

# BEYOND RECALL

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## CHAPTER XXXI.

### MY WIFE HAD TO BEAT.

My wife had not touched the bread I laid on the table. She had eaten nothing now for nearly four-and-twenty hours. That did not disquiet me. I had known prisoners who tried to starve themselves in order to get on the sick list, but their resolution invariably gave way before the pangs of hunger had injured their health, and I reasoned that a woman could not succeed where a dogged convict failed.

"She is preparing another mortification for herself," thought I. "It will all help to break her spirit."

After bolting the trap and taking away the steps, I went up to the loft and fell asleep in the hay, fairly well contented with the day's events.

"You can come down," I called, when I had set up the steps and unbolted the trap the next morning.

Then I lit the fire, made a cup of coffee, and cooked a rasher of bacon for myself. After that I raked out the fire that Hebe might have to light it again for her own purpose. But I might have saved myself that trouble. She did not come down.

When I had finished my breakfast I called to her. She made no response. I had heard no movement overhead and felt uneasy. Going up the steps I put my shoulders against the trap and opened it easily enough. She had thought to secure it by wedging an old nail in the opening. My wife was seated at the other end of her room in an attitude of dejection. She rose hastily and stood in an attitude that was almost defiant as I thrust my head above the floor.

"Do you want me to bring your food up to you?" I asked savagely.

"Leave me—that is the only favor I have to ask of you," she answered.

"That's easily granted. I shan't have much trouble with you if that's all you want."

I picked up the nail I had forced out, and, looking at it with a laugh, went downstairs. In the bag of tools there was an old bolt. I took it up with the necessary tools and a few screws and fastened it on the upper side of the trap where the other had been.

"There," said I, when the job was finished; "now you can lock yourself in if you like."

I expected fully she would come down in a few minutes; but after waiting an hour, meditating what I might say to humiliate her upon her defeat, I grew weary of inaction. "She will beat me at this game," said I; "she's used to doing nothing; I'm not." So I looked about for occupation. Accustomed to the order and neatness of a prison, the state of the room displeased me.

"Rule Twenty-three," said I to myself; "prisoners shall keep their cells, utensils, clothing, and bedding clean and neatly arranged, and shall sweep the yards, passages, and other parts of the prison as may be directed, unless provision for the performance of these duties is otherwise made." As provision don't look like being executed to-day, I must do it myself.

Pleased with the notion of doing something, I set to work with a will: sweeping, brushing, polishing, and setting everything in order with something of the satisfaction I had found in the old "good-conduct" days when I made my cell a model for the warden to show to visitors inspecting the prison. Nevertheless it irritated me to remember that I had resolved to force my wife to perform the offices I was now doing myself. I consoled myself for this disappointment by reflecting that she could not hold out much longer, and that my triumph would be all the greater when she did yield to my directions. To show her that I was not in the least alarmed by her voluntary starving I made an effort to sing, but breaking down in that by reason of my disused voice being as tuneless as a crow's, I had recourse to whistling. Even this, however, was a failure, and degenerated into the hissing noise with which grooms rub down horses.

By about three o'clock there was nothing more to be done. Everything was in its place as neat and clean as hands could make it.

I had not heard or seen a sign of Hebe all the morning. When I knocked off at midday to fry myself a rasher of bacon, I called her without getting any response. Her prolonged obstinacy exasperated me; her endurance perplexed me. I had never heard of a convict holding out longer than forty hours against the temptation to eat, and I was too dull to perceive that a refined woman has infinitely greater fortitude in supporting physical suffering than a brutalised man.

I went again up into her room. She had not troubled herself to secure the bolt. It was like a stove, for the sun had been shining down upon the slates, and the sky-light was closed. Hebe lay upon the bed; she did not move as I put back the trap noisily. The fear that she was dead dismayed me, and I drew near the bedside with a foreboding inexplicable to me then. Why without a spark of tender feeling did I dread losing her? The only explanation I can find is that in losing her I must lose the sweets of a revenge that had formed my only hope for six years.

She lay with her face to the wall, her head bent back, her cheek pillowed upon a tumbled mass of dark, soft hair that threw up in relief the delicate line of her white throat and chin, her parted lips, and white teeth. Her cheek was flushed, her bosom rose and fell to a regular respiration, and her eyes were closed. Her tranquility was a fresh aggravation when I found I had nothing to fear from it.

"You're a clever woman," I said aloud, as I bent over her. "Kit told me all about you, and I didn't stand in need of this proof. But you're not clever enough to deceive me as you deceived him with your acting. I'm not such a soft muf as he was. Oh, you're not asleep! You'd have bolted the trap before lying down if your motive for it was to get a dose. But it wasn't. You knew I should come up, and you left the trap open that I might come in and see you with your head in a pretty pose, and your hair carefully arranged to show your face at its best. You thought that if you had made a fool of one man you could make a fool of another. But, you see, I'm not a greenhorn of twenty, and your beauty makes no more impression on me than if they were all dead. I'm not to be led by

the nose. A fine flat Kit must have been not to see through you. Perhaps he'd believe in you now—think it was innocent simplicity that made you prefer to lie all day in an oven like this when you were free to get fresh air. I know your motive. You're trying to make yourself ill. You expect to frighten me into fetching a doctor, through whom you could communicate with that old rascal the major and get a release. But I'm not to be frightened. You're not ill, and I'll take care you shan't make yourself ill!"

With that I pushed up the skylight and secured it, to let a current of air pass through.

"You'll know how to shut it at night when you feel chilly and the trap's bolted," I said, going back to the bedside.

Her eyes were still closed, her features unmoved. I had made noise enough to awake any ordinary sleeper; her immobility changed suspicion to conviction. She was shamming.

"You have made up your mind to get away from me where Kit may find you," said I, speaking still louder. "I've made up my mind you shall stay here till you find him. We shall see who wins."

The foreboding that I must lose in a struggle with her indomitable spirit enraged me. Her unmoved face seemed to mock me with its placid calm. I doubted the advantage to myself of the passive policy we both adopted. Hers was moral strength; mine purely physical. I was half minded to shake her out of her pretended sleep, and force her to go down below. But that in itself was a tacit admission of defeat in one direction that I could not reconcile myself to. And, after all, if her will were more inflexible than mine, how could I force her further than that? She might compel me to restore her to her friends, or seek medical help, which would result in the same thing, by persisting in starving herself into a dangerous condition, and that within a few days.

As I turned away from her side in savage impatience, I caught sight of an empty glass upon the table; beside it stood the water pitcher; that was nearly empty. She had not been able to overcome the cravings of thirst. I saw at once the power this discovery gave me.

"We shall see who wins," I repeated, with savage exultation. I took the pitcher away with me, dropping the trap with a bang that shook the floor, and bolting it underneath.

I saddled the pony as if my life depended on expedition, and rode over the moor to a small farm on the outskirts of Newton. A man stood in the rick-yard. He came slowly towards me when I hailed him.

"Have you a cow to sell?" I asked.

He shook his head slowly. That did not discourage me. A careful dealer is never in a hurry to sell.

"There are cows in the meadow over there; whom do they belong to?"

"Me."

"Well, can't you let me have one; I don't mind what I pay?"

"What are you? You ain't a farmer, I know, and you don't look like a butcher."

"I'm a gentleman's servant," said I, an assertion which my shaven face might, I thought, bear out. "The young missus is down here for her lungs, and the doctor's ordered her to have pure milk. The governor seems to think she's going to be cured the moment she gets it. That's why he's sent me off with orders to be back again in a couple of hours. If you can't let me have one I won't waste your time or my own, master." I gave my pony a nudge with my heel.

"Hold hard. If it's to oblige some of the gentry at Newton as I hear are in a bad way," he said (I nodded acquiescence) "why I daresay I could part with one, but they are that good it grieves me sore to let ere a one go, it do."

He turned down towards the meadow, with another shake of the head, and I followed. The cattle came towards him when he called.

"There they are, and as its getting on towards milking time you can see for yourself that 'chose as you may, you can't go astray,' as the saying is."

I chose one which, of course, happened to be the very "flower of the flock," and the most hard to part with; but eventually, a price being named, I counted out the money, and going off with my purchase, left the farmer better pleased than I found him.

The sun was setting when I reached the cottage after the tedious return journey. I milked the cow, and filling the pitcher, carried it up to my wife's room. She was seated beside the bed, but her head rested on the pillow. She rose as I came up.

"There's something to drink," said I, putting the pitcher on the table.

She stepped forward eagerly as I turned away. When I looked back from the steps she was taking the half-emptied glass from her lips.

The light was beyond her; she stood out in silhouette, with the glass in her hand, motionless and silent. It seemed to me she had just discovered that what she had drunk so eagerly was not water, and that she was doubtful whether I had not substituted poison.

I was content to leave her in that terrible uncertainty for the night.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### I BETRAY MYSELF.

To house the cow I had to turn the pony loose in the walled enclosure intended for a garden. This reminded me that I must enlarge the stable to shelter both animals when the rough weather set in. So when I had finished my supper, cleared away the things, and lit the lamp, I turned back the table cover to make a drawing of the alteration to be made. That was an affair of five minutes, but long after it was done I still hung over the table, idly tracing the outline of a stain on the white wood.

My thoughts ran continually on the woman upstairs. Her dark figure standing out against the light as I had seen her last haunted me. What was she doing up there in the dark? What visions did she see in the darkness? What voices came to her from the silence? Was she trembling with fear of the husband who should call her to account—weeping for the children she should never take into her arms again? In some form she must be suffering. For the first time that reflection failed to give me delight.

Presently I found a resemblance to her face in the outline of the stain I had been drawing. The pencil mark was indistinct upon the dark polish. Beside me lay the pen-knife with which I had sharpened the pencil. I took it up, and almost as idly as I had begun I continued the sketch. It was apple wood varnished to look like mahogany. The lines cut with the knife showed up clearly, and the likeness became more evident. Gradually my interest grew in the work, developing at length into an artistic ardor that impelled me further and further. I cut deep into the wood, bringing the outline into relief; got light and shadow into the face, and gave softness to the hair by a trick that I once thought was my own. I tried to reproduce the profile as I had seen it in the afternoon; the eyes closed, the lips parted, the head thrown back, giving an unbroken line from the chin to the spring of the throat. I wished it to be faithful to her beauty that in the end I might have the savage gratification of burning it out with a hot iron. "If I rub paraffin into the wood and set light to it," thought I, "I shall see the beauty eaten away as if vitriol had been thrown into her living face."

But as I worked on, this malignant feeling gave place to one of aching sorrow as I recalled to mind the old days when I first attempted to carve a likeness of the beloved face; how I dreamed night after night of the work I had laid aside with regret when the light failed; with what feverish eagerness I returned to it when the slow sun rose; with what reverent love I strove to give the touch that should express the ineffable sweetness and purity I found in her features!

When I got to that stage when an artist doubts whether he is doing good work or bad, I left off. My hand was wet and trembling. It was so long since I had used it to such work, and I had sat over the thing too long. Sick and giddy I went to the open door for air.

"What shall I do with it?" I asked myself, going back to the table. I felt a certain affection for the work in itself; it was good. I no longer thought of defacing it; that was a brutality against which the awakened sensibility of an artist revolted. It was a bit of wood carving—nothing more. There was no sentiment in it as it was; there might be if I disfigured it. I swept the chips off and put them in the stove; then I turned back the cover as I had found it.

On examining the stable in the morning, I found that I could make room for the cow by removing the partition at the end and taking in a piece of the shed beyond. The job was three parts done, and I was nailing up the crossbars in their new position, when the light from the door being blocked out, I turned and saw Hebe standing there.

"Oh, you've come down at last," said I, adding after I had driven home a nail, "going to try another game to-day?"

"I want to speak to you," she said, quietly, ignoring my sneer.

"You can come in. You are only stopping out the light there."

She came in after a moment's conflict with her pride, and stood resting her hand on the corn bin.

"Well, what is it?" I asked, picking up a board and putting it in its place.

"I will wait till you can give me your attention."

"I can listen to you without wasting time. You can talk till I begin hammering and go on again when I stop. If I don't stop, you may take it as a sign that I don't want to hear any more."

She did not accept this invitation at once. I nailed the plank top and bottom without getting a word. Suddenly as I stuck some nails I had selected for the next plank in my mouth, a suspicion seemed to strike her.

"I thought you were a watchmaker," she said.

"So I was, but I learnt carpentry at Dartmoor. Preferred going into a workshop to doing the work of a horse in the quarries; that's where I met Kit."

"You can't carve wood."

"With a saw, I can," said I, after nailing the plank which gave me time to think of the evasion.

But not as my husband did.

I shook my head as I dragged out a fresh plank and set it up. There was another interval of silence. When I turned to select more nails I said—

"Is that all you've got to say?"

She raised her head quickly, as if to change the current of her thoughts. I drove in three nails, with a pretence of whistling.

"When did you last see my husband?" she asked.

"I was drafted to Portland May twelve-month, and I saw Kit the day before I went."

"When did you first come to know him?"

"In '82, when I was put in the carpenters' workshop."

"When you last saw him was he thinking of escape?"

"Why, he was always thinking of it; always trying some game to escape, being caught, and put in punishment for it. Most all the old hands got some mad notion; that was his."

"You knew him six years; did he alter much in that time?"

"Well, that is a silly question! Do you think there'd be a trace of goodness left in you after being treated all that time like a beast?"

"I'm only a woman; he is a man!"

"Don't see much choice betwixt the two. Anyway, all the goodness and manhood too was knocked out of Kit."

There was a contemptuous smile on her face as she met my eyes and shook her head.

"You're like that fellow who went to sleep over so many years and couldn't understand the change that had taken place when he woke," said I. "But you'll have to understand it. You won't find Kit pretty nor pleasant, nor pliable neither; make up your mind to that. He ain't what he was when I first knew him."

"No, no," she said, mournfully. Then in an instant, plucking up spirit, she added—

"But happily he is not what he was when you last knew him."

I did not understand her, and being no nearer a conclusion after nailing a plank top and bottom, I changed the subject.

"Was the cow in the garden when you came through?"

"Yes. You got that for me."

I grunted, and hammered afresh: "It was good of you to think of that," she said when I stopped. "I could not eat; I must have died. It was good of you," she repeated, as if to convince herself that I was not altogether a villain.

"I promised Kit I'd look after you, didn't I? Besides I bought it with your own money."

"Pulling out a new plank, I lost her response."

"How long have you been up?"

"A long while."

"What have you been at?"

"I have been down to the stream for water. You are not afraid of my running away now?"

"I said I'd look after you, but I didn't promise to watch you night and day. You know pretty well what the consequences would be if you tried to cross the moor. You can try if you like, but—"

"I don't intend to try. I believe you were right in your conclusions, though you put them in such a form that I could not at first reconcile myself to accept them. But I have since thought a great deal about my position and what course I ought to take, and now I see that there is no sacrifice of self-respect in accepting even your guidance when it is reasonable."

"Well, you haven't mispent your time, anyhow."

Her chin was on her breast, and she seemed absorbed in meditation when I looked at her again.

"Have you had a look round the place?" I asked.

"I have been looking everywhere," she answered, quietly.

"What for?"

"My husband."

The reply startled me. I waited, my finger on the nail, the hammer half raised, for an explanation. Her attitude was unchanged.

"I wanted to make sure whether he had been here or not," she said.

"I thought you had settled that by the pictures on the wall."

"I believed they were his at first, but not when I have examined the wall."

"Why?"

"Because there is no sign in them that he had thought of me."

"That's a good 'un," said I, with a hoarse laugh. "Did you expect to find a flattering portrait?"

"No, I looked for what you led me to expect. You told me of the horrible subjects he chose in prison. I expected to see myself being strangled by him—anything," she spoke with vehemence and broke off abruptly, covering her face with her hands.

"You expected to see your destiny revealed as a picture of merit rewarded, eh?" I muttered, driving in the nail with a single blow. I turned to look at her. Her fingers still trembled before her eyes.

"It didn't strike you that he might choose to forget you and think of a more pleasant subject?"

"Oh, he could not forget me. No man could forget—" she paused.

"Such injuries as he owes to you," I suggested.

"You have proved that he did not forget me. Oh, I know what must have been in his mind when he tried again and again to escape. I could not hope that he had forgiven me, that he could pity me, that his love could outlive all, and I wronged him in that."

"I doubt it."

"I am sure!" she said, firmly, dropping her hand and raising her head proudly.

"Wait till you see him."

"I will wait cheerfully."

"Ah, you may have to wait long enough; for, according to your own showing, there's no proof that he's out of prison yet."

"But there is proof. I know he has escaped; that is what I came to tell you."

I looked at her in perplexity.

"Come with me and I will show you what I have found," she said, going towards the door.

I threw down the hammer and followed her, not yet perceiving what had happened.

She crossed the enclosure and entered the house.

"There!" she exclaimed, triumphantly, pointing to the table.

The cover was thrown back revealing the work I had done over night and forgotten in the occupation of the last three hours.

"It is my face," she said, as I went round and looked at it with feigned curiosity. "Not as you see it now, but as he saw it years and years ago."

An artist often fails to see the fault that is obvious to the first critic; and now I saw what it was in my work that had displeased me when I glanced at it before sitting down to breakfast. Unconsciously I had reproduced in the character of the face the work I had done in my workshop in the old days; guided, may be, by the subtle influence of the memories that recurred to me in doing it.

"No hand but his could have done that," she continued, her voice trembling with excitement. "And I have reason to think of him as he was—a man, generous and tender, since that shows that he still thinks of me as I was to him in those days."

I could have undecided her on this point but not without betraying myself.

"Well it looks as if you were right in one thing, anyway," said I; "Kit's out."

A smile crept over her face, making it young again.

"And maybe he's gone soft, that's true," I continued. "Perhaps he fell sick."

The smile passed in an instant from her lips.

"I wonder if sickness could make you generous," she said, bending her brows.

"I wonder," she added, with growing disdain and spirit, "I wonder if anything on earth could make you like my husband."

"Not if he's the fool you take him for," I answered.

### (TO BE CONTINUED.)

#### Ever Rejoicing.

There's never a rose in all the world But makes some green spray sweeter; There's never a wind in all the sky But makes some bird wing fletcher; There's never a star but brings to heaven Some silver radiance tender, And never a rosy cloud but helps To crown the sunset splendor; No robin but may swell some heart, His dawnlight gladness voicing, God gives us all some small, sweet way To set the world rejoicing.

#### He Took the Hint.

They were discussing the labor question. "I believe in shorter hours," said Mr. Linger.

"So do I," replied Miss Keedick, earnestly. "I think an hour and a half is plenty long enough for an evening call."

And the young man had been there three hours.

## GOULD CHANGED HIS MIND.

### On Second Thought He Didn't Want to Ride Fast on a Texas Road.

Jay Gould once made a trip to Mexico to inspect the International and Great Northern Railway. It was in the autumn of 1878 and, as usual, the millionaire was in a hurry. Meeting the gentleman who had the sale of the road in hand, he said:

"I'm a busy man, and I want to be back in New York next week. Rush me through."

A special train was made up and put in charge of Jake Lauer, one of the pioneers in Mexican engineering.

"Rush him" was the order, and Mr. Lauer did some hard thinking. He knew that the roadbed was in a terrible condition, and that to run over twenty miles was taking desperate chances. Lauer had lots of nerve, but he felt the responsibility imposed on him by the officials in placing Gould in his hands. He concluded finally to use his own judgement, take no chances, and stick closely to the schedule time.

Between Marshall and Galveston the schedule called for 325 miles to be made between dark and daylight. Jay Gould did not retire early, and on that night seemed particularly wide awake. He set reading a newspaper by a dim light, and every once in a while glanced out of the window impatiently. It was evident that the great man was becoming angry. Finally the storm burst. Turning to one of the officials accompanying him, he remarked testily:

"If this were a funeral train it couldn't possibly travel in a more decorous manner. Steam up and let us go along."

The gentleman spoken to was aware that the night ride had been specially arranged in order that the condition of the roadbed could be ascertained from Gould, but thus forced he had nothing to do but to order an increase of speed. The order was given, but the train moved along at the same speed.

"Send the engineer to me," said Gould. "I'll talk to him."

At the next stopping place Lauer was summoned and given to understand that he was not capable of driving a car horse, much less running an engine.

"Get along! Push her! Let's see what the machine can do," urged Gould.

Lauer demurred and the railroad magnate concluded that he was afraid. "He's a coward," he finally said; "put another man in charge."

Lauer overheard the remark and flushed up. "All right," he said; "we'll open her up."

In a few moments the little special was speeding through the night at the rate of forty-five miles an hour. It was a ride to be remembered. The car rocked from side to side, cracking in every joint, and now and then lifting as if about to leave the track. Everybody clung to some support, those who knew the condition of the roadbed expecting to be hurled into eternity every minute.

Lauer sat at the throttle, watching the rails as they gleamed like silver threads. He was as pale as those in the train behind, but, as he remarked in telling the story the other day: "I'd have gone up with pleasure before I would have given that little cuss the chance to say I was a squealer."

Once he looked back at the swaying train and said: "He won't stand it long."

The engineer was right. At a particularly bad place the bell-cord was jerked and the train brought to a standstill. Jay Gould was picked from under a seat, where he had been thrown, and angrily faced the engineer, who had come back to the car.

"What, in the name of all that is good and holy, do you mean?" he demanded. "Do you want to kill us all?"

"You said you wanted me to pull her open," replied Lauer, quietly.

Gould glared at the man for a moment and his manner changed.

"My man," he said, "you go back there and use your own judgment the rest of the trip. I know how to manipulate a railroad, but I guess you know more than I do about running an engine." Then he was assisted to his berth.

#### Black Something of Something.

The man was in a brown study when he went into the drug store.

"What can we do for you?" inquired the clerk.

"I want black something of something," he said. "Have you got any?"

"Probably we have," replied the clerk, "but you'll have to be more definite to get it."

The customer thought for a moment.

"Got any black sheepskin of something?" he asked.

"No, we don't keep sheep skins. We have chamois skins, though."

"That isn't it, I know," said the customer. "Got any other kind of skins?"

"No."

"Skins, skins, skins," repeated the man, struggling with his slippery memory. "Calf-skin seems to be something like it. Got any black calf skins of anything?"

"No, not a one," and the clerk laughed. The customer grew red in the face.

"By jove," he said, "if it isn't a skin, what in thunder is it?"

"Possibly it is a hide?" suggested the clerk kindly.

"That's it! That's it!" exclaimed the man.

"Have you got any black hides of something or anything?"