

The Two Vanrevels

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(CONTINUED.)

CHAPTER XIX.

WILL CUMMINGS had abandoned the pen for the sword until such time as Santa Anna should cry for quarter, and had left the office in charge of an imported substitute, but late that night he came to his desk once more to write the story of the accident to Corporal Gray, and the tale that he wrote had been already put into writing by Tom Vanrevel as it fell from Crailey's lips after the doctor had come, so that none might doubt it. No one did doubt it. What reason had Mr. Carewe to injure Crailey Gray? Only five in Rouen knew the truth, for Nelson had gone with his master, and, except Mamie, the other servants of the Carewe household had been among the crowd in front of the Rouen House when the shot was fired.

So the story went over the town how Crailey had called to say goodby to Mrs. Tanberry; how Mr. Carewe happened to be examining the musket his father had carried in 1812 when the weapon was accidentally discharged, the ball entering Crailey's breast; how Mr. Carewe, stricken with remorse and horror over this frightful misfortune and suffering too severe anguish of mind to remain upon the scene of the tragedy which his carelessness had made, had fled, attended by his servant, and how they had leaped aboard the evening boat as it was pulling out and were now on their way down the river.

And this was the story, too, that Tom told Fanchon, for it was he who brought her to Crailey. Through the long night she knelt at Crailey's side, his hand always pressed to her breast or cheek, her eyes always upward and her lips moving with her prayers, not for Crailey to be spared, but that the Father would take good care of him in heaven till she came. "I had already given him up," she said to Tom meekly in a small voice. "I knew it was to come, and perhaps this way is better than that—I thought it would be far away from me. Now I can be with him, and perhaps I shall have him a little longer, for he was to have gone away before noon."

The morning sun rose upon a fair world, gay with bird chatterings from the big trees of the Carewe place and pleasant with the odors of Miss Betty's garden, and Crailey, lying upon the bed of the man who had shot him, heartened and smiled goodly to the summer he loved; and, when the day broke, asked that the bed be moved so that he might lie close by the window. It was Tom who had borne him to that room. "I have carried him before this," he said, waving the others aside.

Not long after sunrise, when the bed had been moved near the window, Crailey begged Fanchon to bring him a miniature of his mother which he had given her and urged her to go for it herself. He wanted no hands but hers to touch it, he said. And when she had gone he asked to be left alone with Tom.

"Give me your hand, Tom," he said faintly. "I'd like to keep hold of it a minute or so. I couldn't have said that yesterday, could I, without causing us both horrible embarrassment? But I fancy I can now because I'm done for. That's too bad, isn't it? I'm very young, after all. Do you remember what poor Andre Chenier said as he went up to be guillotined?—'There were things in this head of mine!' But I want to tell you what's been the matter with me. It was just my being a bad sort of poet. I suppose that I've never loved any one, yet I've cared more deeply than other men for every lovely thing I ever saw, and there's so little that hasn't loveliness in it. I'd be ashamed not to have cared for the beauty in all the women I've made love to—but about this one—the most beautiful of all—I—"

"She will understand," said Tom quickly.

"She will—yes—she's wise and good. If Fanchon knew, there wouldn't be even a memory left to her, and I don't think she'd live. And, do you know, I believe I've done a favor for Miss Betty in getting myself shot. Carewe will never come back. Tom, was ever a man's knavery so exactly the architect of his own destruction as mine? And for what gain? Just the excitement of the comedy from day to day, for she was sure to despise me as soon as she knew, and the desire to hear her voice say another kindly thing to me, and the everlasting perhaps in every woman, and this one the heart's desire of all the world! Ah, well! Tell me—I want to hear it from you—how many hours does the doctor say?"

"Hours, Crailey?" Tom's hand twitched pitifully in the other's feeble grasp. "I know it's only a few."

"They're all fools, doctors!" exclaimed Vanrevel fiercely.

"No, no. And I know that nothing can be done. You all see it, and you want me to go easily, or you wouldn't let me have my own way so much. It frightens me, I own up, to think that so soon I'll be wiser than the wisest in the world. Yet I always wanted to know. I've sought and I've sought—but now to go out alone on the search—it must be the search, for the Holy Grail—I—"

"Please don't talk," begged Tom in a broken whisper, "for mercy's sake, lad. It wears on you so."

Crailey laughed weakly. "Do you think I could die peacefully without talking a great deal? There's one thing I want, Tom—I want to see all of them once more, all the old friends that are going down the river at noon. What harm could it do? I want them to come by here on their way to the boat, with the band and the new flag. But I want the band to play cheerfully! Ask 'em to play 'Rosin the Bow,' will you? I've never believed in mournfulness, and I don't want to see any of it now. It's the rankest impiety of all! And, besides, I want to see them as they'll be when they come marching home—they must look gay!"

"Ah, don't, lad, don't!" Tom flung one arm about the other's shoulder, and Crailey was silent, but rested his hand gently on his friend's head. In that attitude Fanchon found them when she came.

The volunteers gathered at the courthouse two hours before noon. They met each other dimly, speaking in undertones as they formed in lines of four, while their spiritless faces showed that the heart was out of them. Not so with the crowds of country folk and townspeople who lined the streets to see the last of them, for these, when the band came marching down the street and took its place, set up a royal cheering that grew louder as Jefferson Bareaud, the color bearer, carried the flag to the head of the procession. With the recruits marched the veterans of 1812 and the Indian wars, the one legged cobbler stumping along beside General Trumble, who looked very dejected and old. The lines stood in silence and responded to the cheering by quietly removing their hats, so that the people whispered that it was more like an Odd Fellows' Sunday funeral than the departure of enthusiastic patriots for the seat of war. General Trumble's was not the only sad face in the ranks. All were downcast and nervous, even those of the lads from the country, who had not known the comrade they were to leave behind.

Jefferson unfurled the flag, Marsh gave the word of command, the band began to play a quickstep, and the procession moved forward down the cheering lane of people, who waved little flags and handkerchiefs and threw their hats in the air as they shouted; but, contrary to expectation, the parade was not directly along Main street to the river. "Right wheel! March!" commanded Tappingham hoarsely, waving his sword, and Jefferson led the way into Carewe street.

"For God's sake, don't cry now!" and Tappingham with a large drop streaking down his own cheek turned savagely upon Lieutenant Cummings. "That isn't what he wants. He wants to see us looking cheering and smiling. We can do it for him this once, I guess! I never saw him any other way."

"You look very smiling yourself!" snuffed Will.

"I will when we turn in at the gates," retorted the captain. "On my soul I swear I'll kill every sniffling idiot that doesn't! In line, there!" he stormed ferociously at a big recruit.

The lively strains of the band and the shouting of the people grew louder and louder in the room where Crailey lay. His eyes glistened as he heard, and he smiled, not the old smile of the worldly prelate, but merrily, like a child when music is heard. The room was darkened, save for the light of the one window which fell softly upon his head and breast and upon another fair head close to his, where Fanchon knelt. In the shadows at one end of the room were Miss Betty and Mrs. Tanberry and Mrs. Bareaud and the white haired doctor who had said, "Let him have his own way in all he asks." Tom stood alone, close by the head of the couch.

"Hail to the band!" Crailey chuckled softly. "How the rogues keep the time! It's 'Rosin the Bow,' all right! Ah, that is as it should be. Mrs. Tanberry, you and I have one thing in

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common, if you'll let me flatter myself so far. We've always believed in good cheer, you and I, eh? The best of things, even if things are bad, dear lady, eh?"

"You darling vagabond!" Mrs. Tanberry murmured, trying to smile back to him.

"Hark to 'em!" said Crailey. "They're very near! Only hear the people cheer them! They'll 'march away so gayly,' won't they? And how right that is!" The vanguard appeared in the street, and over the hedge gleamed the oncoming banner, the fresh colors flying out on a strong breeze. Crailey greeted it with a breathless cry. "There's the flag—look, Fanchon, your flag!—waving above the hedge, and it's Jeff who carries it. Doesn't it always make you want to dance! Bravo, bravo!"

The procession halted for a moment in the street, and the music ceased. Then, with a jubilant flourish of brass and the roll of drums, the band struck up "The Star Spangled Banner," and Jefferson Bareaud proudly led the way



"Here they come!"

through the gates and down the driveway, the bright silk streaming overhead. Behind him briskly marched the volunteers, with heads erect and cheerful faces, as they knew Corporal Gray wished to see them, their captain flourishing his sword in the air.

"Here they come! Do you see, Fanchon?" cried Crailey excitedly. "They are all there—Jeff and Tappingham and the two Madrilions and Will, the dear old fellow—he'll never write a decent paragraph as long as he lives, God bless him!—and young Frank—what devils they've led the boy into!—and there's the old general, forgetting all the tiffs we've had. God bless them all and grant them all a safe return! What on earth are they taking off their hats for? Ah, goodbye, boys, goodbye!"

They saw the white face at the window and the slender hand fluttering its farewell, and Tappingham halted his men.

"Three times three for Corporal Gray!" he shouted, managing somehow to keep the smile upon his lips. "Three times three, and may he rejoin his company before we enter the Mexican capital!"

He beat the time for the thunderous

cheers that they gave. The procession described a circle on the lawn and then, with the band playing and colors flying, passed out of the gates and took up the march to the wharf.

"The flag, the flag!" whispered Crailey, following it with his eyes. "It shows you helped make it, Fanchon. It's so beautiful. Ah, Tom, they've said we abused it sometimes. It was only that we loved it so well we didn't like to see any one make it look silly or mean. But, after all, no man can do that—no, nor no group of men or party! His voice grew louder as the last strains of the music came more faintly from the street. "They'll take your banner across the Rio Grande, Fanchon, but that is not all—some day its stars must spread over the world! Don't you all see that they will?"

After a little while he closed his eyes with a sigh. The doctor bent over him quickly, and Miss Betty started forward unconsciously and cried out.

But the bright eyes opened again and fixed themselves upon her with all their old gay inscrutability.

"Not yet," said Crailey. "Miss Carewe, may I tell you that I am sorry I could not have known you sooner? Perhaps you might have liked me for Fanchon's sake. I know you care for her."

"I do—I do!" she faltered. "I love her, and—ah—I do like you, Mr. Gray, for I know you, though I never—met you until—last night. God bless you—God bless you!"

She wavered a moment, like a lily in the wind, and put out a hand blindly. "Not you!" she said sharply as Tom Vanrevel started toward her. Mrs. Tanberry came quickly and put an arm about her, and together they went out of the room.

"You must be good to her, Tom," said Crailey then in a very low voice.

"I?" answered Tom gently. "There was never a chance of that, lad."

"Listen," whispered Crailey. "Lean down—no—closer." He cast a quick glance at Fanchon, kneeling at the other side of the bed, her golden head on the white coverlet, her outstretched hand clutching his, and he spoke so close to Tom's ear and in so low a tone that only Tom could hear.

"She never cared for me. She felt that she ought to, but that was only because I masqueraded in your history. She wanted to tell me before I went away that there was no chance for me. She was telling me that when he called from the window. It was at the dance, the night before, that she knew. I think there has been some one else from the first—God send it's you! Did you speak to her that night or she to you?"

"Ah, no," said Tom Vanrevel. "All the others."

Mrs. Tanberry and Betty and Mr. Bareaud waited in the library, the two women huddled together on a sofa, with their arms round each other, and all the house was very still. By and by they heard a prolonged, faraway cheering and the steamer's whistle and knew that the boat was off. Half an hour later Will Cummings came back alone, entered the room on tiptoe and silently sank into a chair near Mr. Bareaud, with his face away from Miss Betty. He was to remain in Rouen another week and join his regiment with Tom. None of the three appeared to notice his coming more than dimly, and he sat with his face bowed in his

hands and did not move.

Thus perhaps an hour passed, with only a sound of footsteps on the gravel of the driveway now and then and a low murmur of voices in the rear of the house, where people came to ask after Crailey. And when the door of the room where he lay was opened the four watchers started as at a loud explosion. It was Mrs. Bareaud and the old doctor, and they closed the door again softly and came in to the others. They had left Crailey alone with Fanchon and Tom Vanrevel, the two who loved him best.

The warm day beyond the windows became like Sunday. No voices sounded from without in the noon hush, though sometimes a little group of people would gather across the street to eye the house curiously and nod and whisper. The strong, blue shadows of the veranda pillars stole slowly across the white floor of the porch in a lessening slant and finally lay all in a line, as the tall clock in a corner of the library asthmatically coughed the hour of noon. In this jarring discordance there was something frightful to Miss Betty. She rose abruptly, and, imperiously waving back Mrs. Tanberry, who would have detained her—for there was in her face and manner the incipient wildness of control overstrained to the breaking point—she went hurriedly out of the room and out of the house to the old bench in the garden. There she sank down, her face hidden in her arms; there on the spot where she had first seen Crailey Gray.

From there, too, had risen the serenade of the man she had spurned and insulted, and there she had come to worship the stars when Crailey bade her look to them, and now the strange young teacher was paying the bitter price for his fooleries, and who could doubt that the price was a bitter one? To have the spirit so suddenly, cruelly riven from the sprightly body that was, but a few hours ago, hale and alert, obedient to every petty wish, could dance, run and leap; to be forced with such hideous precipitation to leave the warm breath of June and undergo the lonely change, merging with the shadow; to be flung from the exquisite and commonplace day of sunshine into the appalling adventure that should not have been his for years, and hurled into it by what hand—ah, bitter, bitter price for a harlequinade! And, alas, alas, for the brave harlequin!

A gentle touch fell upon her shoulder, and Miss Betty sprang to her feet and screamed. It was Nelson who stood before her, hat in hand, his head deeply bowed.

"Is he with you?" she cried, clutching at the bench for support.

"No'm," answered the old man humbly. "I reckon we all ain't goin' see dat man no mo'."

"Where is he?"

"On de way, honey; on de way."

"The way—to Rouen!" she gasped.

(To be Continued)

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