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The Battle for the Cedars.

BY PRESLEY W. MORRIS.

CONTINUED.

THE MAN at the door wore a cloak, a fold of which was turned up about his neck, while his hat was turned down over his eyes. As it was, his face was almost entirely concealed.

Entering the library, he walked deliberately to the fire, and stood quietly before it. Evidently the cold mist falling out-of-doors had dampened and chilled him, and the bright blaze of the fire caused the steam to rise from his clothing.

"Dismiss your servant," he said, in a deep, hoarse tone; "I have business of importance with you."

The master of The Cedars hesitated for a moment, and then signed for Sant to depart. In his heart he was trembling. In spite of the resolution he had made to give way to his fears no more, the first sight of this man caused a sensation of terror in his bosom.

"Curse it! can I not behold a tall, athletic figure any more without this absurd fright?"

He rose to his feet, and stood before the man by the fire, who had his back to the blaze.

"What is your business with me?" he asked.

The stranger straightened himself to his fullest stature; he let the cloak slowly fall from his shoulders, and taking the hat—which still half concealed his features—from his head, he threw it upon a table.

The effect upon the master of The Cedars was startling. This was the figure that he had beheld in the west wing; but then he had some reason to doubt; now it was close at hand, within his reach, and there could be no mistake. For one moment a superstitious awe overcame him; then he saw that the man before him was no presence from the spirit-world, but a solid, tangible reality.

The master of The Cedars forgot the bold course upon which he had resolved. All the fears that he had ever felt before sank into insignificance besides his present awful, absolute terror. He sank back in his seat, and his eyes seemed bursting from their sockets; his under jaw fell; he shook like a man in an ague fit.

"Who are you?" he gasped.

"You should know me well, Henri Valasquez," said the man before him, in tones not deep and hoarse, but rich, clear and musical. "I am Lionel Cashel; and I come to claim my inheritance."

He paused for a moment, and stood looking upon the terror-stricken villain. During that moment the silence in the library was so complete that the ticking of the great clock in an adjoining apartment became audible.

"And you, Henri Valasquez," pursued the true Lionel Cashel, "are an impostor and a scoundrel."

"Can the sea give up her dead?" groaned the false master of The Cedars.

"The sea has given up one whom you supposed the victim of your bloody hands," said Lionel Cashel. "Yes; I was not swallowed up by the waters of the ocean, as you basely designed I should be. Henri Valasquez, your crime has found you out; and the day of your triumph is ended."

All this Lionel Cashel had uttered in calm, even tones.

The calmness of the false master of The Cedars began to return. Memory came to his aid, and he recollected the bold course he had resolved upon in anticipation of the possibility of this

hour. Lionel Cashel, the true master of The Cedars, lived; but courage might win the game yet.

"And what do you intend to do?" he asked of Lionel Cashel, in something like his old scornful manner.

"What do I intend to do?" cried Lionel, the anger that must have been hidden before showing. "Can you not solve that riddle, Henri Valasquez? One the thing that I shall do will be to turn you away from these possessions; as to what chances you stand for the State's prison, I leave you to consider." The false master of The Cedars was indeed a matchless villain. His courage rose. The sudden appearance of one whom he supposed to be sleeping beneath the waves of the sea was enough to frighten him surely; but the fright was departing so far that he was growing angry.

"You threaten me with prison!" he hissed. "Man, you boast before your time. Listen."

Lionel Cashel folded his arms across his bosom, shut his lips close, and stood listening. He felt that he must curb himself, or his anger would cause him to strike the villain to the floor.

"Listen," repeated the impostor. "I fear you not. I am in possession here. I am known as the master of The Cedars. I defy you! Go on in any course that you may choose; you will find that you are throwing yourself against a wall of iron. Do you think the world will believe your improbable story? Ha, ha! Attempt to wrest The Cedars from me, and I will denounce you as an impostor. Who will be most likely to be believed,—you or I? I tell you man, I have the advantage of you; and I intend to keep it. You propose to cast me out from here; I repeat, I defy you! Appeal to the law, and I will defeat you utterly. You may continue to threaten, but I know, and you know, that you will have to prove your identity. I say I am Lionel Cashel, and you are not; who holds the best proofs?"

The impostor's eyes shone in triumph. How entirely changed he was from the shrinking wretch of a few minutes previous! His own words gave him confidence. He would fight this battle for The Cedars to the death!

Lionel Cashel advanced toward the man, and he shrank back. Lionel was goaded almost beyond endurance. He half-lifted his arm, and then, with a muttered exclamation, stepped back to the fire.

"I will not strike you, Henri Valasquez," he said. "You deserve immediate punishment; but I will not soil my hands by letting them fall upon you if I can avoid it. God is just; and, as sure as he rules, a day of retribution will come to you."

He ceased for a moment, and then continued, more calmly,—

"I realize what you have said, Henri Valasquez; but I shall labor against you, believing that Heaven will cause the right to triumph. I have a knowledge that there is another claimant for the estate; and if her cause is just, as I believe it is, I would not desire to rob her of her rights. I would not wish to turn her away to install myself. She has gained her case once, and, as I am aware, you have appealed it. Scoundrel, if I can do no more, I can heap difficulties in your way, in case you hatch up some diabolical villainy to defeat her!"

"No; I would not desire possession here so that I might cheat an orphan girl out of her inheritance; yet I would like my right to the name of Cashel acknowledged. O man! when you stole my spotless name, you robbed me of a better inheritance than all the acres of this vast estate!"

Lionel Cashel ceased speaking. A silence fell, and continued unbroken for many moments.

Lionel Cashel spoke first.

"I shall remain here to-night," he said simply. "I know your treacherous spirit, Henri Valasquez; but, my eyes being opened, I fear you not. Mark you, however, I want an apartment that I can secure with bolt and bar. Let your servant show me to it as soon as possible; for I have no desire to remain longer in your company. I warn you not to attempt to molest me; for if you do your blood will be upon your own head."

The false master of The Cedars gnash-

ed his teeth in rage. How those cool words stung him! how he would have liked to strike the man before him dead! yet he dared make no move, for he knew that Lionel Cashel, tall and athletic, was by far his physical superior. But, as he rang for a servant, a strange gleam came into his eyes,—a gleam that was cold and cruel. Lionel did not perceive that expression, for, though he was alert, he was not looking the villain in the face.

"Sant," said the false master of The Cedars, when his ring was answered, show this gentleman to the crimson room; and build a fire for him as soon as possible."

The man's tones were perfectly smooth. Lionel Cashel took up his hat and cloak, and followed the servant from the library. Reaching the sleeping-room, he lighted the two lamps he found there. Sant went away, but returned very shortly with a scuttle of coal, and some kindlings. Soon a cheerful fire was leaping and curling in the grate.

"You can go now," Lionel said to Sant.

After Sant was gone, he closed the door, and examined its fastenings; he found that it could be bolted and barred securely.

Lionel looked about the apartment. It was hung with crimson velvet. He examined the walls, but beheld no other means of entrance than the door.

"I am perfectly secure," he said to himself.

He sat down by the fire and mused.

"Verily, crime is its own punishment," thought he. "The agony of Valasquez in those first moments of beholding me was terrible! An age of torment must have seemed to be concentrated in a moment. But he braved it out well at last."

Lionel's musing continued.

"My life is a tangled web," he said aloud; "but, come what may, I shall proceed with all my powers against Valasquez. I have delayed too long now. As I told him, I do not wish an orphan girl's inheritance; but it is best to attack him from all sides. A suit against him may not benefit me; but I hope it may aid to overwhelm him with defeat the sooner."

It was approaching midnight when Lionel retired. Considering the apartment secure, he had no fear of danger, and was soon fast asleep.

Meantime, the false master of The Cedars had continued in the library. For some hours he sat in silence before the fire in a crouching attitude that was like a tiger's. That glare that was as cruel as the grave was ever in his eyes.

At length he sprang to his feet, his white face set resolutely.

"This plan is better than any other," he muttered; "why have I hesitated to adopt it? Even had I known that he lived, I could have prayed for no better opportunity than this night gives me."

He went out and was absent nearly an hour.

He returned finally with a stout cord in his hand, and locked the doors of the library. Then he proceeded to a desk, and, inserting the key of it in the lock, stood muttering.

"Ay! I will do it," was his thought; "he shall die. He said that if I attempted to harm him my blood would be upon my own head; but I will run the risk. He will give me trouble in the future if I do not put him out of the way. Now is my chance, for I shall never again have such an opportunity."

The man turned the key, and drew out a drawer. Reaching in the aperture it had left, he felt about for a moment, and then from within took out another. This last one contained bottles filled with various colored liquids. He immediately selected one from among the rest. It was labeled chloroform.

He lifted it out, and set it down by itself, while the cruel expression on his face deepened.

Then he lifted out a tiny vial that contained a drop of colorless fluid. He held it up, and an indefinable expression came into his eyes.

"The last resort," he muttered, "to be used if ever I am forced to the wall!"

With a slight shudder, he replaced the vial in the drawer, and in a moment the desk was locked, the bottle of chloroform being retained.

It was some time past midnight.

The false master of The Cedars opened the door of the library, and glided out, the vial of chloroform and the cord held tightly in his grasp. He slipped along quietly and carefully. He entered an apartment that adjoined the one in which Lionel Cashel was sleeping.

He felt carefully along a wall. For some moments he ran his hand about without any effect; then there was a sound as of a spring unfastening, and a panel in the wall slid back.

For a moment the man stood quiet, then he cautiously looked in. A dim light was burning in the apartment. No sound save the breathing of the sleeping man broke the silence.

Quietly the villain made an entrance. Crouching like a beast of prey, he crept to the bedside. Saturating a handkerchief with the chloroform, he held it to the nostrils of Lionel Cashel.

Lionel threw his arms wildly about once or twice, gasped, moaned, and then became unconscious.

He was in the power of his foe.

After that the villain's task was easy. He bound his victim with the cord he had brought; he gagged him, with a sheet taken from the bed, so that it would be impossible for him to utter a cry.

We now give some extracts from the diary of the true Lionel Cashel, which helps explain some parts of the story.

MAY 5, 1855.—I am twenty-three today. Perhaps on this my birthday, I should look forward to the future with joyful anticipation; yet I cannot say that I do. I do not like this life of ease in this dreamy Italian city.

If father would only consent that I should go forth into the world to strive, I believe I could make a man of myself. But he will not consent that I should leave him; and I cannot go without his blessing. All that binds me to Italy is his love, and a grave in the cemetery of an old cathedral: my mother's grave!

I barely remember her. She was beautiful; she loved me passionately. She died very young,—her years only twenty-one. I was a mere child then.

I have one consolation,—I can study. I love chemistry and medicine. I have read much; I am not ignorant upon those subjects. Mayhap my knowledge will some day be useful to me. I love books far better than I could ever love painting.

JUNE 1.—Valasquez has been my father's secretary for three months. I still think father need not have employed him; for I could do all the work he performs, and it would fall lightly upon me. I have no wish to be as much of a gentleman as father wishes to make me; in truth, my idea of a gentleman is not that of a man continually idle. Gladly would I have taken upon me the performance of all the duties of Valasquez.

He speaks English wonderfully well for a foreigner. In fact, from his speech, he might be taken for English or American. He says he learned the language in America. Perhaps he did.

Why should I write so much about Valasquez? If he were a villain, he could not harm us; he is my father's secretary, nothing more.

JULY 15.—I consider this an eventful day. This morning my father came into my room with a letter bordered in black in his hand. He was somewhat pale and discomposed.

"My uncle, Herbert Cashel, is dead," he said.

"Who?" I cried.

"My uncle, Herbert Cashel, of America," he answered.

"I never knew that you had an uncle in America, or anywhere else," I replied.

"I had the impression, father, that we had no living relatives."

"We have not now," he said, sadly enough. "Lionel, my son, I was a wild youth, and quarrelled with my father; I chose to forget all of the blood. I was not absolutely wicked, however, and when I married your sainted mother she made a better man of me. But my father died shortly after I was married, and I never sought out this Herbert Cashel, who I suppose has kept track of me. You know I have some peculiarities."

My father half turned to leave my room; but he paused, and looked at me.

"I had nearly forgotten," he said. "I

have not told you all. I inherit from my uncle, Herbert Cashel, a property which I suppose is very large."

SEPT. 1.—I do not consider it strange that my father did not have any intention of leaving Italy at first. He loves his art; he loves Florence. He would prefer to go on in his old life, working half the time,—dreaming half.

And just here I write in sorrow that if my father had dreamed less he would have achieved more than he has. He has great talent; but he is content in climbing only to a certain height.

But at last my persuasions have prevailed, and he has consented to go to America. It is best so, I feel. He is getting well up in years. He paints as well now as ever, it is true; but it cannot always be so, and in America he will have a home that can never be taken from him.

We are almost ready to depart.

SEPT. 12.—Alas! I have no words to express my fear and suspense. On the eve of our departure for America, my father was stricken with illness; it is fever. He now lies at the point of death. Another day will tell the tale; either his disease will change for the better, or—I cannot bear to think of that other alternative!

SEPT. 13.—My father is dead. Heaven pity me!

OCT. 1.—I am far out on the broad Atlantic. My father sleeps beneath the soft Italian skies. Alas!

Swift sails the vessel for America. America! I am an American by blood, yet I never beheld my native land. Is it strange that my heart swells when I think how soon it will be that I shall tread the shores of my country?

Henri Valasquez is on board the ship. I did not ask him to come; but after my father's death he pleaded that I should allow him to go with me to America. I could only tell him that doubtless there was room enough for us both in that country.

I treat him as a gentleman; still, as I have said before, we shall never be intimate.

OCT. 7.—I am on the ship "London," for Liverpool. How thankful I am that I live to pen this. My hand trembles as I attempt to write of the work of the traitor, Valasquez.

On the night of Oct. 5 I was on the deck of the good ship "Victoria." There was no moon, but myriads of stars shone in the heavens.

I had much to think about,—the father I had left behind me in sunny Italy; the future before me in America!

Henri Valasquez appeared at my side. He made some remarks about the beauty of the night. I rose to my feet. He was standing by the side of the ship, holding by the taffrail. I think—I am very certain—that we were unobserved. Beyond doubt he knew this.

"Look!" he cried. "I believe that is a shark."

I saw something white gleaming below. Naturally, I bent over the side of the ship. In one moment I felt myself falling. Then the cold waves of the sea swept about me and over me. I realized in a moment what had occurred.

Valasquez, the villain, had thrown me overboard.

How I struggled, screamed, and swam!

But the ship plunged on. My violent cries were unheard.

I was left far, far behind. I became exhausted. I gave up to die.

But my hand touched a hard substance.

I grasped it. It was of sufficient body to sustain me. I knew not positively, but it may have been the white object which Valasquez and I beheld from the ship,—part of a wreck, mayhap.

At any rate it was my salvation. With the hold of despair, I clung to it. Hours passed. Morning dawned. With the light of day, I strained my eyes over the illimitable ocean. Heaven was merciful! A ship was bearing toward me.

I was seen and saved!

Since then, till now, I have been quite ill.

But I am getting better.

Oh! the traitor Valasquez!

Have I guessed his dark plan? Yes! He will be Henri Valasquez no longer, but Lionel Cashel instead. I am being carried away from America! he is speeding swiftly toward it!—To be continued.