A WOMAN'S LOVE

OR, A BROTHER'S PROMISE

CHAPTER XIII.

With what berserk vehemence Hector sprang into the welter of carnage, how he slaked his thirsty sword (now shortened, now darting like a cobra), how many went down before his onset—the setting forth here of these things would serve no essential purpose. It is enough to say that his soul was glad within him when he looked and saw the last of the Hispaniolans slink behind the city walls, leaving that on the road they cared not to think on. The forlorn hope of Palmetto had trodden the wine-press: the vintage of victory was theirs: yet, truly, a price had been paid.

The price was the heavier when Hector stumbled, an aimless bullet kindling hell in his right shoulder. As he fell he laughed, half in ironical amusement that he was struck so late in the day, when the fight was won, half in happy wonder at his so good fortune. Good fortune he counted it to shed blood for Maddalena's sake, and best of all fortunes to die for her. Nay, since there could be no gleam of hope that he might ever have the hand who already held the heart—what fortune was there to seek but this last best of death, or if not seek at least take with welcome of open arms and laughter at the core? But yet—the work to be done.

Even as he laughed his eyes closed to the whirl about him, and when he awoke it was to feel a lean Mephistopheles of a surgeon stirring up the furnace in his wound with a porcelain-tipped probe. The torture of digging out the bit of lead he bore with the smile that lighted his lips when he fell, and grimly silent he took the surgeon's compliments on his fortitude.

His first spoken word was Alasdair the faithful, who in obedience to the word gathered in the generals to council. They bustled to the call with effervescence of sympathy, but Hector's left hand waved thanks and a desire for peace, and they stilled to hear.

"Don Miguel."

The old man came to the front.

"Senor Grant!"

"Shall we resume our—conversation?"

"As you please, senor."

"Then we shall. This morning, the hour of battle broke in on our talk, just as I had demanded from you a retractation of certain light remarks you had made about her Majesty Queen Maddalena. I ask you again to withdraw those remarks."

Don Miguel looked stubborn.

"Otherwise, as I said before, I must give you the lie. The matter is urgent. I am, as you see, incapacitated from performing active duty, and according to usage I must delegate my powers to the senior general, but I cannot, I must not. I shall not, hand over my command to one who lacks loyalty towards her Majesty, in outward bearing or speech, in thought or spirit."

"Surely, Don Miguel's vigor in the fight of to-day——" began Tornielli.

"Is guarantee of his loyalty? It was an expression, not a guarantee. I must have a complete withdrawal of all that Don Miguel uttered in my hearing this morning. Come sir, your answer."

"I withdraw—as regards yourself, Senor Grant."

"I did not ask for that: I do not ask for it. My demand concerns——"

"I do not withdraw, and I shall not withdraw one word of what I said concerning her Majesty. I have the use of my eyes, sir."

"Then, gentlemen," said Hector, white to the lips, "I call you to witness that I give Don Miguel the lie. As soon as I am recovered from my wound I shall place myself at his disposal. If he insists on immediate reparation, I shall strive to meet him. In the meantime I resign command in favor of General Ramiros. Your discretion will tell you. Senor Ramiros, how to deal with Don Miguel. Your servant, Generalissimo," and with his left hand Hector saluted as he lay.

"I demand an audience of her Majesty," cried Don Miguel. "I shall not submit to be superseded in this high-handed fashion. I shall——"

A look from Hector stiffened the new generalissimo. He advanced towards Don Miguel.

"Consider yourself under artest, General. Your sword, sir. And now be good enough to retire to your tent, and remain there until I shall acquaint you with the course of action to be pursued."

They made a lane for him.

At the tent door he faced Don Augustin entering.

"Well met, Don Miguel. Her Majesty has heard of your enthusiasm to-day. Alas! that it was not more productive of success. But her Majesty honors the will as much as the deed, and she bade me convey her thanks to you and press your hand for her."

From the very summit of his injured dignity Don Miguel looked down on the dwarfed chamberlain.

"Your pardon, Don Augustin. I may not accept her Majesty's thanks yet. When I am released from arrest——"

"Arrest!"

"I shall be honored to receive them. My generalissimo will explain. Adios!"

The amazed Bravo wheeled on the generals as Don Miguel swung haughtily to his quarters.

"Arest!" he cried.

"Arrest," reiterated Ramiros. "Senor Grant, perhaps you will make matters clear to Don Augustin."

"A word does it," said Hector calmly. "In the hearing of these gentlemen and myself, Don Miguel uttered remarks reflecting on the honor of her Majesty. I demanded a withdrawal. He refused to budge. Instead, therefore, of handing over my duties to Don Miguel, I resigned them in favor of General Ramiros. General Ramiros has placed him under arrest. That is all."

"That is all!" flamed Don Augustin, "that is all! What did he say? Her Majesty's honor! What did he say?"

"Gentlemen," broke in Ramiros, "it is better that Don Augustin should hear the story from Senor Grant. Our presence may be a bar to freedom of speech. We will withdraw, Come."

"You will stay," shouted Bravo.

"As generalissimo," said Ramiros quietly, "I take orders from her Majesty, and from her Majesty only. Come, gentlemen."

Hector and Bravo were alone, not unnatural tumult storming in the breast of each.

To Hector had come the most difficult moment of his life—far more trying than the burning second when the bonds of restraint fell from him like smouldering flax, and Maddalena was at his heart ere he knew—for he felt that he must confess to this man the full tale of the past twenty-four hours, and in some way offer justification or palliation. Yet why either justification or palliation? he thought. Why does a man think it necessary to seek excuses for loving a woman, since the facts that she is she and he is he are inevitable, insurmountable, and loving is the most constantly natural of all phenomena? The sun may sink for ever, the moon pale to wan death, the stars become black pebbles, the tides dry up and the wind call no more, man and woman grow blind, deaf, dumb stumblers in the void dark, yet in the palpable night a hand shall grope and find its mate, and Love triumph by sheer persistence of vitality against the thousand Torquemadas of Fate. So thought Hector, and the thought braced him to look at Bravo with honest eyes—the whole story of his love showing in them. Still, somewhere at the back of his brain, lurked the impression that Bravo might hold him culpable, as one might hold a thief whose rough fingers had the intent to touch a treasure, even if they had not actually closed on it.

To Bravo the moment was all pain. He loved Maddalena as the apple of his eye. He loved Hector just ae much. The difference in affection lay not in degree, but in kind. Maddalena was the daughter and the Queen; Hector the son. His heart spoke for them, his memory, his own empty life— and yet, there was Palmetto and the ultimate happiness of thousands, the stilling of rivalries and the gathering into the broad bosom of freedom a whole weary people. He gazed long after the retreating generals, his thoughts busy as bees, hovering desirous about the sweet blossoms of romance, but ever and again returning to the white honeyless flowerage of duty' and so, resolute with the tenderness of full knowledge, he came to where Hector lay and took him by the free hand.

"Hector," he said, using the name for the first time, "I know all—the Queen has told me all."

"All?"

"Everything."

"My love?"

"Yes."

"Her love?"

"Yes."

"And last night?"

"I said 'everything."

"And you—you——"

"Well, what of me?"

"You condemn us—you grudge us our hour—knowing how impossible it all is?"

"Neither condemn nor grudge. Take your hour, both of you. You will find it all too short: yet in the years to come you will have something to remember, something to make the dull days easier."

"Are you not to blame me?"

"Why? You cannot help loving her. She is the Queen."

"Yes, yes."

"She loves you. Again I say, she is the Queen."

There was silence for a few moments.

"She told you?"

"'My heart is running over,' said she. 'I must speak, I must tell my best friend the new secret of my life. Hector,' she said, 'Hector'—and the next instant she was sobbing on my old shoulder. I more than half feared this: I hoped against it, I prayed against it. Long ago, in London—that very first night when you came to the palace in Bloomsbury—I feared it. You were young, handsome, of a gallant nature—the kind of man that takes a young maiden's heart ere it knows. She knew nothing of men: she had seen only old fellows like myself whom I had engaged to be her tutors. Yes, I made some allowance for the contingency. 'When the occasion arises, said I, 'I shall deal with it: the man must be removed—he shall be removed.' Then you came. Early and early I thought I saw this foreshadowed. 'We will wait,' said I, 'he is the man for the work: when it is done he shall go.' And I would have kept to my intent, but I have grown to know you—nay, more, my son, I have come to love you!"

"Don Augustin!"

"I know that you are big enough of soul to go of yourself when the work is done. You will return to your world in the whirl of London: you will not forget—no, no: you are strong enough to live on the memory of your great hour, when you loved and were loved by a queen. From your distance you will look across to Palmetto and see her live for her people, a finer queen because she drank the cup with you: a finer queen, a stronger woman, because whatever she has given you you have returned threefold.

"If it were possible! These old eyes would desire to see nothing happier—if only it were possible; but it is not, it is not——"

He took Hector's free hand and pressed it with a sympathy and tenderness one did not look for from the grizzled chamberlain.

"You wonder, perhaps, how it is that I am not full of blame for you, loud with upbraidings, hot with anger. Listen—in a word I tell you the secret of my life, the reason why I am lonely in my old age, wifeless and childless. Maddalena is all the world to you: her mother, a fairer Maddlena, was all the world to me—her memory keeps me living now for the daughter. How can I reproach, when I myself dared to lift my eyes so high?"

The old man rose and paced the tent for a few moments in almost vain attempt to master the emotion aroused by the unbosoming of a secret five-and-twenty years old. But after a little he grew calm, helped more than he knew by the silence which Hector preserved as more fitting than any speech.

"Now," he said, "you must make me a promise."

"I know what you would ask," said Hector.

"Well?"

"That as soon as this affair is finished, I shall depart?"

"Is it too heavy a demand?"

"It is my own proposal."

"Then it is settledi?"

"Oh! surely—surely."

"I expected no other answer."

"There could be no other"

"Ah! Hector, my son, how my heart bleeds for her—far more than for you, for you will go back to your work with a rich remembrance while she must sacrifice herself for her country—must marry——"

"Let us not talk of the future, Don Augustin," said Hector; the vision was too painful not to be thrust aside. "Let us rather speak of the present, where there is so much to do. And first, about Don Miguel. That matter must be settled speedily."

"It must be settled this night."

"But surely we must take time to consult her Majesty."

"Her Majesty must not know of it."

"God knows I would spare her this but it concerns her so closely."

"No, no," said Don Augustin, with some slight return of his old imperiousness. "Tell me all the circumstances, and let me judge first."

The telling did not take long.

"And now," said Bravo, "go back and let me have a full account of your sojourn at Friganeta. It may supply the spring that moves Don Miguel."

Hector had no great liking for the task, but he thought it best to give the whole story of Asunta's desperate proffer of her love, because he felt that the usually easy-going Don Miguel was but the merest puppet in his daughter's revengeful hands.

"Ah!" cried Bravo, when the truth flashed on him, "she is the viper we have nursed in our bosoms. Yes, the Queen must know: we men are powerless to deal with a woman: only a good woman can oppose and overcome this devil. I must back to Caldera at once."

But Don Augustin was saved his journey. There was some clamor outside the tent and the voice of a woman was heard, and immediately thereafter entered Alasdair to announce that Dona Asunta demanded audience of Hector.

Hector looked to Don Augustin in some dismay, only to see deep trouble in the old man's eyes. Each waited for each to speak: the silence was eloquent of perturbation. Ere they had found words, or even thoughts to express in words, Asunta forced her way past Alasdair, and although somewhat disconcerted at the presence of Bravo, began to pour out invective and wild imprecation.

"Ah! you shall pay dearly for this, Senor Don Generalissimo Grant from Nowhere! Not content with insulting the daughter, you insult the father—you, scum of an adventurer! You——"

"Dona Asunta!" thundered Bravo, "pray remember who you are! Do not make me forget that you are a woman. Do not force me to have you removed! Do not make me lower the ideal I have formed of Palmetto womanhood."

"What care I for your ideals, blind dotard! If you cannot see the peril that threatens Palmetto, and take steps to avert it, I can—and I will—even though I go to prison with my father at the order of this—canaille!" pointing to Hector where he lay.

Even if her words did not proclaim her access of madness, her looks left no room for doubt. Her eyes glared with fury, now flaming into fire, and anon steeling into a cold vindictiveness that was still more appalling. Her features were distorted with bitterness, and the muscles of her face and neck and temples billowed with the uncurbed tides of passion. She moved within a small space, taking but a step this way, a step that, and never remaining still for a single second: a wild beast caged, seeking for a weak bar to be out at her deadly work. Hector and Bravo, in spite of their natural disquiet, were more than half fascinated by her pythoness fury; but Alasdair, whom none regarded, stood alert by the door, ready to spring upon her should her madness break the last barrier of restraint.

"It is unlike a lady of Palmetto to hold such language," said Don Augustin, "and it ill becomes the dignity of an Ortona to speak thus of a wounded man to his face."

"Lady!" she sneered. "I am no lady. I have shed all that tinsel. I am a woman, and I demand justice—but where to look for it? To whom shall I appeal? To the Queen his mistress?"

"Madame!"

"Shall I repeat it? shall I repeat it?"

"This is treason the cruellest!" cried Bravo.

"O! I have the courage to say it again! My father had the courage to say it, and you send him to prison. I am ready to go there, too. Why don't you send for your gaolers? Have you no fetters for me?" Her voice rose into a scream.

"Dona Asunta!" pleaded Don Augustin, taking another course, "Dona Asunta, would you have the whole camp hear you?"

"And why not? Let everybody know—let all Palmetto know—that one of Palmetto's daughters was insulted by this smooth villain, who casts her off when he finds higher prey willing and ready to drop into his mouth. Let all Palmetto know it—then I may get justice."

"Justice, Dona Asunta!"

At the sweet sound of that low voice a thrill of surprised horror ran through Hector and Bravo, for it was the Queen who spoke; Asunta herself was struck out of madness for a moment. Bravo turned to the voice with unutterable sorrow in his eyes—how he would have given all his remaining days to have spared her the scene that was now inevitable. And Hector—torn between the healing happiness of the sight of her, of the sound of her voice, and terror that she should be drawn into this sorbid brawl—Hector for a moment covered his eyes with his hand.

"I waited for you, Don Augustin," said Maddalena aside in a low tone, "until I could endure it no longer. I sent you to bring me news of—of my wounded general. I regret that I troubled you with my orders: I shall not err again, sir."

"O! madame, you are unjust!"

But she had turned from him.

"You spoke of justice, Dona Asunta. I am here."

But the flame had gone down to a sullen smolder. She held her peace.

"Is it a wrong your Queen cannot set right?"

Again no answer.

"Come, Dona Asunta, what is the injustice? Who has wronged you?"

The direct question was oil to the fire. Like a lightning flash, the answer leaped hot with hate and the hiss of malevolence.

"You."

"I? I, the Queen, wrong you!"

"You, not the Queen—you, his lover!"

(To be continued.)

JAPANESE COURAGE.

The little men of Japan who have dared to face the Russian bear can give the world many thrilling stories of courage, and many of clever stratagem as well. One of the powerful nobles of the olden time was forced to flee from his enemy in haste. He hid in a barrel and was borne away by servants, who, meeting the enemy, declared that the barrel contained food. "If there is anything living in it there will be blood on my sword," said the nobleman's enemy, and thrust his weapon into the barrel. It went through the hidden man's legs and made a terrible wound. But he, with quick thought, wiped the blade on the hem of his garment as it was drawn out, so that it went out clean and he was not discovered.

MIKE'S DISCOURAGING QUEST.

Mike is a married man—a very much married man. He has married no fewer than four times, and all his wives are still to the fore.

According to Michael's own account at the Dublin assizes, where he was tried for bigamy and found guilty, his experiences have not been altogether satisfactory. The judge, in passing sentence, expressed his wonder that the prisoner could be such a hardened villain as to delude so many women.

"Yer honor," said Mike, apologetically, "I was only thryin' to get a good one, an' it's not aisy!"

A man doesn't sing into a phonograph for the purpose of trying to break the record.

UNDERGROUND LONDON.

How Five Hundred Miles of Sewers Are Managed.

The average Londoner is possibly unaware that nearly 500 miles of sewers are situated beneath his feet and this includes only the large sewers, several of them so large that a number of boats could float down them abreast, says Tit-Bits. And some idea of the enormous cost of draining London may be gathered from the fact that the drainage works and machinery alone cost $40,000,000 sterling.

The three main sewers in the Metropolis run from Fleet Street to Hampstead, from Blackfriars to Abbey Mills, and from Harrow to Old Ford. Connected with these are a multitude of smaller sewers measuring about 12 feet, in diameter, which make London one of the best-drained cities in the world.

A thousand men are employed all the year round, not even excepting Sundays, in keeping London properly drained, and the stupendous total of 1,000,000,000 tons of sewage is chemically treated every twelve months and taken away in sludge vessels to the North Sea. It might be supposed that the occupation is an unhealthy one for the men engaged, but this is not so, as the sewage is treated with protophosphate or iron and lime water, which clarifies it as it passes to the great reservoirs ready to be taken away.

During a wet summer the pumping machinery which draws away the rain water might be expected to be very heavily taxed, and the sewers also; but beside there being a number of storm channels which are only utilized when the volume of water in the main sewers is abnormal, the pumping machinery at Abbey Mills alone is capable of lifting 135,000,000 gallons of water to a height of 40 feet every day, which in other words, implies that London could never be destroyed by floods.

At Barking, where the sludge is dealt with, there are fourteen sewers measuring 30 feet across; that is to say, any one of them would be wide enough for a small tug-boat to pass down. Here the sludge, after being chemically treated, has to go through enormous iron cages, resembling gigantic colanders, which keep back solid objects, such as pieces of wood, old boots, and so forth, whilst not infrequently valuable articles of jewellery are found wedged between the bars of a cage.

The vessels used to convey the sludge to the North Sea are not by any means the hulks one might expect to find engaged in the work They are luxuriously fitted with cosy apartments for the men and lighted throughout by electricity. Each barge carries 1,000 tons of sludge, and when fifty miles from the coast the cargo is distributed over an area of several miles.

Connected with the sewer under Ludgate Hill is the old Roman subterranean bath, which is the oldest structure in London, and must have been in existence long before a single brick of the present City was laid. At one time it was approached by a subway, but this has long since disappeared, though the bath, which measures some 14 feet to 16 feet across still remains.

THE SAME COLOR.

Scene—A railway carriage. Englishman (addressing Yankee in opposite corner)—"Excuse me, this is not a smoking carriage."

No reply.

Five minutes later (more brusquely)—"I must really trouble you to put out that cigar."

Still no reply.

One minute later. "Hang it, sir, if you don't put that cigar out I'll have you removed."

Still superb indifference on part of Yankee. Train stops. Englishman calls guard and requests removal of Yankee. The latter breaks in, cooly:

"Guard, examine that man's ticket—it's third-class."

Guard does so, finds the statement correct, and marches the Englishman out, to the great astonishment of the other occupants of the carriage.

After the train had again started another occupant, unable to restrain his curiosity, asks: "How did you know what ticket he had?"

Yankee (with a yawn)—"Saw it sticking out of his waistcoat pocket Same color as my own, I guess!"

INGENIOUS SPIDERS.

The Royal Society in London was recently entertained with an account by Mr. R. I. Pocock, of a spider of the Desidae family, living in Australia, which makes its habitation along the seashore, in the crevices of the rocks, between high and low-water marks. This location is selected, no doubt, because it abounds with the food that these spiders prefer. But when the tide is in their homes are covered with water. Instead of deserting them, however, the spiders solve the difficulty by means of closely woven sheets of silk, which they stretch over the entrances, and within which they imprison sufficient air to keep them alive during the time that they remain submerged.

"Your worship," said a solicitor to the Bench, "everybody knows that I am incapable of lending myself to a mean cause." "True, your worship," chimed in his legal opponent, "my learned friend never lends himself to a mean cause; he always gets cash down!"