, for now she beheld him as the arrogant sneak of the world. He, the lady killer, with his hypocritical air of strength and melancholy sweetness, the leader of drunken revels and, by reputation, the town Lothario and light-of-love, under promise of marriage to Fanchon Bareaud, had tried to make love to another girl, and now his cowardice in trying to disclaim what he had done lent him the insolence to say to this other: "My child, you are betrayed by your youth and conceit; you exaggerate my meaning. I had no intention to distinguish you by coquetting with you!" This was her interpretation of him, and her indignation was not lessened by the inevitable conclusion that he, who had been through so many scenes with women, secretly found her simplicity diverting. Miss Betty had a little of her father in her, while it was part of her youth, too, that of all things she could least endure the shadow of a smile at her own expense.

"Oh, oh!" she cried, her voice shaking with anger. "I suppose your bad heart is half choked with your laughter at me."

She turned from him swiftly and left him.

Almost running, she entered the house and hurried to a seat by Mrs. Tanberry, nestling to her like a young sapling on a hillside. Instantaneously several gentlemen who had hastily acquitted themselves of various obligations in order to seek her sprang forward with eager greetings, so that when the stricken Tom, dazed and confounded by his evil luck, followed her at about five paces he found himself confronted by an impenetrable abatis formed by the spiked tails of the coats of General Trumble, Madrilion, Tappingham Marsh, Cummings and Jefferson Ba-

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read. Within this fortification rang out laughter and sally from Miss Carewe. Her color was high, and her eyes sparkled never more brightly.

Flourish and alarms sounded for a quadrille. Each of the semicircle, firmly elbowing his neighbor, begged the dance of Miss Betty, but Tom was himself again and laid a long, strong hand on Madrilion's shoulder, pressed him gently aside and said:

"Forgive me. Miss Carewe has honored me by the promise of this quadrille."

He bowed, offering his arm, and none of them was too vain to envy that bow and gesture.

For a moment he remained waiting. Miss Carewe rose slowly and, directly facing him, said in composed and even voice, "You force me to beg you never to address me again."

She placed her hand on the general's arm, turning her back squarely upon Tom.

In addition to those who heard, many persons in that part of the room saw the affront and paused in arrested attitudes. Others, observing these, turned inquiringly, so that sudden silence fell, broken only by the voice of Miss Betty as she moved away, talking cheerily to the general. Tom was left standing alone in the broken semicircle.

All the eyes swept from her to him and back. Then every one began to talk hastily about nothing. The young man's humiliation was public.

He went to the door under cover of the movement of the various couples to find places in the quadrille, yet every sidelong glance in the room still rested upon him, and he knew it. He remained in the hall alone through that dance and at its conclusion walked slowly through the rooms, speaking to people here and there as though nothing had happened, but when the music sounded again he went to the dressing room, found his hat and cloak and left



"You force me to beg you never to address me again."

the house. For awhile he stood on the opposite side of the street, watching the lighted windows, and twice he caught sight of the lilac and white brocade, the dark hair and the wreath of marguerites. Then, with a hot pain in his breast and the step of a gren-

adier, he marched down the street.

In the carriage Mrs. Tanberry took Betty's hand in hers. "I'll do as you wish, child," she said, "and never speak to you of him again as long as I live except this once. I think it was best for his own sake as well as yours, but—"

"He needed a lesson," interrupted Miss Betty wearily. She had danced long and hard, and she was very tired. Mrs. Tanberry's staccato laugh came out irrepressibly. "All the vagabonds do, princess!" she cried. "And I think they are getting it."

"No, no; I don't mean"—

"We've turned their heads, my dear, between us, you and I, and we'll have to turn 'em again, or they'll break their necks looking over their shoulders at us, the owls!" She pressed the girl's hand affectionately. "But you'll let me say something just once and forgive me because we're the same foolish age, you know. It's only this: The next young man you suppress, take him off in a corner. Lead him away from the crowd where he won't have to stand and let them look at him afterward. That's all, my dear, and you mustn't mind."

"I'm not sorry!" said Miss Betty hotly. "I'm not sorry!"

"No, no," said Mrs. Tanberry soothingly. "It was better this time to do just what you did. I'd have done it myself, to make quite sure he would keep away—because I like him."

"I'm not sorry!" said Miss Betty again.

"I'm not sorry!" she repeated and reiterated to herself after Mrs. Tanberry had gone to bed. She had sunk into a chair in the library with a book, and "I'm not sorry!" she whispered as the open unread page blurred before her: "I'm not sorry!" He had needed his lesson, but she had to bear the recollection of how white his face went when he received it. Her affront had put about him a strange loneliness—the lone figure with the stilled crowd staring, it had made a picture from which her mind's eye had never been unable to escape, danced she never so hard and late. Unconsciously Robert Carewe's daughter had avenged the other lonely figure which had stood in lonely humiliation before the staring eyes.

"I'm not sorry!" Ah, did they think it was in her to hurt any living thing in the world? The book dropped from her lap, and she bowed her head upon her hands. "I'm not sorry!"—and tears upon the small lace gauntlets!

She saw them and with an incoherent exclamation, half self pitying, half impatient, ran out to the stars above her garden.

She was there for perhaps half an hour, and just before she returned to the house she did a singular thing.

Standing where all was clear to the sky, where she had stood after her talk with the incroyable when he had bid her look to the stars, she raised her arms to them again, her face, pale with a great tenderness, uplifted.

"You, you, you!" she whispered. "I love you!"

And yet it was to nothing definite, to no man nor outline of a man, to no phantom nor dream lover, that she spoke; neither to him she had affronted nor to him who had bidden her look to the stars. Nor was it to the

stars themselves.

She returned slowly and thoughtfully to the house, wondering what she had meant.

CHAPTER XI.

CRADLEY came home the next day with a new poem, but no fish. He lounged up the stairs late in the afternoon humming cheerfully to himself and, dropping his rod in a corner of Tom's office, laid the poem on the desk before his partner, chuckled softly and requested Mr. Vanrevel to set the rhymes to music immediately.

"Try it on your instrument," he said. "It's a simple verse about nothing but stars, and you can work it out in twenty minutes with the guitar."

"It is broken," said Tom, not looking up from his work.

"Broken! When?"

"Last night."

"Who broke it?"

"It fell from the table in my room."

"How? Easily mended, isn't it?"

"I think I shall not play it soon again."

Cradley swung his long legs off the sofa and abruptly sat up. "What's this?" he asked gravely.

Tom pushed his papers away from him, rose and went to the dusty window that looked to the west, where, at the end of the long street, the sun was setting behind the ruin of charred timbers on the bank of the shining river.

"It seems that I played once too often," he said.

Cradley was thoroughly astonished. He went to his friend and dropped a hand lightly on his shoulder. "What made you break the guitar? Tell me."

"What makes you think I broke it?" asked his partner sharply.

"Tell me why you did it," said Cradley.

And Tom, pacing the room, told him, while Cradley stood in silence looking him eagerly in the eye whenever Tom turned his way. The listener interrupted seldom. Once it was to exclaim:

"But you haven't said why you broke the guitar?"

"If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out! I ought to have cut off the hands that played to her."

"And cut your throat for singing to her?"

"She was right!" the other answered, striding up and down the room. "Right—a thousand times—in everything she did. That I should even approach her was an unspeakable insolence. I had forgotten, and so, possibly, had she, but I had not even been properly introduced to her."

(To be Continued)

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