

Maddolena's Story

AND
The Cameo Bracelet.

CHAPTER XV.

"Of what sum are you speaking?" Bessie inquired.

"I must not be asked. Is it a profound secret," answered Maddolena, mysteriously. "If Antonio were not a youth whose notions of right and wrong are marvelous, the coins of the marchese would now be clinking in this pocket of mine. Oh! but I am proud of Tonio for being brave enough to refuse them; yet it is hard, is it not, that we should be the losers of his virtuous scruples?"

Still at fault, Bessie glanced at Trixie for an explanation, and found the latter paler and more visibly affected than before. But still she only said, aloud:

"Wait, my friend. Maddolena ought to be well aware that she may trust both you and I. She need not object to your knowing that her lover was with her this afternoon, and has confided to her that a large sum of money has been offered to him by a person of the highest rank, in consideration of a great and illegal service he was to render him."

"The gold was put into Antonio's palm," added Maddolena, forgetting her reluctance to reveal the secret in her mingled astonishment and admiration at her lover's heroism—"put into his palm—think of that, signorina—and yet he had the courage to refuse it to say, 'Never will I sell my hands with the price of blood! I am poor, but I am no assassin!'"

And the Italian girl's dark orbs dilated, and her voice rose to tragic declamation.

"Blood!" faintly repeated the impressionable Bessie.

"Yes," answered Trixie, in tones tremulous with horror. "There is every reason to fear that the service for which this gentleman would have paid so liberally was an assassination."

"But—but the young man you call Antonio—"

"Very properly refused to entertain the disgraceful—the detestable proposal!"

"Was it not a brave deed?" sighed Maddolena. "He had never seen so much gold before. Who can help thinking of what it would have done. The marchese must have the wicked heart to tempt him in this way a poor youth who has nothing but his daily earnings in the gardens of his master."

"The marchese!" repeated Bessie. "Then you know the name of the heartless nobleman who had been tempting your betrothed to this dreadful deed?"

"Know it? Yes. But I must not

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repeat it, lest Antonio be angry with me. If you did but know how unwilling he was to answer my questions at all, lest I should be indiscreet enough to breathe a word before the baroness!"

"Why should your tale affect Madam Caspares?" asked Bessie, gleaning from Trixie's face, as well as Maddolena's revelations, that there was something else to be revealed.

"Oh, then, how can I know?" stammered the girl, confusedly. "The baroness is quick-tongued and quick-tempered, and might blazon the tale that I have been commanded to hide in my own bosom—that is all."

"It was at this point she stopped before," murmured Trixie, in English. "But she knows more. I am positive of it; and I—I tremble so. I cannot command either my tongue or my thoughts to extract the truth from her as I yearn to do!"

"If this nobleman has failed to accomplish his evil designs, what signifies," Bessie demanded.

"But has he?" her companion retorted. "Would he lay them aside because the first instrument he chose refused his offers? Are there not many in this city who would be easily won over by the sight of the gold he displays?"

This was a new and alarming view of the affair; and, after a moment's thought, Bessie proceeded to interrogate the Italian girl more closely.

"Are you certain that Antonio was not jesting with you? How can we believe that in these peaceful times a

man of birth and education would plot so terrible a crime?"

Maddolena shrugged her shoulders at the question. She did not regard the affair in precisely the same light.

"If one man thwarts another, is it not the most natural thing in the world to seek revenge? If Bertha or Nina stole my betrothed from me, do you think I would sit down and forgive them?"

"Of what country is the unfortunate whose life has been menaced?"

The girl was about to answer; but some thought that flashed into her mind led her to compress her lips, and ask, evasively, how she was to answer this.

"But you have heard what cause of offense he has given this vindictive marchese?"

"Perhaps yes—perhaps no; perhaps all the world guessed this already."

And then Maddolena spread out both her hands with an expressive gesture, and could no longer resist her desire to tell all she had gleaned from her lover.

"What should make the marchese so furious but his being forestalled in the favor of the lady he loves? Ah! but she must be as false as she is fair, for does not every one know that his excellency has been at her feet all these long weeks? Yet no sooner comes this English miorb back to Rome, but la bella donna turns upon him such cold and disdainful looks that every one either pities or laughs at him."

"Is the lady of whom you speak English also?" asked Trixie, breathlessly.

"Of a surety she is. A signora of one's own country would behave with more sense and circumspection. There are no such scandals connected with my countrywomen as this Lady Camilla has occasioned."

At the sound of this name Trixie helplessly wilted down on her knees, clinging for support to her companion, who was almost equally agitated. Both comprehended now why Antonio had enjoined silence on his gossiping betrothed. The gentleman whose life his jealous rival had been seeking was Sir Charles Ormsby, and their terrified ejaculations soon revealed to Maddolena that her secret was a secret no longer.

The little more she had to tell was now extorted from her by mingled bribes and entreaties. It was simply this: That Antonio was to have accompanied the marchese to the Colosseum, where the latter had ascertained that the sickle balle intended to meet her more favored admirer; and at a given signal, his hired tool was to fire at the baronet and kill him by her side. It was the scheme of a madman, but in the confusion that would be sure to follow the report of the pistol, the actual perpetrator of the deed would have little difficulty in making his escape; while the rank and wealth of the wretched man who instigated his criminal would enable him to avert suspicion, if it fell upon him; which was doubtful.

For a few minutes the young girls clung to each other overwhelmed by a miserable feeling of their own helplessness to avert this crime. But this soon gave place to other thoughts. It might not be too late to save Sir Charles. And for once both were of one mind; both were eager to effect his rescue from the deadly peril that threatened him.

"Perhaps we are too late—the crime may have been already committed!" muttered the shuddering Bessie, as she wrapped around her the shawl the more active Trixie had fetched with her own. "Or if we succeed in reaching the Colosseum before the shot is fired, how can we tell Sir Charles where the assassin is lurking?"

"Can we stay quietly here and leave him to his fate?" asked Trixie, indignantly, as she covered her pallid face with a veil thick enough to hide the horror that distorted it.

"No—no; even if I hated him I could not do that!" was the reply; and, turning deaf ears to Maddolena's entreaties that they would do nothing that might injure or betray her, the young girls hurried from the palazzo and took the direction of the Colosseum, though still without having the faintest idea how they were to foil the schemes of the revengeful marchese.

(To be continued.)

There was a young girl named Minnie By nature fearfully skiny, She grafted a pad To each bone she had, And to-day she's as plump as a guinea

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TEMPTATIONS.

"I will save my weekly wages," I resolved, on New Year's Day. "In the bank's vaults and cages I will store my wealth away; I won't go by rapid stages, down the spend-thrift's idle way." It is good indeed to sever ties that bind us to a vice, and I'll save the scale forever; the merchants make no much less; but the merchants make an endeavor to relieve me of the price. Everyone has something nifty he would see me cheap as dirt; one is asking seven-fifty for a fourteen-dollar shirt; ah, it's painful to be thrifty, and good resolutions hurt. And the hatter cries, "Dogsone it! What a Kelly shades your brow! There are streaks of mildew on it, you should feed it to the cow; buy yourself a modern bonnet you can get a bargain now." And the man who deals in buses views with scorn my ancient van; "You class up with linhora cusses when you drive that punk sedan; take it round to Junkman Gus's—buy a new one, spick and span." Thus wherever I may wander there are men with things to sell, and they trail me here and yonder, and they argue and they yell; they're determined I shall squander coin for which I've toiled so well. Oh the dealers all beset me for the scale; I fail to blow, and they worry me and fret me as they chase me through the snow, and some say I fear they'll get me, when I'm tired of saying "No!"

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THE EASIEST THING IN THE WORLD. They think they are a r e r i g h t f u l l y clever. "They" are the little group of sophisticates in every neighborhood in every club in every society of any sort who make a specialty of making fun of the rest. They have no reason to think they are clever. What they are doing is the easiest thing in the world.

The Necessary Equipment. All you need to be a successful fun maker is plenty of malice, an indifference to anyone's feelings, a scorn for people who take anything seriously, an entire willingness to sacrifice any of your friends on the altar, and of course, some sense of humor. But don't flatter yourself that the sense of humor is the chief ingredient of your success, or that it is because you have so much more of it than those who don't make a practise of making fun of everyone and of every thing, that people are afraid of your tongue. It isn't because you have more humor, but because you have less of other qualities—restraint, kindness, sense of proportion, loyalty.

The best real humorist I know seldom says cutting things about people. "It's too easy," he says, "and too unkind. I will admit I think a lot of things I could say but I'm more careful about saying them every year. What's the use? It's nothing to be proud of, and when you hurt people it's something to be ashamed of."

We Like The Knock-But Not The Knocker. A knock always amuses everyone. There's an unregenerate part of us that makes us willing to hear someone knocked even if we don't do the knocking. I suppose in some way it bolsters up that sense of superiority we all have a desire to feel, maximizes our ego, as the psychologists like to call it. But I don't think we have any respect for the knocker. Even the stupidest of us sense that he is going to do it to us the minute he gets a chance. I have people of this sort among my friends (oh yes, they may have other qualities that make them worth having as friends) and often after I have been with them I can look back and see just what thoughtless act, just what careless word of mine, they will use to make a Roman holiday for someone else. And more than once echoes have come back to me which justified my suspicions.

How To Spike Their Guns. A good way to partly spike their guns is to let them know you do understand them. I know a clever student of human nature who, on hearing one of the gun makers give an imitation of a friend of his, started him by saying: "What's good, isn't it? Do you know what I'd like? I wish you'd give your imitation of me. I'll bet it's worth seeing."

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