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Huntley & Palmers, Ltd., Reading, Eng.



A MYSTERIOUS QUEST.

CHAPTER XXI.

Threats and Entreaties.
"But this is being cold-blooded with a vengeance! What if, in the meanwhile, the present object of his attentions falls a victim to his mania?"

"She will not. This time he seems to be really affected by the charms of the lady he addresses. If he injures her, I am no judge of man or woman. Besides, remember there is a watch-dog at her side. Nothing can harm her or shall harm her, while I remain on the watch; of that you may be sure."

"His tone was convincing, and he showed so much feeling in his last words that Mr. Degraw looked at him in surprise.
"Ah, we fellows are not without heart," observed the man. "Give us half a chance, and we can show ourselves as considerate as the best."
"But you are not omnipresent, and peril may reach her in ways unforeseen and unexpected."
"I do not think so. I am both liked and trusted by my master. He confides every commission to me. I am his right hand, and he will make no move without me."
"Do you not flatter yourself?"
"No. He apes the great gentleman and does no work himself."
The artist sighed.
"Well," said he, "I will follow your wishes as far as to try and keep away from the house. If my anxieties make it possible, why, that is the fault of human nature, and must not count against me. You, on your side, must promise that you will not only watch over her, but give me the opportunity to assist you in doing so, if his actions become in any way threatening."
Miss Aspinwall, whom I will take into my confidence, must promise the same, and with these two surities before me, I may succeed in restraining my impetuosity."
"I am sure you will," was the reply. "And if you would go further, and remove to the hotel—"
"I will."
"Then I think matters must culminate very soon, and you will either

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of a suitor whose importunity is unwelcome. But—"O don't care those flowers!" he exclaimed, breaking into his own words as he saw her fingers spread lovingly over the blossoms fastened in her bosom. "Even if their giver were the man he seems, it would be an intolerable sight to me. As it is—"
"Sir, did you send me these flowers?"
"No."
She turned pale, then red, and raised her hand as if to tear the blossoms away.
"The words, the tone raised him to the seventh heaven of delight. Had he not been conscious that more than one pair of eyes were resting upon them, he would certainly have caught her by the hand and uttered a thousand and passionate protestations. But the hour was not propitious for love-making. Besides she looked restless, and panted with impatience.
"Mr. Degraw's man brought them here. I should have thought the donor's name would have appeared upon them."
"It was, but I only thought of you. They were lying on the window-seat, you see. Oh, Mr. Degraw, will you not leave me? Indeed, I am in earnest when I beg you to do so. Though I seem cheerful here and innocent as Paradise before the Fall, there is death in the air and you will be the object of it!"
"Signorina, were that death as near me now as you are, I would not move. That you remain is enough for me. How could you think I would go after I learned that the shadow of danger rested over these walls."
"But I am not menaced; oh, why will you not believe me! See I entreat."
She put her two hands together then stooped to wring them, for his look was immovable.
"Do not call the attention of the others," he remonstrated. "We do not wish to frighten them or even to enlighten them as to the importance of the matter we are discussing." Then as he saw her hands drop despairingly at her side, he added: "Put you alarm yourself unnecessarily if it is my safety you regard. I cannot think that I am in any real danger, nor can I think that you regard me as being so."
Her eyes flashed wildly and with an incomprehensible expression to his face.
"Why do you say that?" she demanded.
"Because you send me away. Because you encourage cowardice in a man who has not, to my knowledge, betrayed any great evidence of pusillanimity. If you thought this other Degraw as great a villain as your words imply, you would be asking for the protection of the police instead of trying to beguile him from his intentions by the frankest and most confiding of smiles."
"You do not understand," she panted. "I am in a net I must go on in my own way. If you love me you will trust me. Mr. Degraw, do trust me. It will be my salvation and yours."
"Mysterious!" he ejaculated.
She seemed to lose heart.
"And you will not go?" she entreated, her breast heaving, her eyes wandering, her form swaying to and fro.
He felt like crying "yes," just to calm her, but he thought her anxiety exaggerated, her emotion that he ought to restrain.
"You are moved," said he, "by what Mr. Degraw's man has told you."
She shrank back. A look of inconceivable terror appeared in her eyes.
"Mr. Degraw's man?" she repeated.
"Yes, I saw him talking to you yesterday. He has been talking to me since. I know just what we have to fear."
Her head fell; she stood a picture of abstraction before his eyes.
He, charmed by her beauty, hesitated to break the spell under which she had fallen. What a dream it was to be standing here in sight of this lovely form and the sweet down-cast face whose charm was ever new and ever captivating to him! What other face or form could ever compare with it in his eyes, and where, if he lost

Sidewalk Sketches.

By H. L. RANN.

THE DIARY.

The diary is something which a man reads once in after years and then tries to forget. It is the most passionate production in all literature, but is not usually long-winded, as it starts off January 1st with a full page of heart throbs and dies away on February 15th with a two-line comment on the weather. One of the most humiliating and flesh-creeping experiences in the world is to have a wife with no great amount of humour in her system read out loud to the children the diary her husband kept while he was in the full flush of courtship. If this won't make a hard-hearted business man feel like crawling under the center table and chewing the corners of the piano, nothing will. As usually compiled, the diary of a sixteen year old boy makes an unexpurgated edition of Balzac look as tame as a meek husband in the corset department. It is a tale of love which frequently lasts as long as two weeks, thrilling adventures by land and sea, if the creek is running, and blood-curdling threats directed against the teacher of the Eighth grade. Marriage usually slows up the diary fever to quite an extent, and then old diaries which never got past the fides of March are put to such sordid uses as checking up the butcher and keeping track of the milk tickets. Female diaries are never used to conceal thought, being generally very full and explicit, particularly as to what he said and how long it took him to say it. The only thing that impels a man to keep a diary after he is forty years of age is the harrowing fear that some other member of the family may find it. It is a pleasant and instructive habit, however, and is useful as showing an improvement in spelling.

her, could he hope to look for emboldened love and poetry again? No, where. Yet, as the word thrilled through his consciousness, he found himself looking down and behind him to the open door where in his lute he saw Miss Aspinwall standing, with her gaze fixed on his and an insupportable smile on her lips! Ah, she is lovely, too, and he found himself asking, as many a man had done before, why his heart should have yielded itself to one whose caprices were a constant torture to him; and not to the noble nature, open mind and serene beauty of this finest specimen of her sex. There was no answer, and with a sigh he looked back only to hear the signorina murmur:
"And what did Mr. Degraw's man say to you?"
"Only what should relieve your mind," was his answer. "He is—well, he is not our enemy, and nothing can occur to us, without his knowledge."
Her hand, which lay on the open balustrade, tapped the wood impatiently.
To be continued.

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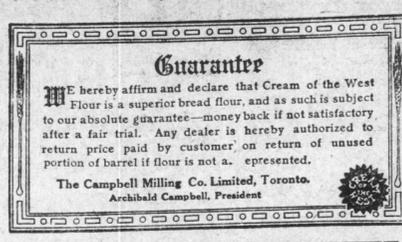
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