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HAATHORNDEN

A STORY OF EVERY DAY LIFE

BY MRS. CLARA M. THOMPSON

CHAPTER XII

CAPTAIN MARTEN COMES HOME, AND WHAT FOLLOWED

"Thank heaven! Captain Marten's ship is in the harbor," exclaimed Edward Hartland, as he came into dinner, addressing his father, who had just returned from his first drive with Rosine since her illness; "the honest old sailor will put an end to the going on of Laura with Le Compte; she is positively the town's talk."

"Silly moth," replied the Colonel, "she will burn her wings this time; wont she?"

"I hope so!" said the Doctor impatiently, looking at Rosine. "She has given so many heartaches, it is a pity she should not know how good it feels, if indeed she has any heart to ache."

"It appears to me, Ned, you excite yourself very unnecessarily about Laura Marten," remarked Mrs. Hartland. "What do you care about her flirtations?"

"Because I have a mother," he replied gravely, "and a sister," he added, bowing cordially to Rosine. "I cannot bear that any of their sex, especially one who has, as we may say, been one of our circle, should be found guilty of such disgraceful conduct."

"But would she marry this Le Compte," inquired the Colonel, "even supposing marriage to be his object?"

"Marry the devil!" exclaimed his son, testily; "a pleasing prospect of repose must a woman have as the wife of such a man, with his amours and liaisons all over the country. No, he'll never marry willingly. Captain Marten is a downright honest man, and hates philandering. I should not wonder if Miss Laura were put under bonds to keep the peace."

"I haven't seen Laura for more than a week," said Rosine, as they arose from the table, making an effort toward a conversation with Dr. Hartland, which she had never been able to bring about since her illness.

"It would have been better if you had never seen her," replied he, in a sharp angry tone, turning away to the window.

"Ned," said the Colonel, in a voice of authority, "why do you speak so to Rosine? See, you have brought us tears to her eyes. I have noticed your ill-natured way of speaking to her of late. I'll not have it."

"Rosine knows the reason very well," replied the Doctor, taking no notice of his father's anger by word, but leaving the room immediately.

"Don't mind him, darling," said the Colonel, caressingly; he is a crabbed fellow—a terrible early disappointment made him so."

The tears dropped upon the work which she had taken up. "He shall not bring his moroseness to trouble you," he added, rising, "and I'll tell him so."

"O, please don't speak to him about it," said Rosine, drawing Colonel Hartland down by her side. "It is something in connection with Laura that makes him angry with me."

"He has no right to be angry with you on any account. I'll not have such ungentlemanly conduct in my house."

"Please don't speak to him about it, father," she pleaded, using the paternal title as a sure passport to his heart. "It will pass over soon, and he will be as kind as ever."

ful guidance, and given the required promise that the intimate friendship should be given up; and now when she was ready to yield, though Laura was as dear to her as ever. Providence opened the way that made the effort she had dreaded for so many weeks comparatively easy. Once bring the rebellious will into a state of submission to know duty, and myriads of obstacles that before seemed insurmountable, take flight directly. She told Laura decidedly that she could no longer be bound by the secret; she had sinned by her share in it, lost the Doctor's friendship, and was suspected of double-dealing, and she avowed her intention, if an opportunity offered, of telling what she knew; she thought it would be better for Laura as well as herself. Her friend was very angry, accused her of treachery and meanness, said it was like all Catholic priests, interfering between friends. Rosine in her turn, incensed by the reflection on Father Roberts, reprimanded, charging Laura with using her as an instrument to her own ends, and in a moment of time the chain of friendship was ruptured between the two.

The after-reflections of Rosine were not pleasant; they were a mingling of relief that a duty was done, and sore grief at the way in which it was accomplished. The consciousness of the wrong she had done both herself and Laura, in being the repository of her secret, depended when she felt herself relieved of the obligation, and she determined no long time should elapse before she would unburden her mind to Dr. Hartland or the Colonel. She sat in the drawing-room alone the evening after Laura's departure. Colonel Hartland and his lady were out, and the Doctor, who since her convalescence had never sought her society, had gone to the library. The impression came upon her that now was her time, and coming where Dr. Hartland was smoking, his head thrown back, his feet in a chair, and his eyes shut, she said in her sweetest tones a little tremulous, "Brother Ned, may I speak with you?"

He raised himself and turned upon her one of his penetrating glances. "I have waited for you many days, Rosine," was his reply.

"But you did not give me an opportunity," she said, seating herself on a footstool by his side. "You have been offended with me, and never told me why."

"Rosine," he replied sharply, turning away from her as he spoke, "you know very well the cause of my displeasure—I should say my disappointment. I thought when I met you there was one of your sex, who would not and could not deceive; but when you lent yourself a tool to Laura Marten's machinations, my confidence in you was shaken."

"Edward," she said, hiding her face in her hands, "I have done very wrong, but you are unjust to me. If I was a tool for Laura, it was an unwilling one, and I have thrown off the yoke. I hope it may be a lesson to me."

The Doctor laid by his cigar, and turning about again, he asked, "Rosa, do Laura Marten and Aleck correspond through you?"

"Yes, I knew I ought not to make a secret of it; his letters came enclosed in mine, but they arranged it without my consent, or even knowledge. But that is not all," she continued, mustering courage from his more kindly manner, "there is a greater secret which I obtained and kept very unwillingly; it has burnt in my heart ever since it reached there, there are engaged to be married."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the brother, starting to his feet, almost overturning Rosine in his excitement. "Engaged! Laura Marten engaged to Aleck! Her heart is blacker than I thought. But on the whole, it was fortunate perhaps that it was not a public engagement; after her course with Le Compte all other promises must be at an end, unless a man's a fool! But now I think of it, Rosine, Aleck assured me only a day or two before he sailed that he had no intention of marrying this woman."

"She wears a betrothal ring with their initials, and the motto, 'Omnia vincit amor.'"

"Fools!" cried he impatiently. "Aleck will be charmed with my last epistle, in which I described the campaign of his affianced with this soaps grace Le Compte. It will be a bitter pill if he cares for the worthless girl; but I'll risk their hearts," he added, lighting a fresh cigar, "such hearts as Laura's might love on continually, 'the object still changing, the sympathy one,' to end of the chapter, without fear of cracking, much less of breaking. Do you call that love, Rosine?"

"It doesn't seem like it to me," she replied timidly.

"I hope it never will, but at your age you can hardly be expected to know much about it. But never have a secret of this kind," he added, laying his hand on her head, "young as you are, you are old enough to know that if this engagement had been made public in the beginning, Laura could not have gone on as she has; and I believe it was her plan to keep it secret, that she might flirt to her heart's content during Aleck's absence. Don't you see, my little one, that she was acting a lie?"

"I do, I did see it," she replied earnestly. "It made me wretched, and I expostulated with her; indeed, I have hardly had a light heart since I have known it; her conduct seemed so wicked, it troubled me constantly to know that I was a party, in a way, to her untruthfulness."

"This trouble helped to make you ill, and retarded your recovery. Rosa, you will be better, now you have told it. Never hear such another burden while I am in the land of the living. I shall tell Captain Marten of this, that he may keep a strict watch over his dutiful daughter, unless she finishes the plot by running off with Le Compte."

Captain Marten was exasperated beyond measure when Dr. Hartland made known to him the secret of Laura's engagement. He cursed and swore roundly in true sailor fashion; said, "if she hadn't more sense than to quit a nice young naval officer for this upstart adventurer, she deserved to be shut in a convent for the rest of her natural life;" and laid his commands with more force than ever upon the sister under whose care he had placed his daughter, not to suffer the girl to go out without herself for company.

In this home of her aunt's Laura had only a few months before been wooed by Lieutenant Hartland, and the associations of the present with the past made her reflections anything but agreeable. She was completely caught in the net which he had spread for her, and she did not care for Le Compte, and she said truly, and yet she could not rid herself of him. She had never believed him more serious in the flirtation than herself; he knew her engagement and correspondence, but he still pursued her with his attention in a way that seemed to take it for granted that she was ready for his company, and the first feeling of vexation with his presumption, scattered by his honeyed flattery, she found herself powerless to resist his will. She remembered how Dr. Hartland had spoken of this will, which she found so powerful, so irresistible—and she was rather relieved when a third, in the person of her father, ordered her away from her enchantment.

Mrs. Norris, the mistress of the fine estate to which Laura was banished, was a weak-minded person, unfitted to control and scarcely able to influence one with Laura's strong points of character. She had been delighted with the little episode in her usually monotonous life, which had brought her niece and the Lieutenant to her house, and though she scolded her for her imprudence, when the Captain entered into the details of her conduct with Le Compte, her eager questioning about the affair, when Laura was alone with her, manifested the truth that she, after all, did not see wherein her niece was so very much to blame.

Captain Marten was called away by the duties of his office, but he reiterated again and again his charges both to his sister and daughter. It was not long before Laura, with her attractive exterior, drew about her the young people of the neighborhood, and before many weeks she was engaged in a round of picnics, fishing parties, and moonlight rides, which drove Le Compte quite out of her mind. A set of tableaux were to come off, in which she was much interested, expecting to take part in the living picture; but an sudden and severe cold, for which she was obliged to lay by for a week, prevented her assisting, except as a spectator; even that was imprudent, as the physician had forbidden her leaving the house. Many young people from town were to assist in the exhibition, and she did not resist the temptation to be present.

"Ah, dear," said Mrs. Norris, in the second rising of the curtains for the striking piece, the Sultan and Sultana. "If you were only in the place of that fair-haired, petite girl!"

"But, Aunt," Laura replied, "we will imagine her to have been a Circassian slave; they are small and white."

As she spoke, the next scene was announced, "The Game of Life." Laura turned a look towards the stage and uttered a faint cry, for in the person of the arch-adversary represented therein she recognized Le Compte. She pleaded faintness to her aunt, and almost unobserved she left the company and stepped to the veranda. Fear, dread, attraction, interest, and repulsion, mingled in Laura's mind as she wandered down the pine walk to the broad river, which lay in the clear moonlight like a thing of life. She forgot her indisposition, her position, everything but the dreaded presence. At the last terrace, before reaching the stream, she paused; her quick ear caught the sound of a step behind her, her senses became awake, the powerful mind awoke—yes, her unpraying heart uttered one petition for help, and summoning all that remained of her naturally strong resolution, she turned suddenly upon Le Compte.

"You should not have come here," she said, eagerly; "there has been enough of this; we must part."

"You speak *ma chere*, as if it were an easy thing to part," was the reply, in a low, melodious but decided tone; "never, too—it may be for you, but for me, after what has passed, impossible."

Laura sunk into a garden chair, while he poured into his tale of love in no measured words, assuring her in terms that scorched her very soul, that he was in earnest, that a union she had from the first been his intention; this he asserted on his honor.

"It can never be, Le Compte," replied Laura; "you know it can never be. There are reasons." "Her voice seemed to come from a sepulchre, and she had not power to close the sentence.

"Love conquers all obstacles," he said gently, yet firmly.

"But I cannot obliterate former vows said promises," sobbed Laura, almost incoherently.

"It does on my part, it may on yours; only say the word, and you are mine—mine forever!"

"Never! I will not!" cried she, resolutely, withdrawing her hand from his, and rising from her seat, she whispered in his ear.

The words must have been of dreadful import, and they cut deep, for they caused him to stamp his foot wrathfully, and brought a terrible oath to his lips; but the excitement was but momentary, his smooth, clear, polished voice was heard again, fearfully distinct in the ears of his trembling victim, as he said, "This need be no barrier to our happiness; you must fly with me; there is no time like the present; dancing has commenced at the house, many hours must elapse before we are missed, the silver moon smiles on our project, I will arrange the way."

But he spoke to closed ears. "Led captive at his will," had been brought to Laura's mind as she realized the awful nature of his proposals, backed as she knew by a will which she had learned to dread. Nature gave way, and she fell senseless at his feet, as suddenly as if she had been smitten by his hand. Le Compte, for the first time in his life of intrigue, was baffled. Elopement had been his design ultimately, but his arrangements were not fully completed; with Laura yielding to his will, as he had anticipated after a brief struggle, he could easily make a way on the spur of the moment, but with Laura in a fainting fit, it was quite a difficult matter. He carried her to the water and tried all the means in his power to restore her, unsuccessfully. He saw at length with the eye of a physician that the trouble was more than a mere faintness, so bending over her as she lay ghastly in the white moonlight, he muttered a fierce curse if she thwarted him, and returning to the house, the rumor was soon spread through the hall by the servants, that Miss Marten had stepped out for air, and fainted in the pine walk.

The house was aroused, and Laura was conveyed to her aunt's, still unconscious, where she wandered for weeks amid the mazes of a brain fever.

TO BE CONTINUED

OUR LADY OF VICTORY

Oliver Rowan's profession was that of the law but his friends, were fond of saying that his avocations, literature and philanthropy, were really more to his taste. They sometimes went so far as to declare that he practised in order to find material for his stories and objects for his altruism.

The winter of 1917-18 had given him abundant opportunity for his benevolence. What with the coal famine and the high price of food, he spent many hours sending baskets of provisions to his pensioners and securing coal for them. His bill at the drug store would have indicated that he was a victim to several ailments, but he did not know that the drugs were ordered for sick families of the poor. Nor was he content with mere impersonal kindness. He was on friendly terms with his beneficiaries and visited them frequently.

Being anxious about elderly Mrs. Flynn, one cold evening he went down to her cottage and found her grateful for a recent load of coal which had decidedly helped to ward off from her household the pneumonia and other dread diseases that preyed so fast and furiously on the poor in her neighborhood. After chatting with her awhile, Oliver rose to go.

"Sure and it's yours! I'm always glad to see," she told him. "Aside from your goodness to the lot of us here, it's the entertainin' visitor you are!"

"Now, Mrs. Flynn," protested the guest, "how many times did you tell me you had kissed the Blarney Stone?"

"The Blarney Stone, is it? Now indeed it's the truth I'm tellin' you, and was it a younger and handsomer woman was passin' you the compliment, it's not so ready you would be to turn it off as flattery. Faith indeed, Mr. Oliver, what at all we'd have done without you this winter, I don't know. How thankful to you we are, we can never be done sayin'!"

With that the old woman put her hand into her pocket for a handkerchief to mop her eyes. Taking it out, she drew forth also a small package.

"Bless your heart," said she, "I wonder now if you would be acceptin' a small present?" And she put into his hand a tiny package.

"Just try me!" answered Mr. Rowan, knowing it would not be likely to embarrass him to receive anything the dear woman had contrived to get for him. Opening the package, he discovered a little medal of Our Lady of Victory.

"It's but a second hand affair, at that," said Mrs. Flynn. "That is to say, it was given to me by someone else—but he's dead now, as saintly a man as you could be findin' in a day's walk, God rest his soul. Father Rogey it was, and he brought me the medal from the Old Country, but there's none of my own so welcome to it as yourself. And even though it's the Protestant you are, you're too fine a gentleman to be objectin' to receiving it, and I'm wishin' it's herself, the Mother of Our Lord, will be blessing you and bringin' you some fine young lady for a wife some day. It's Our Lady of Victory, you see. The medal's in honor of her, and she should be bringin' you what you want the most."

"Well, indeed now this is most kind of you, Mrs. Flynn, and I shall treasure your gift all the more because I know you must have prized it yourself. I'll keep it here in my vest pocket—close at hand, you see, when I need anything."

"Do that!" answered Mrs. Flynn heartily. "And sure it wouldn't hurt you to be sayin' a prayer to her, Our Blessed Lady, would it now, if you did want anything very much?"

Oliver was touched almost to tears himself by his old friend's tenderness and simple piety. He answered cordially: "It couldn't possibly hurt even such a heretic as you must think me, Mrs. Flynn, and I'll keep it, and remember what you suggest in my hour of need. By the way, when they wake in the morning, tell Bobbie and Nellie to see if they can possibly find anywhere on this table any proof that Fairy Silver Fingers has been here through the night." When Mrs. Flynn had turned away a moment Oliver had slipped under an old candlestick all the change he had with him, a few dimes and nickles, a game he and the children knew very well by this time.

"Ah now, Mr. Oliver, it's too good to us you are. You spoil the young ones. But you do the same for their grandmother—God bless you!" she added as he went forth into the night.

Oliver Rowan took his way through the humble streets which led from Mrs. Flynn's home to the handsome avenues nearer his own dwelling, he was deeply wrapped in thought. Mrs. Flynn had told him about a nephew of hers now out of work, and about a neighbor who needed assistance. These affairs and a legal angle he had hoped to solve in court on the morrow were absorbing his mind as he walked along.

So concentrated was he that it was no wonder that a nervous shock to him suddenly accosted in a dark, poor street by a rather disreputable looking man who halted him with the words:

"I'm not a desperado, but I may be soon. Give me some money! You can, so don't pretend you can't. I need what you have more than you do. Come on, give me all your small change and any decent bill you have. Don't stop about it, I'm in a fierce hurry."

The whole thing was so sudden, the man's mood so dictatorial, his need so obvious, and his demand so free from threat or violence, that Oliver Rowan did not at the moment think of doing anything, but acceding to so positive a request. He began going through his pockets. He soon remembered that in dressing he had left his bill case in his other suit. He went through all his pockets without finding anything resembling change but he arrived at his vest pocket, where a small silver piece, a five-cent piece, and a dime. Promptly he drew it forth, saying amiably:

"This honestly, seems to be all I have about me."

The man snatched at it, and as he gained possession of it Oliver remembered—he had parted with "Our Lady of Victory," with his friend's recent gift to him.

"Here," he called out to the man who had turned on his heel, "that's no good to you—it's not money. Give it back, please." In another moment he would have added in his usual benevolent fashion, "Come along and I'll get you a meal," and doubtless more help would have followed. But the man had dashed off with the medal, calling back as he turned down the cross-street. "What better can I have after all?"

Oliver started to follow him, but it would have meant a running pursuit. If the man was satisfied, it was quixotic to go flying after him. And yet Oliver felt a distinct sense of loss in thus having his medal carried off. It had touched his fancy. The quaintness and unexpectedness of Mrs. Flynn's presentation and the poetry and beauty of the name—Our Lady of Victory—had appealed to him. Immediately he had taken pleasure in possessing the medal as a kind of precious talisman. Even if his Presbyterian heart could not give it all the deep reverence dear Mrs. Flynn had bestowed upon it, Oliver had the sharp sense of having parted with a treasure. Meanwhile, he was also in rather a tense state of excitement over this recent episode.

"My cronies will never believe it, they will swear I made the whole thing up. Now I wonder what's become of that fellow. I can surely make a good story of what may have become of him! I'd take a sprint after him if I weren't so tired. Well, good luck to the poor devil. I guess Mrs. Flynn would say, 'May Our Lady of Victory help him.' Well, then, may she indeed, for he was in desperate need, the queer chap—the queerest chap, I ever saw—certainly a Catholic, too, of some sort, from the way he seemed satisfied. And I must be as honest looking as some of the fellows say, considering that he took me at my word about not having any money with me. I thought they always tried for your watch, Glory! What a story I can hatch out of it."

While Oliver Rowan's imagination was thus engaged with his late acquaintance, this singular individual had hastened onward with no romantic intention whatsoever but with an extremely commonplace and prosaic desire—that of satisfying his ravenous hunger. At the first place

that promised to assuage the same, he stopped. Passing to the counter of a combined cafe and delicatessen shop, he said to the proprietor:

"Give me two sandwiches and something to wash 'em down. Coffee will do. Give me the sandwiches right off."

The proprietor, Tim Doolan, cast a shrewd glance at his customer—obviously a tramp, most obviously a starved one. Forthwith Tim handed over two sandwiches notable for length, breadth, and thickness. A cup of coffee was soon likewise set in front of the man. The food made a rapid disappearance. In his passage through the night the man seemed destined to leave the impression of swiftness. As soon as he had finished his repast he threw down upon the counter four pennies and something silver.

"It's all I've got! I was bound to have food—without stealin'. The silver piece is worth something, I reckon. Anyhow, it may bring you luck."

With that he dashed from the store. It was the sort of conduct that elsewhere might have started a commotion, pursuit, the police, a general outcry and disturbance of the neighborhood. But as far as was consistent with his dignity as a merchant, and with his desire not to be too far imposed upon, Tim Doolan prided himself on keeping the peace. Moreover, this little piece of business was accomplished so quickly that he was some moments recovering from his surprise.

"Well, I'm blessed if that's not the coolest trick that's been played on me in a long time! Two first-class sandwiches and a ten cent cup of coffee, and I get for it four pennies and a holy medal! May the Saints be blessed if ever I seen their images used this way before!"

He scrutinized the medal more closely, and exclaimed:

"If it's not the Blessed Virgin, herself! And how does she like such a trick, I wonder? I should have made the fellow show his money before he was let go—but he was that starved looking I had to face to ask him, that's the truth. I'm not so fooled after all, for I did not think he had much change in these clothes of his. But what beats me is his impudence, so free and easy, putting the coppers and the medal down as though it was paying in full, and wishin' me luck. It beats all!"

As he soliloquized, Tim pulled out his change-drawer to put away the pennies.

"I've a notion to see if the ragged man's wish is good for anything," he said to himself. "I'll just be leaving the Blessed Virgin in charge of the cash box for a while. With times so hard and everything so high, it's help from Heaven we'll have to be getting or falling into bankruptcy—that's certain." Thereupon the medal was carefully laid among the pennies.

As the evening passed the pennies began disappearing. The penny worth increase on postage and general commodities through the year had brought the lowly copper cent into new importance, keeping the pennies circulating rapidly. In half an hour only a few companions of the silver medal. Various customers had followed the mysterious and impudent tramp, and now small Ned Morrison entered the shop, sent by his sister Mary to buy a few necessities for breakfast. His purchases amounted to forty-six cents and he handed Tim a fifty-cent piece. Tim went to the cash box—and found only three pennies. In Tim, however, there was an ever resourceful spirit and an inexhaustible element of mischief. He looked at the pennies and the bright silver medal a moment; he had a genuine respect for all objects of reverence, but he had an irresistible desire to tease cheery, sharpwitted Mary Morrison.

"I'll just send her the Blessed Virgin—without any offense to Our Lady. Maybe she'll bring a blessing to Mary Morrison's pocketbook. Sure, trade's been brisk here this evening since the medal's been restin' in the cash box!"

"Turning to Ned, Tim said: 'Tell Mary I'm short of change and I'm just sending her a bit of silver that was passed in to me this evening. Be sure and give it to her—don't be keepin' it yourself.'"

"I won't," answered Ned, adding with youthful irrelevance. "Tom Morgan's at our house—he's goin' to war right away."

"Is he indeed?" said Ned as he went out of the shop.

"It's lonely Mary will be," thought Tim Doolan. "It's a pity the pair of them can't marry, though Mary'll not be willing to go to the altar with anybody till her mother's well again, and the children are up a little more from under her feet. Well, Tom's a strong lad and he'll be coming back if he gets a half a chance from the bombs and submarines and poison-gases."

Ned had been instructed to put the groceries upon the kitchen table and the change upon Mary's dresser. There Mary found the pennies and the medal when she went upstairs after bidding goodnight to her dear Tom who in a few days would go forth to "war and arms." Ned had carefully piled the three pennies one upon the other and "Our Lady of Victory" on top of all. It captured Mary's glance as she walked over to her dresser and she saw at once that it was somewhat finer and heavier than other medals of its type, having a good minting and a clearly cut image and inscription.

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