

MISS MILNE AND I.

CHAPTER VIII—Continued.

When I reached the Commercial Hotel, at my request I was instantly shown into the private sitting room that had been taken for our interview by Colonel Pelham. When I entered I found the gaunt, military-looking old gentleman looking more gaunt and military than ever, and pacing the room with his arms folded across his breast. He made the slightest bow, which I returned, and took my stand at the fireplace. He continued his walk in silence until he had reached the other end of the room, then, swinging suddenly round, in firm, slow tones he said:

"At our last interview, Doctor Rigby, you told me that you had done nothing that could be called dishonorable."

"Nor have I, sir," I replied, emphatically.

"Nothing to place yourself within the reach of the law—the criminal law?"

"A man may place himself within the reach of the law without acting dishonorably, sir."

"And may he, by your code, under those circumstances, continue an engagement that will end by placing in a like terrible position a young girl upon whom no harsh wind has ever blown, and still be honorable?"

"My God! my God!" I groaned, as I dropped into the chair beside me and covered my face with my hands. "Is there no road of escape, no hope for me?"

"As far as your engagement with my daughter goes, it is my duty to tell you there is none, Doctor Rigby."

"Colonel Pelham, do you know what you are doing? This woman—do you believe her word in preference to mine?"

"You have admitted being within reach of the criminal law, and this woman has sworn that the day you marry my daughter shall be your last of liberty and my daughter's last of happiness. Under these circumstances, Doctor Rigby, I ask you, am I justified in allowing your engagement to continue?"

I sprang to my feet.

"But, Colonel Pelham, you are a gentleman, you are a man of honor. Will you not allow me to tell you my story of this woman and her villainies?"

"I will reply to your questions, Doctor Rigby, if you will first answer one of mine, namely: Has this woman this hold over you? Could she, if it so pleased her, deprive you of your liberty, and my daughter, if she were married to you, of her happiness?"

In a moment I saw what was expected of me. By a yes or no—for that was the kind of reply he looked for—I was to pass sentence on myself. And yet no such reply was possible. The man standing there—my judge—the man in whose hands my fate rested, was a soldier, a man of action and my story was a matter of detail. The answer could not possibly convey any idea of the nature of the case to him, and yet such was the answer he expected, and I knew he would admit no other.

"Colonel Pelham," I said, "when you ask me if this woman has or has not the hold over me she professes to have, I can only reply by saying: she has, and she has—the eyes of God."

"Rigby, I must remind you that I have asked you a plain, straightforward question, to which I require you to give a plain, straightforward answer. This interview, which must of necessity be painful to both of us, has already lasted too long. It can only be shortened by your giving me such an answer as I asked for. I repeat this question: Has this woman, or has she not, this hold over you?"

In utter amazement I groaned: "She has, but—"

"Doctor Rigby," said Colonel Pelham, taking up his hat, "no number of 'buts' will alter matters. Somehow, in my heart I believe and feel that you have been made the victim of this woman. You will believe me, I am extremely sorry for you. My interview with her this morning showed me a phase of female character which I with my somewhat wide experience of the sex, was utterly ignorant of, but my pity and sorrow for you do not alter facts. I should be unworthy of my position, as Edith's father, if I allowed her to follow her woman's instincts and share your calamity."

"Edith, Edith!" for it was she, "what are you doing here? This is no time or place for you; you must leave us at once."

"I came," she said, "because I know you saw that dreadful woman this morning, and when Allan did not come, and you had gone to meet the train, I was certain some dreadful thing had happened."

"Well, well," said the old gentleman, hurriedly, lest I should speak first. "Some dreadful thing has happened, but I will tell you all about it presently. For the present you must leave us." He had walked across the room and taken her gently by the arm, that he might lead her to the door.

In a moment the old soldier's blood awoke in the daughter. She quietly disengaged herself and as quietly asked: "Am I then to have no voice in the deciding of my own fate?"

"Edith, you will not, you can not wish to stay here. Leave the matter in my hands; I know more about it than you do, and am therefore more capable of deciding what is best for you—for you both."

"Allan, does my father know the details of this trouble?"

"He does not, Edith, nor will he allow me to tell him; he insists on my breaking off the engagement without seeing or writing to you, and that I have declined to do."

"If that is so, father, you have not the advantage over me that you imagine. I do know every detail of this trouble."

"You, Edith!" Then turning to me in a towering passion: "Do I understand, sir, that you have so far forgotten child?"

"Allan has in no way forgotten himself; he has behaved as a gentleman, as you yourself would have behaved, had you been placed in his position."

"Then turning to me she cried: 'Allan! Allan! do you want my love?'"

"Edith, how can you ask such a question?"

"Father, I loved him when he was not in trouble. Should I be a woman, should I be your daughter, if I did not love him now that he is? No, no!" she exclaimed. "I am a Pelham, and no coward. I will not forsake you now, my darling!"

And in her agony she threw herself upon my neck and sobbed aloud.

It became now evident to the colonel that things were going against him, and he hastily decided upon making a

promise you our communications shall come, I remain, very faithfully yours,
"A. A. RIGBY."

I read this letter twice, then closing it finally, I took up my letter to Edith and read that. I have no copy of it by me, nor have I any memory of the wording of it. All I know is, that in it I poured out, as a man would, all my heart and soul to her. I tried to tell her what the step I had taken was costing me, and then I said good-bye, with the hope (and hence very customary at such times) that in a happier world we might consecrate and perpetuate our love.

At length, very cold and tired, but still sleepless, I went down to the kitchen, lighted the gas stove, and made some coffee; then, collecting writing materials in the dining room, I went back to my bedroom to write once more, and, perhaps the most important letter of all. It was to my good friend Mrs. Needs, the medical agent of King's Cross. I told her that a great trouble had taken and overwhelmed me, and as a consequence I had decided upon selling my practice. I told her a few particulars as to its value, etc., and requested her to sell it at once, even though she could not get the full price; for within one short hour a desperate hatred of the place had taken hold upon me, and although I knew that the sacrifice must be great, it could not be avoided. Under no circumstances now could I continue to live in the same district as Miss Milne, even if she left, I could never be happy in that home again. And so the letter was sent, and within forty-eight hours a purchaser found who would be satisfied with one month's introduction.

After my third letter was written I did get an hour or two of sleep, but awoke in the morning unrefreshed and heavy. I got through the day as best I could, saw my patients perfunctorily, and when evening came put on my ulster and a slouch cap and started for the theater, hoping some and the gayeties of the West End, to lose some of my misery. But the effort was a useless one. When I reached home I found the last post had brought me a letter from Colonel Pelham. It was kind, and courteous; it was the extreme; he told me that he had had throughout too much confidence in my malice ever to really doubt my ultimately seeing the wisdom of his advice; he said nothing as to the future, but concluded with a sentence which shocked me terribly: "Edith," he said, "is not well enough to attempt answering your letter to-night; the events of the last few days quite unstrung her mind; but our medical attendant tells us that tone and a change of surroundings will soon restore her."

That night would have been another sleepless one had I not, to make certain of some rest, taken a considerable dose of opium—it was my first and last experience of the bewitching drug.

CHAPTER IX.

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"You are not looking well to-night, doctor," she said, as she placed my coffee on a little table at my side.

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The colonel's behavior in the matter now appeared to me to be natural and reasonable, and as for Edith, I almost forgot my love in my intense admiration of her self-sacrifice and truth.

Every word the colonel had said was true. I was a coward; I had no right to retain my hold upon, and drag down with me, any girl, much less a girl like Edith. And so came to pass that I was preparing to write a letter of importance, or, rather, two letters of importance.

At twelve, after innumerable failures, they were finished and in their envelopes. I took them to my bedroom determined to post them in the morning. Tired out, I did not follow my usual custom, but in my anxiety to get some rest for my weary brain, put the gas out and lay down at once. Sleep, however, was out of the question. I turned from side to side, and sought by every method I knew to win an hour or two of blissful forgetfulness; but it was useless, my whole mind and soul had been, in one short day, transformed. A new heaven and a darker one was above me, a new earth and a sadder one beneath my feet. At length, unable to bear it longer, I got up and paced the room, drew up the blind, and looked out upon the dimly lighted, silent streets.

Then I walked back to the table, lighted my reading lamp, re-opened the two letters, and read half aloud:

"My Dear Colonel Pelham—I did not behave with the self-respect that you had a right to expect of me, but perhaps, just as my facts dawned on me, when I left you, so the difficulties of my position may have dawned on you. A man does not yield up such a priceless treasure as Edith's love without a struggle, and I thought I should have been unworthy of such a mind and soul as hers; but now that I am away from the glamour of her presence, I can clearly see that my efforts to keep her at all hazards were cowardly, as you said, and unjustifiable. To give up the one thing that was to me worth living for is like giving up half my life, nay, more than half my life. But I see now that there is no other course open to me. Of the future, I, of course, know nothing, but if it ever should come to pass that I am a free man, to reinstate your confidence will be the one object of my efforts. I will not try to see Edith again. I have written to her by this post, giving my reason for adopting this course, and with that letter I

retreat. He walked to the bell, rang it, and stood looking from the window with his back to us as he waited for the servant to reply. When we heard his steps upon the stairs, we unlocked each other from an embrace made mad and desperate by the thought of separation.

When the door opened, and the servant asked: "Did you ring, sir?" the old colonel turned toward him, and said: "Yes, will you order my carriage at once?"

"It is at the door, sir," said the man, and left us.

"Come, Edith, this interview can now be productive of nothing but misery; therefore, the sooner it is closed the better. Will you wish Doctor Rigby good-bye and come with me?"

Good-byes, when lovers are parting, are always better left unsaid, so Edith and I held; and now when for all we knew, it might possibly be our last, she true to her faith, put out her hand and without a word left me.

The colonel lingered a moment, and then, turning to me, said: "You have not behaved with the self-sacrifice I had a right to expect of you," and followed her down the stairs.

With the last sound of their steps upon the stairs I closed the door, and in a desperate effort to collect my thoughts paced the room.

I rang the bell and asked about the next train to town. I found I had just time to catch it, and, hastening to the station, I took my seat in an empty carriage, that I might nurse my trouble without interference.

When I reached home I found that nothing of importance had happened; in fact, my practice was suffering from a want of that energy and continuous effort that had gone to the building up of it. About half-past nine that evening I was sitting alone and miserable in the dining room, when that good old soul, my housekeeper, came in with a cup of coffee for me. She had noticed the troubled expression that I had of late constantly worn, and in a vague sort of way connected it with Miss Milne. She felt there was trouble in the wind, and her sorrow at leaving me was forthwith turned into anxiety to serve me.

"You are not looking well to-night, doctor," she said, as she placed my coffee on a little table at my side.

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"She has, Ann," I said, quite glad to find the good old soul had discerned the alteration, and half inclined to tell her a little about the woman, for of all my friends there was not one more trustworthy, and she might possibly be of help to me; but I decided not to do so, not at present, and let her go back to the kitchen. When she had gone I took from my desk paper and envelopes, put in a new nib and adjusted the table and chair in a manner that would have told a stranger even that some letter of importance was about to be written. And so it was, for as an outcome of my self-examination, which I had continued from the moment I had left Chislehurst, I had come to the conclusion that my conduct had been mean, cowardly and despicable. I was heartily ashamed of myself, and determined at all costs to do something by way of reparation.

When I reached home I found that nothing of importance had happened; in fact, my practice was suffering from a want of that energy and continuous effort that had gone to the building up of it. About half-past nine that evening I was sitting alone and miserable in the dining room, when that good old soul, my housekeeper, came in with a cup of coffee for me. She had noticed the troubled expression that I had of late constantly worn, and in a vague sort of way connected it with Miss Milne. She felt there was trouble in the wind, and her sorrow at leaving me was forthwith turned into anxiety to serve me.

"You are not looking well to-night, doctor," she said, as she placed my coffee on a little table at my side.

"No, Ann; no. I am finding that the course of true love does not run smoothly."

"But I thought it never did, sir."

"So proverbial say, but proverbs are, you know, probably untrue, Ann. By the way you have not seen Miss Milne tonight, have you?"

"Yes, sir; I saw her call at Doctor Stokes' opposite, and the baker tells me her little boy is ill."

"Indeed! Seriously ill?"

"I'm afraid so. The baker said that the doctor was going to call again late."

"Dear me, I am sorry."

"I ain't—that is, not for her, doctor; I'm sorry for the child."

"Why, I thought you were fond of her?"

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Premontion Proved True.
A sensational case of coincidence recently occurred at Newport. Mr. Charles Anates, the proprietor of the Potter's Arms hotel, had a presentment that he would die on the anniversary of the death of his wife, who fell and fractured her skull a year ago. His friends tried to laugh him out of it, but he was found dead in bed at 6 o'clock a few mornings ago—exactly a year after his wife's fatal accident.

She Might.
"I wonder if she regrets her marriage?"
"Why should she?"
"Well, you know, they're both literary, and now her husband thinks himself entitled to every bright idea she has."

Failed to Scare Him.
His medical adviser: "You won't last long at this rate, young man. You are burning the candle at both ends."
Gayboy—Very well, doctor. When the candle is burnt out I'll light the gas.

Acting the Part.
"Since he married that rich girl I understand Dabsey leads a dog's life."
"I expected as much."
"Yes; he does nothing but eat, lie around the house and growl."—Philadelphia North American.

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Regret.
Mamma—Why, Willie, you asked for two pieces of candy, and you got them. Aren't you satisfied?
Willie—No'm, I ain't. You gave up so easy I'm just kickin' myself 'cause I didn't ask you for more.

Druidical Ruins in England.
Druidical remains, several "plague stones," erected about 1450 A. D., of old market crosses and 40 stocks of their remains, are among the ancient monuments now to be found in the west riding of Yorkshire, England.

Mothers will find Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup the best remedy to use for their children during the teething period.

Not Able to Share It.
Hewitt—The editor says it will be at least a year before he can publish his poem. That's a long time to wait.
Jewett—Yes; you might die, and then the whole disgrace would fall on your family.—New York Herald.

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