

One Night's Mystery.

By May Agnes Fleming.

CHAPTER VI.—CONTINUED.

Miss Dormer found her niece unpleasantly reticent for a girl of sixteen.

Who had given her all these handsome books of poetry, marked with the initials 'F. D. C.'? Oh, a friend of papa's—papa had so many friends, and they all made her presents!

It was an album that told the story—a gorgeous affair of ivory, purple velvet and gilt clasps, that her niece kept always jealously locked up, filled with cabinet-sized photographs of her Bohemian friends.

Beauty Hendrick, on her fifteenth birthday, from the most devoted of her admirers.

The old woman uttered a shrill hissing sort of cry, as though she had been struck, her yellow face turned green, her wicked old eyes absolutely glared with fury.

The girl darted forward to the rescue with a scream of dismay, but warding her off with one hand, Phillis Dormer held it down with her stick, not speaking a word, and glaring, as Cyrilla ever afterwards said, like old Hecate over her witches' cauldron.

This is the sort of ingrate I have taken into my house, is it? This is the sort of friends you and your father have made.

You forget Aunt Phillis, that curses, like chickens, come home to roost, was what she said.

Then she walked out of the room with her paper chin higher than ever, and the air of an outraged grande dame.

Miss Dormer did not send her home. The first outbreak past, even her warped sense of justice showed her that the girl was not so much to blame.

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is safe, and then the remainder of Mr. Fred Carew follows. He poses himself for an instant on the top of the wall, unguarded, in this peaceful town, by wicked spikes or broken bottles, then lightly drops upon the turf beneath.

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It was an album that told the story—a gorgeous affair of ivory, purple velvet and gilt clasps, that her niece kept always jealously locked up, filled with cabinet-sized photographs of her Bohemian friends.

Beauty Hendrick, on her fifteenth birthday, from the most devoted of her admirers.

CHAPTER VII.

UNDER THE TAMARACS.

'My dear little Beauty, what a trump you are!' is Mr. Carew's enthusiastic exclamation.

He rises to embrace her, but Cyrilla resolutely resists herself, and draws back.

'No, thank you, Freddy; I palm to palm is holy palmer's kiss. I didn't come here to be made love to; I came for news of papa.

'Lying down than sitting, dead than lying down.' 'Is that your belief, Beauty?'

'No, I am afraid I would not be at all better off dead, particularly while I act as I am doing to-night. By-the-by, Freddy, I wish you would leave off calling me Beauty; it sounds too much as though I were a little woolly King Charles, with a curly tail and pink eyes.'

'All right, Beau—I mean Cyrilla.' They have found the bench by this time and sat down.

'Oh, Freddy! you really are so fond of me as this?'

'Yes, Freddy; I shall marry the Scotchman, but all the same, dear old fellow, you shall be first in my heart—such heart as it is—to the end of the chapter.'

'Happy Mr. McKelplin! Is this the morality they teach in young ladies' seminaries, then?'

'I never require to be taught, Fred; Cyrilla replies, rather sadly; all worldly and selfish knowledge seems to come to me of itself.

'No!' cries Fred Carew, with most unwonted energy. 'That I swear shall not! The day you become Mrs. McKelplin, or Mrs. Anybody else, that day you and I part forever.

'I mean that, Beauty. Mind—I don't say you are not right—if you do marry the Scotchman, I won't blame you. I am poor—I have my pay, just enough at present to keep me in moss rosbuds, cigars, and Jouvina's first choice.

'Would it be the act of a scoundrel to remain my friend—to go on seeing me after I am married?' Cyrilla demands, her cheeks flushing, her eyes flashing.

'It would, Beauty. Your friend I could never be; that you know. The motto of my Uncle Durnraith is, 'All or nothing.' In this matter it is my motto also—all or nothing!'

'You mean this, Mr. Carew?'

'I most decidedly mean this, Miss Hendrick. I will be the happiest in the universe if you will marry me to-morrow. If you will not, I have nothing to say—you know best what is best for you, I am sure. But stand by and see you married to another man—go on meeting me over for a tallow man. Only when you marry him our intimacy shall end. My father acted like a scoundrel to your aunt. I won't act like a scoundrel to you.'

'As you please,' Cyrilla answers, and she rises resolutely as she does answer. 'You will act, of course, in all things, Mr. Carew, as your superior wisdom may suggest. I can only regret, since the proposal is so distasteful to you, that I made it at all. Forget it—and me—and my folly in meeting you here, and good night.'

'She turns to go, but before she has moved half a dozen steps he is by her side, detaining her once more.

'Angry, Beauty? and with me? What nonsense? You couldn't be, you know, if you tried. Are you really going to leave me, 'Rilla? He is holding both her hands once more. 'Not at least until you tell me when and where we are to meet again.'

'There shall be no more meetings, Mr. Carew. The friendship you disclaim so disdainfully in the future shall end at once. Good night.'

'And once more—nonsense, Beauty! I decline to meet Mrs. McKelplin, but Cyrilla Hendrick I shall go on meeting, and loving while she lives. If I may not come here, again, will you write to me, at least!'

'Have I not already told you no letter can come into the school that is not opened by Mademoiselle Stephanie? Still—'

The only genius he possessed was a genius for getting rid of money, and that has honorably descended to his only son, only he never has any to get rid of.'

'Yes,' Cyrilla says, gravely. 'Mr. McKelplin will make a much better guardian of the Dormer dollars than you or your late lamented father. For pity's sake, Fred, don't laugh so loudly. Miss Jones' window is directly over mine, directly opposite this, and Miss Jones invariably sleeps with one eye open.'

'If Miss Jones's beauteous orbs were as sharp again as they are,' answers Mr. Carew, 'she could hardly see us here. But all this is beside the question. Let us return to our mutation—I mean our soap-and-candle man. Beauty, it isn't possible—it cannot be possible—that you are going to throw me over, and marry the Scotchman?'

'He takes both her hands in one of his and holds her fast. Cyrilla resists a little, but Mr. Carew is firm, and maintains his clasp.

'Throw you over, Fred! I like that? As if there could ever be any question of loving or marrying between you and me. As if I could ever look upon you—a small boy—in the light of a lover!'

'Indeed!' says Mr. Carew, opening his handsome blue eyes, 'a small boy like me. In what light, Beauty, have you looked upon me, then, in the past, in the days we spent together in Bloomsbury? You see I am deplorably ignorant in all these nicer distinctions.'

'As my very good friend and staunch comrade, always. Those days in London spent together, were the best I have ever known; the best I ever will know.'

'What, Miss Hendrick! Even when you are the rich and respectable Mrs. Sandy McKelplin?'

'Donald, Freddy, Donald—Mrs. Donald McKelplin. Yes, even then; although, as far as money will go, I mean to enjoy my life. And there is no enjoyment, to speak of, in this lower world, that money will not purchase. For you, Fred, I told you your fortune six hours ago. You will steer clear of the dark lady, Cyrilla Hendrick, and you will marry the elderly blonde person with fortune. I can't point her out at present, but I have no doubt she exists, and can be found if you set about it properly. Seriously, Fred, your father made a fiasco of his life by marrying for love and all that nonsense, and died years before his time in poverty and premature old age. Take warning by him, and do as I shall do, marry for money.'

Mr. Carew smiles that peculiarly sweet smile of his that lights up so pleasantly his blonde, boyish face.

'I have never thought much about marriage in the abstract,' he says, 'in fact I never thought of it at all, Beauty, until you put it in my head; but I think I may safely say this: that I will never marry either for love or money, unless I can call Cyrilla Hendrick my wife.'

'There is real feeling in his voice, real love in the blue eyes that shine upon her. Cyrilla Hendrick's black ones flash and soften in the moonlight as they meet his.'

'Oh, Freddy! you really are so fond of me as this?'

'His answer is not in words, but it is satisfactory. There is silence for a little.

'And you won't marry the Scotchman, 'Rilla,' he says at last.

'Yes, Freddy; I shall marry the Scotchman, but all the same, dear old fellow, you shall be first in my heart—such heart as it is—to the end of the chapter.'

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Are you stationed here in Petit St. Jacques for the winter?'

'No, only temporarily; our headquarters are Montreal. By-the-by, your home, Miss Dormer's rather, is in Montreal. When you leave school we must manage to meet often. Meantime, 'Rilla,'—he draws her closer to him in the moonlight—'promise me this—don't take that oath to marry me.'

The handsome face is very close, very pleasing. She loves him, and the last shadow of anger vanishes from here like a cloud, and a smile, Cyrilla's own, too rare, and most radiant smile, lights it up.

'I think I may safely promise that much, Fred—yes.'

'And you won't marry McKelplin—confound him!—without letting me know?'

'She laughs, and promises this too. They are out in the open air by this time—in broad chill, dazzling white, midnight moonlight. St. James-the-Less chimes out sonorously, on the still frosty air, twelve.

'Good Heavens, Fred, midnight! This is awful! Let me go. No, not another second! Good-night, good-night!'

'She tears herself from him, and swings nimbly into her friend, the hemlock tree. He stands and watches her clambering up, hand over hand, sees her reach the lead water-pipe and mount upon the sill of the window. She waves her hand to him, and he turns to depart. With that parting smile still on her face she vaults into the room, and finds herself face to face with—Mademoiselle Stephanie and Miss Jones!'

CHAPTER VIII.

'ALL IS LOST BUT HONOR.'

Fred Carew's fatal laugh had done it all—reached Miss Jones's slumbering ear, and aroused her from her vestal dreams.

Cyrilla had said Miss Jones slept with one eye open; she might have added, truthfully, with one ear also. And, as it chanced, on this particular night her slumbers were lighter even than usual.

For nearly an hour after quitting the pupils' rooms with their lamps, she had sat at the window—a very unusual thing with Miss Jones—and gazed sentimentally out at the moonlight. She was nine-and-twenty, as has been said, and in all these nine and twenty years no man had ever paid her as much attention as Mr. Carew had paid her to-night.

A delicious trance wrapped Miss Jones. What a brilliant match as yet in store for her!—on this side of forty at times seem possible. Mr. Carew had committed himself in no way certainly; but he had given her looks, and there had been tones and words that made her unappropriated heart throb with rapture.

What a triumph it had been over her refractory, her supercilious pupil, Cyrilla Hendrick. He had hinted at meeting her again—enquired, with seeming carelessness, her hours for visiting the town, the church she attended on Sunday, and at parting he had squeezed, absolutely squeezed, her hand. No doubt he would be in waiting on Sunday to attend her home after worship. How very handsome and distingue he was—her to a title it might be—many of these officers were. A vision of rosy brightness—orange blossoms, Honiton lace, half-a-dozen of the girls for bridesmaids—rose before her enraptured vision, and in the midst of it a loud sneeze warned Miss Jones that she was sitting in the open window in a draught, and that the probable result of her rosy visions would be a bad cold in the head to-morrow. Upon this Miss Jones went to bed.

For hygienic reasons, she invariably left her window open, winter and summer. She had dropped into a slight beauty sleep, when suddenly there came to her ear the decided sound of a heavy laugh. In one second of time Miss Jones was sitting bolt upright in bed, broad awake, and listening intently.

Yes, there it is again—a laugh, a man's laugh, and in the garden. Burglars!—that was her first thought. But no; burglars do not, as a rule, give way to fits of merriment over their work. She slipped from her bed, went to the window, and strained sight and hearing to discover the cause. There was nothing to see but the broad sheets of moonlight pouring down upon everything; but, yes, distinctly Miss Jones could hear, in that profound frosty silence, the subdued murmur of voices under the trees.

Was it inspiration—the inspiration of hatred, the inspiration of hope—that made her mind leap to Cyrilla Hendrick? Without waiting to reason out the impulse that prompted her, she ran from her room, down the stairs, and noiselessly into that of her foe. Yes, she is right! There stood the bed unoccupied, the window wide open, the girl gone. On her bed, 'Toinette lay fast asleep; she, then, was not Cyrilla's companion! Who could it be? Even more distinctly than upstairs Miss Jones could hear the murmured talk here—one voice she could have sworn, was the voice of a man.

In an instant her resolutions were taken; in another she had acted upon it, and was rapping at the sleeping-room of Mademoiselle Stephanie. At last her time had come. The prize pupil of the school, her arch enemy, was in her power. Mademoiselle Stephanie, in a white dressing-gown, opened the door, and stared in bewilderment at her second English teacher. People talking in the grounds! What did Miss Jones mean?'

'There is not a second to lose, mademoiselle! Miss Jones feverishly cried, 'if we wish to see who the man is! It wants but five minutes to twelve—she surely will not stay much longer. Come! come at once!'

She took Mademoiselle Chateauray's hand, and fairly forced her along the chill passage to Cyrilla's room. They were not a second too soon. As they took their places at the window, the two culprits stepped out from under the tamaracs into the full light of the moon. The gentleman's arm affectionately encircled his companion's waist.

'Mon Dieu!' mademoiselle gasped.

Miss Jones gave one faint gasp also, for in the brilliant light of the moon she recognized at first glance her false, her recreant admirer, Mr. Carew. It all flashed upon her—it had all been a blind to lead her off the scent, his intentions to herself. He and Cyrilla Hendrick had planned this meeting. No doubt they had laughed together over her gullibility there under the trees. She set her teeth with a snap of rage and fury at the thought.

'You have had your laugh, my lady, with your lover,' she thought, with a vicious glare; 'it is my turn now, and those laugh best who laugh last.'

Then came that hurried parting embrace, extorting another horrified 'Mon Dieu!' from mademoiselle. Then Cyrilla was mounting the tree, then the lead pipe, then, kissing her hand to her lover, leaped into the room and stood before them!

Imagine that tableau! Dead silence for the space of one minute, during which judge, accuser, and criminal stand face to face. One faint cry of sheer surprise Cyrilla had given, then as her eyes fell on the intolerably exultant face of Miss Jones, her haughty head went up, her daring, resolute spirit asserted itself, and she faces them boldly. There was fearless blood in the girl's veins—bad blood, beyond all doubt, but pluck invincible. For her this discovery meant ruin—utter, irre-

trievable ruin—but since it had come there was nothing for it, with Mary Jane-Jones looking on particularly, but to face it without flinching.

'Come with me, Miss Hendrick,' Mademoiselle Stephanie coldly began. 'You also Miss Jones.'

She led the way back to her own room, where a lamp burned and a dull red glimmer of fire yet glowed. Spectral and ghostly the two teachers looked in their long night robes, and a faint smile flitted over Cyrilla's face as she followed. Mademoiselle closed the door carefully, and then confronted the culprit.

'Now for it!' Cyrilla thought. 'Good Heaven! what an unlucky wretch I am! Nothing can save me now.'

'Well, Miss Hendrick,' Mademoiselle Chateauray began, in that cold, level voice of intense displeasure, 'what have you to say? I presume you have some explanation to give of to-night's most extraordinary conduct.'

'A very simple explanation, mademoiselle,' Cyrilla answered. 'I thank you for letting me make it. Nothing can wholly excuse a pupil keeping an assignation with a gentleman in the school-grounds by right-of that I am aware—but at least my motive may partly. I have heard no news of my father for over a year; I went to hear news of him to-night. This evening, at Mrs. Delamore's, I met a gentleman whom I have known from childhood—who has been as a brother to me since my earliest recollection—who was a daily visitor at my father's house in London. I was naturally anxious for news, of papa in particular, and would have received it then and there but for Miss Jones's interference. She would not allow us to exchange a word—she was resolute to make me leave him, and I obeyed. What followed Miss Jones knows. He and I did not exchange another word, but before he left me he told me he had an important, most important message to deliver from my father, and was determined to deliver it to-night. I refused to meet him at first, but when I remembered it was my only chance of hearing from poor papa, that no letters were allowed to come to me, I consented. He came over the wall, and I descended, remained a few minutes and returned. That is the whole story.'

She could see the enquiring scorn and unbelief on Miss Jones's face, the cold intense anger deepening upon Mademoiselle Stephanie's. Neither of them believed a word she had said.

'Does 'Toinette know?' Mademoiselle Chateauray asked.

'No, mademoiselle. 'Toinette was asleep long before I went.'

'Of that at least I am glad. It is sufficiently bad to have a pupil in my school capable of so shameful and evil an act, without knowing that she had corrupted the minds of other and innocent girls. For three and twenty years, Miss Hendrick, I have been pre-ceptor of this school, and in all that time no breath of scandal has touched it. Wild pupils, refractory pupils, disobedient pupils, I have had many—a pupil capable of stealing from her chambers at midnight to meet a young man in the grounds I have never had before. I pray the bon Dieu I never may have again.'

A color, like a tongue of flame, leaped for a moment into each of Cyrilla Hendrick's dark cheeks. Something in mademoiselle's simple, coldly-spoken words made her feel for the first time how shameful, how unmanly her escapade had been. Up to the present she had regarded it as rather a good joke—a thing to tell and laugh at. A sense of stinging shame filled her now—a sense of rage with it that these women who made her feel it. All that was worst in the girl arose—her eyes flashed, her handsome lips set themselves in sullen wrath.

'I thank Heaven, and I thank my very good friend, Miss Jones,' pursued mademoiselle, 'that this wicked thing has been brought to light so soon. So soon! Mon Dieu, who is to tell me it has not been done again and again.'

Once more the black eyes flashed, but with her eyes folded Cyrilla stood sullenly silent now. The worst had come; the very worst that could ever happen. Miss Dormer would hear all, she would be expelled from the school, expelled Miss Dormer's house—her last chance of being Miss Dormer's heiress was at an end. Ruin had come, absolute ruin, and nothing she could do or say would avert it now. The look that came over the face of the girl in unfeigned shame for the first time the strong capabilities of evil within her.

'What was the name of this young man you met, Miss Hendrick?' mademoiselle went on.

Cyrilla lifted her darkly angry eyes.

'I have given you an explanation of my conduct, mademoiselle, and you refuse to believe it. I decline to answer any further questions.'

'His name was Mr. Carew,' said Miss Jones, opening her lips for the time. 'Lieutenant Frederic Carew of the First Fusiliers.'

She gave the information with unctious, her exultant eyes upon Cyrilla's face. Once more the dark eyes lifted and looked at her a look not good to see.

'This is your hour, Miss Jones,' that darkly ominous glance said. 'Mine shall come.'

Mademoiselle Stephanie made a careful note of the name.

'That will do, Miss Jones. I will not detain you from your needful rest longer. Of course it is unnecessary to caution you to maintain strictest silence concerning this disgraceful discovery. Not for worlds must a whisper of the truth get abroad or reach the other young ladies. Miss Hendrick will remain in this room a close prisoner until she quits the pensionnat forever. She has been, not the pupil I best loved, but the pupil I have most been proud of. It gives me a pang, I cannot describe how great, to lose her, and thus, I am sorry for my own sake, and sorrier for hers. Miss Dormer told me to watch her closely, for she was not as other girls, and for three years I have. For three years she has offended in no way, and now, to end like this!'

'Then let my three years' good conduct plead for me, mademoiselle,' Cyrilla said boldly. 'It is my first offence—it shall be my last. Say nothing to any one; let me remain until Christmas—not three months now—and quit the school, as I have lived in it, with honor.'

But mademoiselle shook her head, sorrowfully, yet inexorably.

'Impossible, Miss Hendrick. You have been guilty of an offence for which expulsion can be the only punishment. How could I answer to Heaven and to mothers of my pupils for the guilt of allowing any one capable of such a crime to mingle with them and deprave them?'

'Guilt! deprave! you use strong language, mademoiselle. The gentleman I met has been all his life as my brother—I met him to hear news of my father, which I can hear in no other way. And that is a crime?'

'A crime against obedience, against all delicacy and maidenly modesty. But it has been done, and no talking will undo it. Go to your room, Miss Jones, and be silent. You, Miss Hendrick, shall remain with me. To-morrow I will write to your aunt, telling her all. Until her answer arrives you will remain under lock and key here.'

'And the sentence of the court is that you

be taken hence to the place of execution and that there you be hanged by the neck until you are dead.'

The grim words flashed through Cyrilla's mind. She had read them often, and wondered how the miserable, covering criminal in the dock feels. She could imagine now. She did not cower—outwardly she listened unmoved, with a hardihood that was to mademoiselle proof of deepest guilt; but inwardly—'all within was black as night.'

Miss Jones, with that covert smile still on her face, left the room. Mademoiselle Stephanie pulled out that transparent deception, a sofa-bed, amply furnished with pillows and quilts. Many pupils had slept out their week of solitary confinement on this prison bed, but never so deeply dived a criminal before.

'You will address and sleep here, Miss Hendrick,' mademoiselle said; 'but at first kneel down and ask pardon of le bon Dieu for the sin you have done.'

'I have committed no sin—I will thank you not to say so, mademoiselle,' Cyrilla flashed forth at last. 'Make mountains out of mole-hills if you like, but don't expect me to call them mountains too. Write to my aunt, expel me when you please, but meantime don't insult me.'

And then Cyrilla, flinging her clothes in a heap on the nearest chair, got into the sofa-bed and turned her face sullenly to the wall.

'There goes my last hope,' she thought, 'thanks to my horrible temper. I might have softened her to-morrow—now there isn't a chance. Like Francis the First, at Paris, 'all is lost but honor!'

CHAPTER IX.

'A TEMPEST IN A TEACUP.'

The dim firelight flickered and fell, one by one the cinders dropped softly through the bars, one by one the slow moments ticked off on the old-fashioned chimney-piece clock. Outside, the autumn wind whistled around the gables, and moaned and whistled through the pines and tamaracs. Broad bars of luminous moonlight stole in through the closed shutters, and lay broad and light on the faded carpet. Wiry and long drawn out, Mademoiselle Stephanie's small treble note told that a good conscience and a light supper are sordid in their tendency, and that she, at least, was 'over all the hills of life victorious.' And Cyrilla Hendrick lay broad awake, seeing and hearing it all, and thinking of the sudden crash that had toppled down her whole fairy fortune.

Impossible to sleep. She got up softly, wrapped a shawl around her, went to the window, opened one of the shutters, and sat moodily down. In sheets of yellow light, the moon-steeped fields and forests, the Rue St. Dominique wound along like a belt of silver ribbon, no living thing to be seen, no earthly sound to be heard beside the desolate scuffling of the October wind. And, sitting there, Cyrilla Hendrick looked her prospects straight in the face.

To-morrow morning Mademoiselle Stephanie would write a detailed account of her wrong-doing to Miss Dormer, giving Mr. Carew's name, as a matter of course. She could picture the rage, the amazement, the fury of the tyrannical old woman, as she glared over the letter. Other, and even more grievous faults, Miss Dormer might condone—this, never. She would be sent for in hot haste—she would be expelled the school—her lip curled scornfully at the thought, for that her bold resolute spirit cared nothing—and she would return in disgrace to her father's Lodge. And then the scene that would ensue! Miss Dormer glaring upon her with eyes of fire, and tongue like a two-edged sword. 'My niece Cyrilla comes of a bad stock' over and over again the old maid had hissed out her prediction; 'and mark my words, my niece Cyrilla will come to no good end.'

The end had come sooner than even Miss Dormer had expected.

Well, the first fury, the first tongue-lashing over, Aunt Dormer would