

BLOOD OF FLESH.

Wander Tale of Life from the Tyrolean Mountains.

BY EDGAR FAWCETT.

CHAPTER I.

This is a story of much sorrow, and of those who only love that is full of cheer and brightness that it may sadden and reveal them. It is a story of a man, for it deals with the darkness of a strange and awful destiny. But at the same time I have deemed it a story worth the telling, since it is filled, after all with the tragedy of a great if unique human passion.

We were born in a lovely village of the Austrian Tyrol, whose name I will not here record. Our parents were people of good bourgeois standing, and their luck and their wealth most proverbial. For years he had desired children, and at last we came.

My mother suffered agony at our birth, and afterward, when we were shown her. It is said that she had caused her death, and that we were not other children, but bound together by a ligature of flesh. Otherwise we were two boys formed in a perfectly normal way. My brother was, however, at all times far less healthy and vigorous than I. He was a weak, nervous, sensitive little man.

My father was a man here, named Conrad, and Victor was the name given to myself.

Our birth created wild wonder, and for days people flocked to see us. My father neither one nor the other allowed us to be seen. An old relative, a kind of aunt long since dead, showed us, I believe, to the gaping crowds. As for my father, he was prostrated with grief at the death of his wife and the curse of the child which he held a hideous and monstrous progeny.

But after awhile all such feeling changed with him. He became not only used to us but fond of us. The next step was easily taken, and before we were two years old he laid his hands on us as if we were his own.

Meanwhile we had received the best of care from dear, kindly old Hedwig, and had been nursed through an illness which threatened to end our infantile lives. My early recollections are solely of her being very happy. Conrad seemed in a manner apart from me, and yet most intimately akin. They used to say that my nature was a rather domineering one. But I was in every way the stronger and larger, so that I began to begin a tender age to assert my superior mental and physical powers.

My father's health began to weaken when we had reached our eighth or ninth year, and the failure of a Vienna banking house, to which he had inched the major portion of his savings, completed his ruin. He fell into a severe paralytic disorder. From this it soon became apparent that he could never quite rally; but while his partial recovery had begun to encourage Hedwig and ourselves, we were sought out by a man named Oscar Schreiner.

This man from the lower world, who amazed if you denied them the title, Oscar Schreiner certainly possessed education, and combined with that a high and sure sense of honor.

He wanted to make money, and frankly told my father that this was his purpose in life. He was wholly candid and sincere in his dealings. Would my father give us to him for a certain time, and permit him to manage our exhibition wherever he chose, receiving by terms of contract a stated and continuous percentage on all public shows in which we might be engaged?

My father, an needing money, consented. I never regretted his consent, though at first I rebelled against it. Perhaps I would have rebelled more if I had not cried and protested less. But I deemed it my duty to resent continually any sort of my brother's part, dearly as I loved him.

By this time my influence over him was potent in the extreme. He was devotedly fond of me, looked upon me as a guiding spirit, and faithfully followed all my counsels. I soon became aware that the influence which I exercised over him was of a strangely forceful kind. I suppose it was what would nowadays be called hypnotism. Weird as it may seem, I discovered that by the exertion of a little concentrated will-power I could throw him into a sleep and afterward awake him at pleasure almost at pleasure, that is, though not quite, and not always. The bond of flesh extended from my right side, while it did not his over the aorta. The physicians who had examined us when I do not care to repeat, agreed that my operation performed upon us in the way of cutting us apart would certainly result in Conrad's death, while it might fearfully imperil my own life, even if the worst did not result.

Oscar Schreiner might have proved a man of more than ordinary honesty had he been the gentlest and kindest; we were taken by him in many different parts of Europe, but treated always with the tenderest care. I shall never forget my delight on first meeting his daughter in Berlin. By this time we had journeyed over the whole of the fatherless earth, for my father had been dead for some months. His last wishes were to give up his showman's life, and to lead a quiet, domestic way, at the end

of our loud, bustling hours in the crowded museum.

It would now have been easy enough for Oscar Schreiner to grasp all the money which our constant exhibition brought him in. Our father had died; we were, in a manner, quite his own property. But apart from showing any aversion to my father's will, the attitude man kept perpetually desisting of our credit a distinct percentage on every coin that he received. Far more than that, he employed tutors for our education, and though Conrad was a dull creature, I was made to learn with my quicker and keener mind, soon becoming strikingly proficient.

Knowledge, cultivation, brought me sorrow mixed with joy. It was of course an effort to think and feel in a more refined way, but this very enlightenment induced the inevitable moods of self-disgust. I found myself beginning to loathe the bond of flesh which bound me to Conrad. With my brother it was not so. He accepted his condition without a murmur. Gradually I began to realize it; he was more a part of me than I of him; not merely a great affection for me swayed him at all times, but a feeling that I was in a way the center of his life, the axis of his best energy sprang. From a physical point of view this fact was noticeable thus: If a sickness of any sort overtook me Conrad was sure to share it, while if he were ill I often remained perfectly well.

One day in our ninth year we were attacked by a malady which came near ending his life. To me the tedium and anxiety were intolerable, since I was in fairly good health. And then, suddenly, one day came the terrifying thought, "What if he should die?"

But Conrad recovered, and my fears vanished. Still, a resolve was slowly taking shape within my brain. I mentioned it to no one for a very long time, but nevertheless it grew and grew like a plant in the dark.

Conrad treated us in the most honorable manner regarding all profits which accrued to us, keeping both the letter and spirit of his contract with our dead father. As we became older our financial prospects brightened; we drew larger audiences as young men than he had drawn as boys. I wearied greatly, now, under the continuous vulgarities and monotony of our life. I knew by heart, and so did Conrad, the speech with which Oscar Schreiner was wont to present us for public inspection. Then, one day, he was suddenly visited by a task of learning it from the bottom upward. This feat I at length achieved, to the wonder and admiration of my brother, whose mental powers it completely surpassed.

In appearance I was tall and fair, with a strong, athletic, and well-built figure. I perceived that I was by no means ill-favored, and when I had reached early manhood the frequent smiles of women and maidens told me that my looks attracted them. But always a touch of compassion was blended with their admiration, and the more they gazed upon me, the more troubled me more than words can express.

Conrad was a slender, shrinking lad, almost a head shorter than I, and unassuming both as to form and feature. When we had passed our twenty-first year his features became almost pitifully striking. His dependence upon me, his belief in me, had increased rather than lessened. Nothing could have been more pathetic than either. His spirits rose and fell in affectionate obedience to mine. If a cloud gloomed over his thoughts I could see its reflection in the dull yet wistful eyes uplifted to me.

CHAPTER II.

In the year 1886, we drifted again to Berlin, for the fourth or fifth time. A young physician, named Olaf Aveling, a Dane who had already won some little note in the medical and surgical world and was believed anxious to win considerable more, came very often to see us, and with Schreiner's full sanction made repeated minute examinations of the peculiar link that bound us together.

I had never especially liked Aveling. He struck me as cold and unempathetic, and I could not but comprehend that if he should ever make a proposal to perform upon us a disjunctive operation, it would be entirely for motives of a severely selfish character.

Still, I liked his conversation, which was often brilliant and forcible. He was a handsome fellow, with a pale, keen face lit by small though shining dark eyes, and an air of command and assertion which became his shapely build.

All in all, I rather prized his visits; and though for many days he did not tell even a single hint that he desired to operate upon our bond of flesh, he still contrived to make it clear that such an operation would give him a very large fortune.

Shortly after our arrival in Berlin the daughter of Schreiner left a relative with whom she had been living since her graduation at the German boarding-school, and came to dwell with her father. I took this for a sign that Schreiner had finally yielded to my persuasions on a certain subject, and I rejoiced in consequence.

One day I said to our friend: "This is a pretty little home, and I hope sincerely that instead of merely passing the next few months here for purposes of rest, you may reside indefinitely under its peaceful roof."

Oscar Schreiner started, while Conrad looked up at me inquiringly with his placid, trustful eyes.

"Do you mean, brother," he asked, "that you want us never to appear in public any more?"

"Never!" I said emphatically, and fixed my gaze upon Schreiner. "Have we not gained enough?" I went on. "Conrad and I can live comfortably on our money for the rest of our days; be they now or hereafter. As for yourself, you have acquired a snug little fortune beyond all doubt."

"Yes," said Schreiner, "I have told you every thing."

"If you are sure of it," I broke in, with a smile, "that is just my reason for now or hereafter sticking to the point, and the point is, do you or do not give up showman's life forever? I detest it, as you know, and Conrad has

by any means enamored of it. Besides, now that your charming daughter has come to live with us we ought to make the happiest sort of a household; surely that is a point to remain with you. But that will be impossible if you again travel."

Schreiner looked at me with a smile that slowly deepened, and then drew near to me, taking my hand. "It will be as you say, Victor," he replied. "After all I believe you are right. But how will you and Conrad pass your time? I fear that after a certain term of leisure you will both long for the old life again."

"Oh," I said, laughing, "I will talk with Linda for an hour or two every day. That will never tire me."

These words were joyfully thrown at Linda Schreiner, who had just finished entering the room. But immediately her father echoed my laugh, saying, lightly: "Oh, you must be careful how you talk too much in that strain! Olaf Aveling might overhear you and grow jealous."

This was the dawn of my discovery that Dr. Aveling cared in the least for the daughter of our dear friend.

Linda tossed her curly blonde head and gave a contemptuous smile, not without a touch of a blush. Then, in the kindest way, she looked at me and said: "We don't care a straw, do we, Victor, whether he's jealous or not?"

"Not a straw," I returned, though the affected gaiety with which I spoke cost me inward pain.

Linda had become a very beautiful girl now, and it is not in the least strange that a man of Aveling's comparative youth should have been fascinated by her radiant face, aureoled in boucous hair of silken gold. When she and I next held one of our private talks together (which means when Conrad's head had sleepily drooped itself upon my shoulder) I somewhat boldly questioned her.

"Do you," I said, "do you think that Olaf Aveling really wishes to marry you?"

"I think nothing whatever on the subject," declared Linda, with a little frowning brow.

"But he should ask you to be his wife, Linda," I persisted, "answer me frankly, would you refuse him?"

She gave me a strange, fervent look,



"WOULD YOU REFUSE HIM?"

which somehow ended by resting on the similitude of a smile.

"Do you," she exclaimed, with great ardor, and with a wild, wistful light flashing forth at me from her sweet, blue eyes. Then, in another instant, she had burst into tears, and darted from the room.

I sat dazed, dubious, vaguely thrilled, I knew not why. The keenness of her to which had waded Conrad, who asked of me:

"Victor, what is it? Was Linda angry at you, hurrying off like that?"

"Oh, no," I answered, though absently, with the tips of my lips, as it were.

Conrad seemed satisfied with the answer and let his head sink again on my shoulder. I slowly turned and regarded him, he being unconscious that I did so. And then a terrible thing happened. Momentarily and yet with intense acuteness there came across me a shuddering intuition of this frail creature whose life was so indissolubly linked to mine. The impulse that seized me was, I suppose, a murderous one. If it had lasted, if some wave of ethics and fraternal potency had not soon swept it aside, God knows what might have happened!

As it was, the re-humanizing change took place, and I presently found myself still seated at my brother's side, with an altered and remorseful spirit and with cold beads of sweat clustering on my cheeks and brow.

Still I could not seem to speak, its lasting reverberations through my life, I did not cease to regard Conrad both with tenderness and pity; but the love which I now knew that I felt for Linda Schreiner controlled me with novel stress. I must here admit that it left behind it a certain odor residuum of cruelty toward Conrad.

And yet, was I so wholly blameworthy? If the severance was effected between him and me, my own peril would be immense. I had become sure that my chances of survival, in such a case, would be about as good as nothing. Yet this love for Linda, mixed with a joyous glimmering of faith in her possible love for me, set my heart throbbing with a sort of divine courage.

"Divine?" in my will ask. "And why?" they will further urge, "since it is essentially selfish!" I grant that selfishness has much to do with it, and yet what love except the loftier altruistic love is unconcerned with egoism? A passion like mine is not, nor ever was. And swiftly, even horribly, as I may add, my love for this charming girl had blossomed in a reason.

Almost whenever Linda and I held conferences after this I used my power over Conrad—hypnotic, mesmeric, whatever one pleases to call it. Not a word of confession ever left my lips. But by suggestion, by innuendo, I can say that I made the young physician understand me or no, I cannot tell. It seems to me now that she understood perfectly. All this time I was possessed by a prophetic sensation that sooner or later my repudiated fervor of sentiment must break its bounds in terms of transport and avowal.

Olaf Aveling held several conversations with me after this, and at last I could no longer endure the knowledge of his evident yet concealed purpose. One day I asserted my influence over Conrad, while the young physician was present, yet it wholly failed, as now and then it had previously failed.

Conrad grew nervous, petulant, even peevish. "You want to say something that you prefer I shouldn't hear," he declared. "You often thought this before, but now it's very plain to me. You've been hiding things from me for a good while past. Oh, I've seen and

noticed, brother! you needn't deny it!" "I do deny it," I dissented, gnawing my lips. Then I made a swift sign of dismissal to Dr. Aveling, who quitted the room with an odd smile on his lips which I did not like, yet dimly comprehended.

"That evening, while Conrad had fallen into one of his dozes, a servant slipped a letter unbidden in my hand. It was from Dr. Aveling, and I read it through several times without Conrad dreaming that I did so.

It was a proposal to undertake the operation of our disjunction, and it gave me pangs of mingled delight and hope.



IT WAS FROM AVELING.

"My last examination," ran one passage of the letter, "has convinced me that both you and your brother stand an excellent chance of recovery. What other surgeons may have told you, rest sure that I am right. That the operation will be highly perilous I do not deny. But that any scruples of sacrificing Conrad should restrain you is on your part unwise to a foolish degree. You, the superior mind and intelligence—you, as I am so firmly convinced, craving and hungering after your liberty, should by no means recoil from trying to attain it because fearful of offending your brother. On my word of honor as a scientific man, Conrad will run no greater risk than yourself. He need know nothing of the coming trial. Ether, would naturally, be administered to you both. He could receive a slight shock, as a matter of course, I should choose the night, after you have retired, Schreiner had best be told, beyond doubt, but Linda, poor little sympathetic soul, should not be shocked by any previous tidings of the sort. Think this communication carefully over, and answer me at your leisure convenience."

Soon afterward I found an occasion to give Oscar Schreiner the letter from Aveling.

"Read," I enjoined, "and decide for us." "I was fearfully agitated, and he perceived that I was.

"I—I know something of this," he faltered, after having glanced at the letter.

"Aveling has told you?" I whispered.

"Yes."

"But you've not breathed a word to Linda?"

"No, and I shall not."

He left me, and during another hour Conrad and I retired to bed. I passed a most anxious and troubled night, and my distress reacted upon my brother, so that he too, he grew feverish at midnight, and as wakeful as myself. A horrible fear beset me, toward dawn, that he might perhaps be on the verge of some serious seizure.

All the next day he was so restless and vigilant that I had the greatest difficulty in obtaining from Schreiner his opinions and views.

But at length I did obtain them. I saw now that he was immensely under the influence of Aveling's private persuasions. But these were not his sole motives for desiring that the operation should take place. He had observed only too well my eager longing for freedom, though his chief cause I am but too sure that he did not then even remotely suspect.

Presentations.

Mozart's sad notation that the requiem he had undertaken to write for his mysterious customer would be his own death-chant, proved as prophetic as Hogarth's serious ascent to the jocular suggestion when "The End of All Things" was completed there would be an end to the painter.

Fechter's intuition was not at fault when it made him urge the sculptor taking his instructions respecting his last resting-place, to set to work at once, as there was no time to lose; when the tomb was ready for the tenant the tenant was ready for the tomb.

Tom Sheridan, bidding Angelo good-by with the remark, "I have twenty months to live," gauged the term of his existence to a nicety.

Awakened from a sick man's slumber by the baying of hounds and the uproar attending the pulling down of a stag in a neighbor's garden, sporting Millet exclaimed, "It is an omen!" and in a few days took leave of pencil and paper forever.

Not long before his fatal illness, Prince Albert said to the Queen: "I do not cling to life. You do, but I set no store by it. If I knew that those I loved were well cared for, I should be quite ready to die tomorrow. I am sure if I had a severe illness I should give up at once. I should not struggle for life."

The Irish Harp.

The old-style Irish harp was about four feet high, had no pedals, and was strung by the back with straps. The one belonging to King Brian Boru, who was killed at the battle of Clontarf in 1014, is still preserved in the museum at Trinity College, Dublin. It is black with age, and polished, but worn-out. The old relic is adorned with silver ornaments. The King's son, Teague, took the harp to Rome after the battle, and presented it to the Pope, together with the crown and regalia that had been worn by his father. A succeeding Pope gave it to Henry VIII, together with the title of "Defender of the Faith," and Henry gave it to the Earl of Clanricarde, in whose family it was held until the beginning of the eighteenth century. It then passed through several hands, until 1786, when the college became its owner.

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