The Two Vanrevels

BY BOOTH TARKINGTON

IN view of the surprising dearth of really good books during the past season some of those that made their appearance a year or more ago are now enjoying a remarkable new popularity; none more so than "The Two Vanrevels," by Booth Tarkington, which may, however, be better accounted for by the fact that this last creation is said to be by far the best novel ever written by the talented young author of "Monsieur Beaucaire" and "A Gentleman From Indiana." It is a stirring story, and so great has been the demand for it that the Sunday Call, following its literary policy of giving its readers the very best American literature obtainable, has secured it by special arrangements with the publishers. It will therefore be printed complete in the Sunday Call Magazine in four installments—an offer never before equaled in the West. "The Two Vanrevels" cannot be secured anywhere in any other form for less than five times what it will cost you in the Sunday Call.

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CHAPTER I.

A CAT CAN DO MORE THAN LOOK AT A KING.

IT was long ago in the days when men sighed when they fell in love; when people danced by candle and lamp, and did dance, too, instead of solemnly gliding about; in that mellow time so long ago, when the young were romantic and summer was roses and wine, old Carewe brought his lovely daughter home from the convent to wreck the hearts of the youth of Rouen.

That was not a far journey; only an afternoon's drive through the woods and by the river, in an April long ago; Miss Betty's harp carefully strapped behind the great lumbering carriage, her guitar on the front seat, half-buried under a mound of bouquets and oddly shaped little bundles, farewell gifts of her comrades and the good sisters. In her left hand she clutched a small lace handkerchief, with which she now and then touched her eyes, brimmed with the parting from Sister Cecilia, Sister Mary Bazilede, the old stone steps and all the girls; but for every time that she lifted the dainty kerchief to brush away the edge of a tear, she took a deep breath of the Western woodland air and smiled at least twice; for the years of strict inclosure within St. Mary's walls and still garden were finished and done with and at last the many-colored world flashed and danced in a mystery before her. This mystery was brilliant to the content girl because it contained men; she was eager to behold it.

They rumbled into town after sunset, in the fair twilight, the dogs barking before them, and every one would have been surprised to know that Tom Vanrevel, instead of Mr. Crailey Gray, was the first to see her. By the merest accident, Tom was strolling near the Carewe place at the time; and when the carriage swung into the gates, with rattle and clink and clouds of dust at the finish, it was not too soon lost behind the shrubbery and trees for Tom to catch something more than a glimpse of a gray skirt behind a mound of flowers, and of a charming face with parted lips and dark eyes beneath the scuttle of an enormous bonnet. It happened—perhaps it is more accurate to say that Tom thought it happened—that she was just clearing away her veil when he turned to look. She blushed suddenly, so much was not to be mistaken; and the eyes that met his were remarkable for other reasons than the sheer loveliness of them, in that, even in the one flash of them he caught, they meant so many things at one time. They were sparkling, yet mournful; and they were wistful, although undeniably lively with the gayest comprehension of the recipient of their glance, seeming to say, "Oh, it's you, young man, is it!" And they were shy and mysterious with youth, full of that wonder at the world which has the appearance, sometimes, of wisdom gathered in the unknown out of which we came. But, above all, these eyes were fully conscious of Tom Vanrevel.

Without realizing what he did, Mr. Vanrevel stopped short. He had been swinging a walking-stick, which, describing a brief arc, remained poised half way in its descent. There was only that one glance between them; and the carriage disappeared, leaving a scent of spring flowers in the air.

The young man was left standing on the wooden pavement in the midst of a great loneliness, yet enveloped in the afterglow, his soul roseate, his being quavering, his expression, like his cane, instantaneously arrested. With such promptitude and finish was he disposed of that had Miss Carewe been aware of his name and the condition wrought in him by the single stroke, she could have sought only the terse Richard of England for a like executive ability, "Off with his head! So much for Vanrevel!"

She had lifted a slender hand to the fluttering veil, a hand in a white glove with a small lace gauntlet at the wrist. This gesture was the final divinity of the radiant vision which remained with the dazed young man as he went down the street; and it may have been three-quarters of an hour later when the background of the picture became vivid to him; a carefully dressed gentleman with heavy brows and a handsome high nose, who sat stiffly upright beside the girl, his very bright eyes quite as conscious of the stricken pedestrian as were hers, vastly different, however, in this; that they glittered, nay, almost bristled, with hostility; while every polished button of his blue coat seemed to reflect their malignancy, and to dart little echoing shafts of venom at Mr. Vanrevel.

Tom was dismayed by the acuteness of his perception that a man who does not speak to you has no right to have a daughter like the lady in the carriage, and, the moment of this realization occurring as he sat making a poor pretense to eat his evening meal at the "Rouen House," he dropped his fork rattling upon his plate and leaned back staring at nothing, a proceeding of which his table-mate, Mr. William Cummings, the editor of the Rouen Journal, was too busy over his river bass to take note.

"Have you heard what's new in town?" asked Cummings presently, looking up.

"No," said Tom truthfully, for he had seen what was new, but not heard it.

"Old Carewe's brought his daughter home. Fanchon Bareaud was with her at St. Mary's until last year; and Fanchon says she's not only a great beauty but a great dear."

"Ah!" rejoined the other with masterly indifference. "Dare say—dare say."

"No wonder you're not interested," said Cummings cheerfully, returning to the discussion of his bass. "The old villain will take precious good care you don't come near her."

Mr. Vanrevel already possessed a profound conviction to the same effect. Robert Meilhac Carewe was known not only as the wealthiest citizen of Rouen, but also as its heartiest and most steadfast hater; and, although there were only five or six thousand inhabitants, neither was a small distinction. For Rouen was ranked, in those easy days, as a wealthy town; even as it was called an old town; proud of its age and its riches, and bitter in its politics, of course. The French had built a fort there, soon after LaSalle's last voyage, and, as Crailey Gray said, had settled the place and had then been settled themselves by the pioneer militia. After the Revolution, Carolinians and Virginians had come, by way of Tennessee and Kentucky; while the adventurous countrymen from Connecticut, traveling thither to sell, remained to buy—and then sell—when the country was in its teens. In course of time the little trading-post of the Northwest Territory had grown to be the leading center of elegance and culture in the Ohio Valley—at least they said so in Rouen; only a few people in the country, such as Mr. Irving of Tarrytown, for instance, questioning whether a center could lead.

The pivotal figure, though perhaps not the heart, of this center, was unquestionably Mr. Carewe, and about him the neat and tight aristocracy of the place revolved; the old French remnant, having liberally intermarried, forming the nucleus, together with descendants of the Cavaliers (and those who said they were) and the industrious Yankees, by virtue (if not by the virtues) of all whom the town grew and prospered. Robert Carewe was Rouen's magnate, commercially and socially, and, until an upstart young lawyer named Vanrevel struck into his power with a broad-ax, politically. The wharves were Carewe's; the warehouses that stood by the river, and the line of packets which plied upon it, were his; half the town was his, and in Rouen this meant that he was possessed of the Middle Justice, the high and the low. His mother was a French woman, and, in those days, when to go abroad was a ponderous and venturesome undertaking, the fact that he had spent most of his youth in the French capital wrought a certain glamor about him; for to the American, Paris was Europe, and it lay shimmering on the far horizon of every imagination, a golden city. Scarce a drawing-room in Rouen lacked its fearsome engraving entitled "Grand Ball at the Tuileries," nor was Godey's Magazine ever more popular than when it contained articles elaborate of similar scenes of festal light, where brilliant uniforms mingled with shining jewels, fair locks, and the white shoulders of magnificently dressed duchesses, countesses, and ladies. (Credit for this description should be given entirely to the above mentioned periodical.) Furthermore, a sojourn in Paris was held to confer a "certain nameless and indescribable polish" upon the manners of the visitor; also, there was something called "an air of foreign travel."

They talked a great deal about polish in those days; and some examples still extant do not deny their justification; but in the case of Mr. Carewe, there existed a citizen of Rouen, one already quoted, who had the temerity to declare the polish to be in truth quite nomeless and indescribable for the reason that one cannot paint a vacuum. However, subscription to this opinion should not be over-hasty, since Mr. Crailey Gray had been notoriously a rival of Carewe's with every pretty woman in town, both having the same eye in such matters, and also because the slandered gentleman could assume a manner when he chose to, whether or not he possessed it. At his own table he exhaled a hospitable graciousness which, from a man of known evil temper, carried the winsomeness of surprise. When he wooed, it was with an air of stately devotion, combined with that knowingness which sometimes offsets for a widower the tendency a girl has to giggle at him; and the combination had been, once or twice, too much for even the alluring Crailey.

Mr. Carewe lived in an old-fashioned house on the broad, quiet, shady street which bore his name. There was a wide lawn in front, shadowy under elm and locust trees, and bounded by thick shrubberies. A long garden, fair with roses and hollyhocks, lay outside the library windows, an old-time garden, with fine gravel paths and green arbors; drowsed over in summer time by the bees, while overhead the locust rasped his rusty cadences the livelong day; and a faraway sounding love note from the high branches brought to mind the line, like an old refrain:

'The voice of the turtle was heard in the land.

Between the garden and the carriage gates there was a fountain where a bronze boy with the dropsy (but not minding it) lived in a perpetual bath from a green goblet held over his head. Nearby, a stone sun dial gleamed against a clump of lilac bushes; and it was upon this spot that the white kitten introduced Thomas Vanrevel to Miss Carewe.

Upon the morning after her arrival, having finished her pianoforte practice, touched her harp twice, and arpeggioed the Spanish Fandango on her guitar, Miss Betty read two paragraphs of Gilbert (for she was profoundly determined to pursue her task with diligence), but the open windows disclosing a world all sunshine and green leaves, she threw the book aside with a good conscience, and danced out to the garden. There, coming upon a fuzzy, white ball rolling into itself spirally on a lazy pathway, she pounced at it, whereupon the thing uncurled with lightning swiftness, and fled, more like a streak than a kitten, down the drive, through the open gate and into the street, Miss Betty in full cry.

Across the way there chanced to be strolling a young lady in blue, accompanied by a gentleman whose leisurely gait gave no indication of the maneuvering he had done to hasten their walk into its present direction. He was apparently thirty or thirty-one, tall, very straight, dark, smooth shaven, his eyes keen, deep set and thoughtful, and his high white hat, white satin cravat and careful collar were evidence of an elaboration of toilet somewhat unusual in Rouen for the morning; also, he was carrying a pair of white gloves in his hand and dangled a slender ebony cane from his wrist. The flying kitten headed toward the couple, when, with a celerity only to be accounted for on the theory that his eye had been fixed on the Carewe gateway for some time previous to this sudden apparition, the gentleman leaped in front of the fugitive.

The kitten attempted a dodge to pass; the gentleman was there before it. The kitten feinted; the gentleman was altogether too much on the spot. Immediately—and just as Miss Carewe, flushed and glowing, ran into the street—the small animal doubled, evaded Miss Betty's frantic clutch, re-entered the gateway, and attempted a disappearance into the lilac bushes, instead of going round them, only to find itself, for a fatal two seconds, in difficulties with the close-set thicket of stems.

In regard to the extraordinary agility of which the pursuing gentleman was capable, it is enough to say that he caught the cat. He emerged from the lilacs holding it in one hand, his gloves and white hat in the other, and presented himself before Miss Betty with a breathlessness not entirely attributable to his exertions.

For a moment, as she came running toward him and he met her flashing look, bright with laughter and recognition and haste, he stammered. A thrill nothing less than delirious sent the blood up behind his brown cheeks, for he saw that she, too, knew that this was the second time their eyes had met. Naturally, at that time he could not know how many other gentlemen were to feel that same thrill (in their cases, also, delirious, no less) with the same, accompanying, mysterious feeling which came just before Miss Betty's lashes fell, that one had found, at last, a precious thing, lost long since in childhood, or left, perhaps, upon some other planet in a life ten thousand years ago.

He could not speak at once, but when he could, "Permit me, madam," he said, solemnly, offering the captive, "to restore your kitten."

An agitated kitten should not be detained by clasping its waist, and already the conqueror was paying for his victory. There ensued a final, outrageous squirm of despair; two frantic claws, extended, drew one long red mark across the stranger's wrist, and another down the back of his hand to the knuckles. They were good, hearty scratches, and the blood followed the artist's lines rapidly; but of this the young man took no note, for he knew that he was about to hear Miss Carewe's voice for the first time.

"They say the best way to hold them," he observed, "is by the scruff of the neck."

Beholding his wounds, suffered in her cause, she gave a pitying cry that made his heart leap with the richness and sweetness of it. Catching the kitten from him, she dropped it to the ground in such wise as to prove nature's foresight most kind in cushioning the feet of cats.

"Ah! I didn't want it that much!"

"A cat in the hand is worth two nightingales in the bush," he said boldly, and laughed. "I would shed more blood than that!"

Miss Betty blushed like a southern dawn, and started back from him. From the convent but yesterday—and she had taken a man's hand in both of hers!

It was to this tableau that the lady in blue entered, following the hunt through the gates, where she stopped with a discomposed countenance. At once, however, she advanced, and with a cry of greeting, enveloped Miss Betty in a brief embrace, to the relief of the latter's confusion. It was Fanchon Bareaud, now two years emancipated from St. Mary's, and far gone in taffeta. With her lusterful light hair, absent blue eyes, and her gentle voice, as small and pretty as her face and figure, it was not too difficult to justify Crailey Gray's characterization of her as one of those winsome baggages who had made an air of feminine helplessness the fashion of the day.

It is a wicked thing that some women should kiss when a man is by; in the present instance the gentleman became somewhat faint.

"I'm so glad—glad!" exclaimed Betty. "You were just coming to see me, weren't you? My father is in the library. Let me—"

Miss Bareaud drew back. "No, no!" she interrupted hastily and with evident perturbation. "I—we must be on our way immediately." She threw a glance at the gentleman, which let him know that she now comprehended his gloves, and why their stroll had trended toward Carewe street. "Come at once!" she commanded him quickly, in an undertone.

"But now that you're here," said Miss Betty, wondering very much why he was not presented to her, "won't you wait and let me gather a nosegay for you? Our pansies and violets—"

"I could help," the gentleman suggested, with the look of a lame dog at Miss Bareaud. "I have been considered useful about a garden."

"Fool!" Betty did not hear the word that came from Miss Bareaud's closed teeth, although she was mightily surprised at the visible agitation of her schoolmate, for the latter's face was pale and excited. And Miss Carewe's amazement was complete when Fanchon, without more words, cavalierly seized the gentleman's arm and moved toward the street with him as rapidly as his perceptible reluctance to leave permitted. But at the gate Miss Bareaud turned and called back over her shoulder, as if remembering the necessity of offering an excuse for so remarkable a proceeding: "I shall come again very soon. Just now we are upon an errand of great importance. Good-day!"

Miss Betty waved her hand, staring after them, her eyes large with wonder. She compressed her lips tightly: "Errand!" This was the friend of childhood's happy hour, and they had not met in two years!

"Errand!" She ran to the hedge, along the top of which a high white hat was now seen perambulating; she pressed down a loose branch, and called in a tender voice to the stranger whom Fanchon had chosen should remain nameless:

"Be sure to put some salve on your hand!"

He made a bow which just missed being too low, but did miss it.

"It is there—already," he said; and, losing his courage after the bow, made his speech with so palpable a gasp before the last word that the dullest person in the world could have seen that he meant it.

Miss Betty disappeared.

There was a rigidity of expression about the gentle mouth of Fanchon Bareaud, which her companion did not enjoy, as they went on their way, each preserving an uneasy silence, until at her own door, she turned sharply upon him. "Tom Vanrevel, I thought you were the steadiest—and now you've proved yourself the craziest—soul in Rouen!" she burst out. "And I couldn't say worse!"

"Why didn't you present me to her?" asked Vanrevel.

"Because I thought a man of your gallantry might prefer not to face a shotgun in the presence of ladies!"

"Pooh!"

"Pooh!" mimicked Miss Bareaud. "You can 'pooh' as much as you like, but if he had seen us from the window—" She covered her face with her hands for a moment, then dropped them and smiled upon him. "I understand perfectly to what I owe the pleasure of a stroll with you this morning, and your casual insistence on the shadiness of Carewe street!" He laughed nervously, but her smile vanished, and she continued, "Keep away, Tom. She is beautiful, and at St. Mary's I always thought she had spirit and wit, too. I only hope Crailey won't see her before the wedding! But it isn't safe for you. Go along, now, and ask Crailey please to come at three this afternoon."

This message from Mr. Gray's betrothed was all the one ill-starred Tom conveyed to his friend. Mr. Vanrevel was ordinarily esteemed a person of great reserve and discretion; nevertheless there was one man to whom he told everything, and from whom he had no secrets. He spent the noon hour in feeble attempts to describe to Crailey Gray the outward appearance of Miss Elizabeth Carewe; how she ran like a young Diana; what one felt upon hearing her voice; and he presented in himself an example exhibiting something of the cost of looking into her eyes. His conversation was more or less incoherent, but the effect of it was complete.

CHAPTER II.

SURVIVING EVILS OF THE REIGN OF TERROR.

Does there exist an incredulous, or jealous, denizen of another portion of our country who, knowing that the room in the wooden cupola over Mr. Carewe's library was commonly alluded to by Rouen as the "Tower Chamber," will prove himself so sectionally prejudiced as to deny that the town was a veritable hotbed of literary interest, or that Sir Walter Scott was ill-appreciated there? Some of the men looked sly, and others grinned, at mention of this apartment; but the romantic were not lacking who spoke of it in whispers; how the lights sometimes shone there all night long, and the gentlemen drove away, white faced, in the dawn. The cupola, rising above the library, overlooked the garden, and the house, save for that, was of a single story, with a low veranda running the length of its front. The windows of the library and of a row of bedrooms—one of which was Miss Betty's—lined the veranda, "steamboat fashion;" the inner doors of these rooms all opening upon a long hall which bisected the house. The stairway leading to the room in the cupola rose in the library itself, while the bisecting hall afforded the only access to the library; hence, the gossips, well acquainted with the geography of the place, conferred seriously together upon what effect Miss Betty's homecoming would have in this connection; for any one going to the stairway must needs pass her door; and, what was more to the point, a party of gentlemen descending late from the mysterious turret might be not so quiet as they intended, and the young lady sufficiently disturbed to inquire of her father what entertainment he provided that should keep his guests until four in the morning.

But at present it was with the opposite end of the house that the town was occupied, for there, workmen were hammering and sawing and painting all day long, finishing the addition Mr. Carewe was building for his daughter's debut. This hammering disturbed Miss Betty, who had become almost as busy with the French Revolution as with her mantua-maker. For she had found in her father's library many books not for convent shelves; and she had become a Girondin.

She found memoirs, histories and tales of that delectable period, then not so dim with time but that the figures of it were more than tragic shadows; and for a week there was no meal in that house to which she sat down earlier than half an hour late. She had a rightful property-interest in the Revolution, her own great-uncle having been one of those who "suffered;" not, however, under the guillotine; for to Georges Meilhac appertained the rare distinction of death by accident on the day when the business-like young Bonaparte played upon the mob with his cannon.

There were some yellow letters of this great-uncle's in a box which had belonged to her grandmother, a rich discovery for Miss Betty, who read and re-read them with eager and excited eyes, living more in Paris with Georges and his friends than in Rouen with her father. Indeed, she had little else to do. Mr. Carewe was no comrade for her, by far the reverse. She seldom saw him, except at the table, when he sat with averted eyes, and talked to her very little; and, while making elaborate preparation for her introduction to his friends (such was his phrase), he treated her with a perfunctory civility which made her wonder if her advent was altogether welcome to him; but when she noticed that his hair looked darker than usual about every fourth day, she began to understand why he appeared ungrateful to her for growing up. He went out a great deal, though no visitors came to the house; for it was known that Mr. Carewe desired to present his daughter to no one until he presented her to all. Fanchon Bareaud, indeed, made one hurried and embarrassed call, evading Miss Betty's reference to the chevalier of the kitten with a dexterity too nimble to be thought unintentional. Miss Carewe was forbidden to return her friend's visit until after her debut; and Mr. Carewe explained that there was always some worthless young men hanging about the Bareauds', where (he did not add) they interfered with a worthy old one who desired to honor Fanchon's older sister, Virginia, with his attentions.

This was no great hardship for Miss Betty, as since plunging into the Revolution with her great-uncle, she had lost some curiosity concerning the men of to-day, doubting that they would show forth as heroic, as debonnair, gay and tragic as he. He was the legendary hero of her childhood; she remembered her mother's stories of him perhaps more clearly than she remembered her mother; and one of the older sisters had known him in Paris and had talked of him at length, giving the flavor of his dandyism and his beauty at first hand to his young relative. He had been one of those hardy young men wearing unbelievable garments, who began to appear in the garden of the Tuileries with knives in their sleeves and cudgels in their hands, about April, 1794, and whose dash and recklessness in many matters were the first intimations that the Citizen Tallien was about to cause the Citizen Robespierre to shoot himself through the jaw.

In the library hung a small, full-length drawing of Georges, done in color by Miss Betty's grandmother; and this she carried to her own room and studied long and ardently, until sometimes the man himself seemed to stand before her, in spite of the fact that Mlle. Meilhac had not a distinguished talent and M. Meilhac's features might have been anybody's. It was to be seen, however, that he was smiling.

Miss Betty had an impression that her grandmother's art of portraiture would have been more successful with the profile than the "full-face." Nevertheless, nothing could be more clearly indicated than that the hair of M. Meilhac was very yellow, and his short, huge-lapelled waistcoat, striped with scarlet. An enormous cravat covered his chin; the heavy collar of his yellow coat rose behind his ears, while its tails fell to his ankles; and the tight trousers of white and yellow stripes were tied with white ribbons about the middle of the calf; he wore white stockings and gold-buckled yellow shoes, and on the back of his head a jauntily cocked black hat. Miss Betty innocently wondered why his letters did not speak of Petion, of Vergniaud, or of Dumouriez, since in the historical novels which she read the hero's lot was inevitably linked with that of every one of importance in his generation; yet Georges appeared to have been unacquainted with these personages, Robespierre being the only name of consequence mentioned in his letters; and then it appeared in much the same fashion practised by her father in alluding to the Governor of the State, who had the misfortune to be unpopular with Mr. Carewe. But this did not dim her great-uncle's luster in Miss Betty's eyes, nor lessen for her the pathetic romance of the smile he wore.

Beholding this smile, one remembered the end to which his light footsteps had led him, and it was unavoidable to picture him left lying in the empty street behind the heels of the flying crowd, carefully forming that same smile on his lips and taking much pride in passing with one small, cynical speech, murmured to himself, concerning the inutility of a gentleman's getting shot by his friends for merely being present to applaud them. So, fancying him thus, with his yellow hair, his scarlet-striped waistcoat and his tragedy, the young girl felt a share of family greatness, or at least of picturesqueness, descend to her. And she smiled sadly back upon the smile in the picture and dreamed about its original night after night.

Whether or not another figure, that of a dark young man in a white hat, with a white kitten etching his wrist in red, found any place in her dreams at this period it is impossible to determine. She did not see him again. It is quite another thing, hazardous to venture, to state that he did not see her. At all events, it is certain that many people who had never beheld her were talking of her; that Rouen was full of