

The Two Vanrevels

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

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(CONTINUED.)

CHAPTER XIII.

TOM VANREVEL always went to the postoffice soon after the morning distribution of the mail; that is to say, about 10 o'clock, and returned with the letters for the firm of Gray & Vanrevel, both personal and official. Cralley and he shared everything, even a box at the postoffice, and in front of this box one morning, after a night of rain, Tom stood staring at a white envelope bearing a small black seal. The address was in a writing he had never seen before, but the instant it fell under his eye he was struck with a distinctly pleasurable excitement.

Suddenly and without reason he knew that it came from Elizabeth Carewe.

He walked back quickly to his office with the letter in the left pocket of his coat, threw the bundle of general correspondence upon his desk, went up to the floor above and paused at his own door to listen. Deep breathing from across the hall indicated that Mr. Gray's soul was still incased in slumber.

Vanrevel went to his own room, locked the door and took the letter from his pocket. At last, after examining all the blades of his pocketknife, he selected one brighter than the others and loosened the flap of the envelope as gently and carefully as if it had been the petal of a rosebud that he was opening.

Dear Mr. Vanrevel—I believed you last night, though I did not understand. But I understand now—everything—and, bitter to me as the truth is, I must show you plainly that I know all of it, nor can I rest until I do show you. I want you to answer this letter—though I must not see you again for a long time—and in your answer you must set me right if I am anywhere mistaken in what I have learned.

At first, and until after the second time we met, I did not believe in your heart, though I did in your mind and humor. Even since then there have come strange, small, inexplicable mistrustings of you, but now I throw them all away and trust you wholly, Monsieur Citizen Georges Melhae!—I shall always think of you in those impossible garnishments of my poor great-uncle, and I persuade myself that he must have been a little like you.

I trust you because I have heard the story of your profound goodness. The first reason for my father's dislike was your belief in freedom as the right of all men. Ah, it is not your pretty exaggerations and flatteries (I laugh at them) that speak for you, but your career itself and the brave things you have done! My father's dislike flared into hatred because you worsted him when he discovered that he could not successfully defend the wrong against you and fell back upon sheer insult.

He is a man whom I do not know—strange as that may seem to you. It is only to you, who have taught me so much that I could write it. I have tried to know him and to realize that I am his daughter, but we are the coldest acquaintances, that is all, and I cannot see how a change could come. I do not understand him; least of all do I understand why he is a gambler. It has been explained to me that it is his great passion, but all I comprehend in these words is that they are full of shame for his daughter.

This is what was told me. He has always played heavily and skillfully, adding much to his estate in that way, and in Rouen always with a certain coterie, which was joined several years ago by the man you came to save last night.

Your devotion to Mr. Gray has been the most beautiful thing in your life. I know all that the town knows of that, except the thousand hidden sacrifices you have made for him, those things which no one will ever know. (And yet, you see, I know them after all.) For your sake, because you love him, I will not even call him unworthy.

I have heard—from one who told unwillingly—the story of the night two years ago when the play ran so terribly high, and how in the morning when they went away all were poorer except one—their host; how Mr. Gray had nothing left in the world and owed my father a great sum, which was to be paid in twenty-four hours; how you took everything you had saved in the years of hard work at your profession and borrowed the rest on your word and brought it to my father that afternoon; how, when you had paid your friend's debt, you asked my father not to play with Mr. Gray again, and my father made that his excuse to send you a challenge. You laughed at the challenge—and you could afford to laugh at it.

But this is all shame, shame for Robert Carewe's daughter. It seems to me that I should hide and not lift my head; that I, being of my father's blood, could never look you in the face again. It is so un-speakably painful and ugly. I think of my father's stiff pride and his look of the eagle—and he still plays with your friend, almost always "successfully!" And your friend still comes to play! But I will not speak of that side of it.

Mr. Gray has made you poor, but I know it was not that which made you come seeking him last night, when I found you there in the hall. It was for his sake you came—and you went away for mine. Now that I know, at last—now that I have heard what your life has been (and, oh, I heard so much more than I have written!)—now that my eyes have been opened to see you as you are, I am proud and glad and humble that I can believe that you felt a friendship for me strong enough to have made you go "for my sake." You will write to me just once—won't you?—and tell me if there was any

error in what I listened to, but you must not come to the garden. Now that I know you I cannot meet you clandestinely again. It would hurt the dignity which I feel in you now, and my own poor dignity—such as it is! I have been earnestly warned of the danger to you. Besides, you must let me test myself. I am all fluttering and frightened and excited. You will obey me, won't you? Do not come until I send for you.

ELIZABETH CAREWE.

Mr. Gray, occupied with his toilet about noon, heard his partner descending to the office with a heavy step, and issued from his room to call a hearty greeting. Tom looked back over his shoulder and replied cheerily, though with a certain embarrassment, but Cralley, catching sight of his face, uttered a sharp ejaculation and came down to him.

"Why, what's the matter, Tom? You're not going to be sick?"

"I'm all right, never fear!" Tom laughed, evading the other's eye. "I'm going out in the country on some business, and I dare say I shall not be back for a couple of days. It will be all up and down the county."

"Can't I go for you? You don't look able!"

"No, no. It's something I'll have to attend to myself."

"Ah, I suppose," said Cralley gently, "I suppose it's important and you couldn't trust me to handle it. Well—God knows you're right! I've shown you often enough how incompetent I am to do anything but write jingles!"

"You do some more of them—without the whisky, Cralley. They're worth more than all the lawing that Gray & Vanrevel have ever done or ever will do. Goodby—and be kind to yourself."

He descended to the first landing, and then, "Oh, Cralley," he called with the air of having forgotten something he had meant to say.

"Yes, Tom?"

"This morning at the postoffice I found a letter addressed to me. I opened it and"—He hesitated, and uneasily shifted his weight from one foot to the other with a feeble, deprecatory laugh.

"Yes, what of it?"

"Well, there seemed to be a mistake. I think it must have been meant for you. Somehow, she—she's picked up a good many wrong impressions, and, Lord knows how, but she's mixed our names up and—I've left the letter for you. It's on my table."

He turned and, calling a final good-bye over his shoulder, went clattering noisily down to the street and vanished from Cralley's sight.

Noon found Tom far out on the National road, creaking along over the yellow dust in a light wagon.

He stopped at every farmhouse and cabin, and where the young men work-



"Why, what's the matter, Tom?"

ed in the fields bailed them from the road or hitched his horse to the fence and crossed the soft furrows to talk with them. At such times he stood erect again and spoke stirringly, finding eager listeners. There was one question they asked him over and over: "But are you sure the call will come?"

"As sure as that we stand here. And it will come before the week is out. We must be ready!"

Often when he left them they would turn from the work in hand, leaving it as it was to be unfinished in the fields, and make their way slowly and thoughtfully to their homes, while Tom climbed into his creaking little wagon

once more, only to fall into the same dull, hunched over attitude. He had many things to think out before he faced Rouen and Cralley Gray again, and more to fight through to the end

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with himself. Three days he took for it, three days driving through the soft May weather behind the kind old jog trotting horse.

But on the evening of the third day he drove into town, with the stoop out of his shoulders and the luster back in his eyes. He was haggard, gray, dusty, but he had solved his puzzle, and one thing was clear in his mind as the thing that he would do. He patted the old horse a hearty farewell as he left him with the liverman from whom he had hired him and strode up Main street with the air of a man who is going somewhere. It was late, but there were more lights than usual in the windows and more people on the streets. An old man, a cobbler, who had left a leg at Tippecanoe and replaced it with a wooden one, chastely decorated with designs of his own carvings, came stumping excitedly down the middle of the street, where he walked for fear of the cracks in the wooden pavement, which were dangerous to his art leg when he came from the Rouen House bar, as on the present occasion. He hailed Tom by name.

"You're the lad, Tom Vanrevel!" he shouted. "You're the man to lead the boys out for the glory of the state! You git the whole blame fire department out and enlist 'em before morning. Take 'em down to the Rio Grande, you hear me? And you needn't be afraid of their puttin' it out, if it ketches afire, neither!"

Tom waved his hand and passed on, but at the open doors of the Catholic church he stopped and looked up and down the street, and then, unnoticed, entered to the dim interior, where the few candles showed only a bent old woman in black kneeling at the altar. Tom knew where Elizabeth Carewe knelt each morning. He stepped softly through the shadowy silence to her place, knelt and rested his head upon the rail of the bench before him.

The street was quiet when he emerged from that lone vigil. The corner groups had dissolved. Shouting youths no longer patrolled the sidewalks. Only one quarter showed signs of life—the little clubhouse, where the windows still shone brightly and whence came the sound of many voices settling the destinies of the United States of America. Thither Tom bent his steps thoughtfully and with a quiet mind. There was a small veranda at the side of the house. Here he stood unobserved to look in upon his noisy and agitated friends.

They were all there, from the old general and Mr. Bareaud to the latter's son, Jefferson, and young Frank Chenoweth. Trumble was proposing a health to the president in a voice of fury.

"In spite of all the Cralley Grays and traitors this side of hades!" he finished politely.

Cralley emerged instantaneously from the general throng and mounted a chair, tossing his light hair back from his forehead, his eyes sparkling and happy. "You find your own friends already occupying the place you mentioned, do you, general?" he asked.

General Trumble stamped and shook his fist. "You're a spawn of Aaron Burr!" he vociferated. "There's not a man here to stand by your infernal doctrines. You sneer at your own state, you sneer at your own country, you defile the sacred ground! What

are you, by the Almighty, who attack your native land in this her hour of peril?"

"Peril to my native land!" laughed Cralley. "From Santa Anna?"

"The general's right, sir," exclaimed the elder Chenoweth indignantly, and most of the listeners appeared to agree with him. "It's a poor time to abuse the president when he's called for volunteers and our country is in danger, sir!"

"Who is in danger?" answered Cralley, lifting his hand to still the clamor of approbation that arose. "Is Polk in danger, or congress? But that would be too much to hope! Do you expect to see the greasers in Washington? No, you idiots, you don't! Yet there'll be plenty of men to suffer and die, and the first should be those who thrust this war on us and poor little Mexico. But it won't be they. The men who'll do the fighting and dying will be the country boys and the like of us from the towns, while Mr. Polk sits planning how he can get elected again. And you ask me to drink the health of the politician who sits at home and sends his fellow men to die to fix his rotten jobs for him?" Cralley had persuaded himself into such earnestness that the depth of his own feeling almost choked him, but he finished roundly in his beautiful, strong voice: "I'll drink for the good punch's sake. But that health—I'll see General Trumble in heaven before I'll drink it!"

There rose at once a roar of anger and disapproval, and Cralley became a mere storm center amid the upraised hands gesticulating madly at him as he stood, smiling again, upon his chair.

"This comes of living with Tom Vanrevel!" shouted the general furiously. "This is his cursed abolition teaching! You're only his echo. You spend half your life playing at being Vanrevel!"

"Where is Vanrevel?" said Tappingham Marsh.

"Aye, where is he?" raged Trumble, hammering the table till the glasses rang. "Let him come and answer for his own teaching. It's wasted time to talk to this one. He's only the pupil. Where is the traitor?"

"Here," answered a voice from the doorway; and, though the word was spoken quietly, it was nevertheless at that juncture silencing. Every one turned toward the door as Vanrevel entered. But the apoplectic general, whom Cralley's speech had stirred to

a fury beyond control, almost leaped at Tom's throat.

"Here's the tea sipping old granny!" he bellowed hoarsely. (He was ordinarily very fond of Tom.) "Here's the master! Here's the man whose example teaches Cralley Gray to throw mud at the flag. He'll stay here at home with Cralley, of course, and throw more, while the other boys march out to die under it!"

"On the contrary, general," answered Tom, raising his voice. "I think you'll find Cralley Gray the first to enlist, and, as for myself, I've raised sixty men in the country, and I want forty more from Rouen in order to offer the governor a full company. So it's come to 'the king, not the man.' Polk is a pitiful trickster, but the country needs her sons; that's enough for us to know. And, while I won't drink to James Polk"—he plunged a cup in the bowl

and drew it out brimming—"I'll empty this to the president!"

It was then that from fifty throats the long, wild shout went up that stirred Rouen and woke the people from their midnight beds for half a mile around.

CHAPTER XIV.

FOR the first time it was Cralley who sat waiting for Tom to come home. In a chair drawn to his partner's desk in the dusty office he half reclined, arms on the desk, his chin on his clinched fists.

Tom took his own time in coming. He had stayed at the club to go over his lists—so he had told Cralley—with the general and old Bareaud. His company was almost complete, and Cralley had been the first to volunteer, to the dumfounding of Trumble, who had proceeded to drink his health again and again. But the lists could not detain Tom two hours, Cralley knew, and it was two hours since the new volunteers had sung "The Star Spangled Banner" over the last of the punch and had left the club to Tom and the two old men. Only once or twice in that time had Cralley shifted his position or altered the direction of his set gaze at nothing. But at last he rose, went to the window and, leaning far out, looked down the street toward the little clubhouse. Its lights were extinguished, and all was dark up and down the street. Abruptly Cralley went back to the desk and blew out the candle, after which he sat down again in the same position. Twenty minutes later he heard Tom's step on the stair, coming up very softly. Cralley waited in silence until his partner reached the landing, then relit the candle.

"Tom," he called, "come in, please. I've been waiting for you."

There was a pause before Tom answered from the hall: "I'm very tired, Cralley. I think I'll go up to bed."

"No," said Cralley; "come in."

The door was already open, but Tom turned toward it reluctantly. He stopped at the threshold, and the two looked at each other.

"I thought you wouldn't come as long as you believed I was up," said Cralley, "so I blew out the light. I'm sorry I kept you outside so long."

"Cralley, I'm going away tomorrow," the other began. "I am to go over and see the governor and offer him this company, and tonight I need sleep, so please—"

"No," interrupted Cralley quietly; "I want to know what you're going to do."

"To do about what?"

"About me."

"Oh!" Tom's eyes fell at once from his friend's face and rested upon the floor. Slowly he walked to the desk and stood in embarrassed contemplation of the littered books and papers, while the other waited.

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