

## Won By Devotion

— BY —

Mary A. Fleming

"Dear little soul!" he thought, "dear little, innocent warm-hearted Vera! How much younger she is than most girls of her age—how true and clear she sings! What a noble, loving generous woman she will make in five or six years! And how little is the fear of Mrs. Grundy before her eyes! What will Eleanor—what will Mrs. Carlton think and say of this escapade?"

Miss Carlton's refusal had not altogether, it will be perceived, broken the heart of Captain French. He felt considerably better than before the ordeal—it is not certainty, but suspense that kills—Eleanor, conjugal bliss—Carlton vs. Englehart and the rest of these bon camarades—new discoveries, botanical and mineral in Honduras—the die was cast between—it was to be the latter, and in his secret heart he rejoiced.

Twelve by the clock of St. Ann's. Vera was still by the window, but her croon had ceased, she was growing sleepy, and a trifle chilly. After all, a person might as well have a sleep—moonlight and sea effects would keep. So yawning very much, she took her place on the lounge, and in five minutes was as fast as a church.

Morning! She opened her eyes, as the first eastern beam shot pink and golden into the room. The window stood wide open, and by it, smoking placidly, sat Captain Dick.

"Is it tomorrow?" she asked, rising on her elbow. "It does not seem half an hour since I lay down. Has Daddy come?"

"Good morning, Dona Martinez. No, Daddy is still among the missing. How late did you sit up last night? Far into my beauty sleep, I heard a still, small voice chanting, 'We won't go home till morning!'"

"You heard nothing of the sort. How is the tide, on the ebb or flow? Can I walk ashore?"

"Here is some one!" cried Captain French. On an instant a boat swept

round the curve of the island and ran sharply up on the sand.

"Daddy at last," said Vera, with a yawn. "I shall not have to walk after all."

"That is not Daddy's step." Daddy's master said quickly. "There is more than one."

The footsteps drew nearer, the door opened, and four persons entered the room—Dora Lightwood, pale and breathless; Mrs. Carlton, austere and grim; Mr. Carlton hobnobbing with a stick, a dark frown on his furrowed face, and the boatman last of all.

"Vera!" Dora cried, and rushed forward, and fell on her sister's neck, and lifted up her voice and wept.

The rest stood still—a dread trio. Captain Dick rose and removed his pipe, a crushing sense of iniquity upon him as he met Mrs. Carlton's gorgon gaze. Then there was silence. And until the last day of his life that scene was before Dick French—his little den all jubilant with the morning sunshine. Dora's suppressed sobbing, Mrs. Carlton's stony glare, and the dark frown in his stepfather's face. It never faded. But most of all, he saw little Vera, instinctively drawing from her sister, and with a brave, bright, loyal smile, taking her stand by his side. The image of Vera as she stood there would be with him his whole life long.

### CHAPTER XIV A Morning at Shaddeek Light

Vera was the first to speak.

"It is not Captain Dick's fault," she exclaimed eagerly. "Dora—and all of you! It is not Captain French's fault. It is Daddy's. He never came from St. Ann's all last night, and so I had to stay."

A sort of smothered groan escaped from Mrs. Carlton. It said plainer than words, "Worse and worse! not even Daddy to act as chaperon."

"And it stormed so, I was frightened

ed nearly to death, and then when that was over the tide rose, and I couldn't walk—or swim. And there was no boat. And Captain Dick had his shoulder hurt, and couldn't manage one if there was. And I tell you Daddy never came. Dot, why don't you say something?" cried Vera, stamping her foot, all breathless and flushed in her defense. "What do you stand looking like that for? I didn't think you would be uneasy. I thought you were sure to know. What is the matter with you all? It was nobody's fault—nobody could help my staying here last night."

No one spoke. The silence was beyond all telling, tremendous. Richard French had ridden down on the bayonets of the enemy to red death many a time, had faced starvation more than once last year on the pale, frozen deep, had stood face to face with mortal peril many a time and oft, but never—no never—had he felt such blank consternation as possessed him now! Conscience makes cowards of us all. He had been held a brave soldier, a reckless boatman, a fearless explorer, a daring hunter, but at this moment he was horribly afraid of Mrs. Carlton. And Mrs. Carlton's "glittering eye" was upon him, and held him as that other dread opic held the trembling wedding guest.

Vera came a little nearer, drew quite away from Dora, and stood close by his side, her dark face flushing angrily.

"Captain Dick is not to blame," she repeated proudly; "he never sent for me, he never wanted me to come. But I am glad I came—yes, glad!"

said Vera, flinging back her head defiantly, "for if I had not, he would have been here alone with his disabled arm. None of you cared! Not that he wanted anything, but if he had it would have been all the same. Daddy went to the druggists, and never came back. And now, if you are ready," said Vera, picking up her hat, and flashing defiance on the company, "I am. Good-by, Captain Dick."

"Not good-by just yet, Vera, only good morning," he answered, and with a smile took the hand she offered in a strong clasp. His eyes praised and thanked her, but his lips only smiled. She knew nothing, except that they were all angry with her for staying from home last night, and wanted to throw the blame on him. She turned to the door, no one tried to stop her; on the contrary, Dora desired the greedily listening boatman to go as well.

"Take her to the boat," she said, "and wait till we come."

They departed, and the house door closed behind them. Then Dora rose in her outraged sisterhood, and faced the enemy. To the frivolous mind it looked like a little barnyard bantam ruffling its white feathers, and challenging to mortal combat a big Newfoundland. But, there were no frivolous minds present, and Captain Dick felt his hour had come! She was pale, and her cold blue eyes had a strange, dry glitter, that really looked as much like triumph as anger.

"And now, Captain French," she began, "what have you to say?"

"Nothing whatever," retorted that culprit promptly. "Vera has told you all about it. I am very sorry if her absence caused you anxiety last night, but I presume the storm extended as far as Carlton, as she says, it could not be helped."

"You have no more to say than that?"

"Not that I know of. I am very sorry. I am not aware that there is anything more to be said."

Miss Lightwood turned from him to the others, as if saying, "You hear! He adds to the atrocity of his conduct cold-blooded indifference. And I am a poor, little unprotected creature, unable to help myself."

"You must be aware, sir," said Mr. Carlton coming to the rescue, his voice harsh with irritating pain.

"That this is an abominable affair—that people will talk—that that it's an outrageous affair—that I wouldn't have had it happen for a thousand pounds—that—that—that there will be a devil of a scandal—that—that, in short, sir, you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

He struck his stick angrily on the ground, feeling that there was more needed, and thinking how little like a prisoner at the bar this boy looked, standing erect there, his head held well up, his dark face a little pale, his frank, honest, fearless eyes meeting theirs unflinchingly. For Dick, a very craven in his secret soul, before his accusing angels, had a dogged instinct that he meant to die game, outwardly at least.

"Vera Martinez is blighted for life," said Mrs. Carlton, opening her sealed lips, and speaking in a deep, strong, slow, rasping, ominous monotone.

"Madam!" said Dick French severely, swinging round, his face flushing red.

"Blighted for life!" repeated Mr. Carlton, waving him contemptuously down—"Irretrievably blighted! She must live under a cloud all the rest of her days. It would have been better for her had you turned her out into the storm to perish than have kept her here. Last night will be fatal forever to the reputation of this most unhappy young girl!"

She waved her hand again; her tone was deep and Siddonslike; it froze the very marrow of this hapless young man's bones. Her gesture was tragic—indeed, she looked uncommonly like the tragic muse altogether.

Like the tragic muse altogether, she stood elderly and stout. Her stony stare was a blood-freezing thing to meet. Her words went through him one by one like bullets. Dora stood pallid, mournful, despairing—life evidently held nothing more for her.

Mr. Carlton was near her, gloomy, silent, frowning. He and Dot were the gentlemen of the jury. Mrs. Carlton was the judge. The black cap was ready, he had been tried by his peers and found guilty. If he had anything to say way the sentence of the law should not be pronounced, now was the time! It was the supreme hour of his life. And he stood tall, square-shouldered, upright, looking from one to the other, the wretched prisoner in the dock, reading no hope of mercy in either Rhadamanthus face.

"Look here!" he burst out at last, "this is all confounded rubbish, you know. Blighted! Under a cloud! Sent adrift to perish! By George, you use forcible English, Mrs. Carlton! I tell you governor, I tell you Miss Lightwood, I tell you madam, I am not to blame. It was simply an impossible thing for Vera to go home last night. As to sending her out to perish, that is all hosh, of course."

"I have no more to say," said Mrs. Carlton folding her hands, and turning austere away. "It is no business of mine. My daughter knows nothing of it, and shall not. It is a very delicate and disagreeable subject. I wash my hands off the whole matter. If the young person herself is satisfied," with a short, laugh, "we may be, I think."

"She is such a child—such a child," sobbed Dora, covering her face with her hands, "she does not know. Oh, why did we ever, ever come!"

Dick put his hands to his head, feeling that his senses were reeling. What had he done—what was he to do? Was it really such a tremendous affair as they were trying to make it out, or was this a new version of "Much Ado About Nothing"? He was not versed in the nicer gradations, the subtler shades of feminine propriety, as rigidly required by Mrs. Grundy—he only knew that he wished an earthquake would split Shaddeek Light in two and swallow him bodily. It would be less terrific than Dora's sobs, or Mrs. Carlton's death stare.

"What do you want me to do?" he demanded turning at bay upon his tormentors at last.

"I?" she laughed another short, rasping laugh. "Nothing whatever. It is nothing to me. Vera Martinez's disgrace does not touch—"

"Disgrace!" cried Richard French, with sudden fierceness facing her. "There is no other word for it that I know of—no other the world will

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"The world be—"

"Not!" said Mrs. Carlton, lifting her arm, "that I will not endure. Swearing or passion never mended a shattered reputation yet. I permit no man to blaspheme in my presence."

"You mean to say—"

"I mean to say that I have no more to say. You are neither so ignorant nor so innocent as you pretend. You are a man of the world, Captain French, and do not need me to tell when it knows it—will put upon Miss Vera's ahem—eccentricity of last night. It is very painful and embarrassing subject—I really must decline to discuss it now or at any other time."

"But, by heaven, it shall be discussed!" exclaimed Captain French fairly enraged. "You come here and blacken that child's character, and then tell me you will not discuss the subject."

"I blacken her character! You forget yourself, Captain French! Mr. Carlton, I must insist upon going. I never permit myself to be insulted twice."

"I beg your pardon!" Dick said hastily, and with a sudden total change of tone. "I had no right to lose my temper. If you and Miss Lightwood, governor, would leave us for a few minutes I would like to—"

he was at a deadlock, and the sentence was not finished.

Dora's tears upset him beyond everything, and if there was a grain of truth in all this rhodomontade he would like to get at it. Vera to suffer through him! Why, he would not have hurt a hair on the dear little thing's head for a universe.

They obeyed—Dora indeed, wiped her eyes, and departed with alacrity.

He placed a chair for his marble guest, and took another.

"Sit down," he said briefly; "let us get at the head and front of my offending, if we can. In all innocent—in all inability to help myself, it seems I have blundered. You tell me I did wrong in keeping the little one last night. To do otherwise was simply impossible, but we will let that go. Keep her I did. By so doing you say I have blighted her good name for life. Now, there are but two sorts of evil, I take it, the curable and the incurable. To which does this belong?"

"To the curable decidedly," replied Mrs. Carlton promptly. She saw she was torturing her victim, and took malignant delight in his writhing. She felt as a cold-blooded naturalist might who had a rare and precious beetle impaled on a pin.

"That is well. Now what am I to do?"

"Does the 'what am I to do' not present itself unsuggested, Captain French? In my day when a young man seriously compromised a young woman, there was but one honorable alternative—to marry her!"

She brought out the word with vicious relish. She had not the faintest, slightest, most shadowy thought that he would entertain the idea, or she never would have uttered it. Had he not been but just rejected by her daughter—did he not look upon Vera as a little girl, as in point of fact she was? "Pure cussedness" had more to do with the spiteful suggestion than any thought of the possibility of its being acted upon.

He sat quite still, looking at her—his hands deep in his pockets, after his usual abstracted fashion, profound gravity on his face.

"This is the one alternative?" he asked.

"The one alternative," she answered, "and in this case out of the question."

"Why out of the question?"

"Why? Because she is too young; because she is a great, grown-up baby; because you don't care a pin about her; because you are going away; because—oh this is nonsense and a waste of time, and I really must go!"

He made no attempt to detain her. He rose, opened the door politely, and escorted her to the boat. In it was seated Vera, her little straw hat tilted over her nose, half asleep in the sun. On the rocks were seated Mr. Carlton and Dora, in deep conversation—Dora still looking stricken and mournful but resigned. Vera started up at the sight of him. They were making a great fuss about nothing, she thought, and badgering Captain Dick for what was no fault of his, with his hurt shoulder and everything.

"Governor," he said, very quietly, "you will be at home for the rest of the day, I suppose? Sometime this afternoon I shall go ashore and have a talk with you. Ladies, good morning."

He took off his hat ceremoniously to dame anddemoiselle; to Vera he gave a parting smile. That and the fact that he was coming later on, sent her home happy. No one scolded her, no one asked her questions, the subject was tacitly dropped. The worst was over; Captain Dick had been honorably discharged on her evidence alone, and she lifted up her voice and sang, half in gladness, half in mischievous defiance of grim Mrs. Carlton.

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(continued on page 8)



## "Whatever is the Matter, Jack, You Don't Look Well!"

"Oh, I'm all right."

"But you're not. You look so worried and tired."

"Well, I haven't been sleeping very well lately."

"No, and you don't seem to have any appetite. I think you ought to take something to tone up your system."

"Oh, no, I don't need any medicine. I guess I will soon be all right."

"But you should not neglect yourself, for that is just the way I was before I had nervous prostration, and you know what a long time I was laid up."

"Well, I haven't any time to be laid up, that's a sure thing."

"I know what I am going to do. I am going to buy half a dozen boxes of Dr. Chase's Nerve Food and see that you take it regularly."

"You know, Jack, that nothing seemed to help me like Dr. Chase's Nerve Food, and I am sure it will be just as good for you."

"You will take it, won't you?"

"I'll do most anything to get feeling better, for I know I have been losing my grip on business lately."

"I get up feeling tired in the mornings, and have to drive myself to do the work that used to be a pleasure for me. I have got in the way of putting off matters that need attention, and hate to meet people when I know that some energy will be required to discuss business deals with them."

"You'll take the Nerve Food, won't you?"

"Oh, I'll let you be the doctor, and if the Nerve Food builds me up like it did you I'll soon get back my old-time vigor and be able to make things hum. I have been rather discouraged lately, but I can see now that the trouble is in the condition of my nervous system. So you get the Nerve Food and we'll see what it will do."

Dr. Chase's Nerve Food, 50 cents a box, 6 for \$2.75, all dealers, or Edmanston, Bates & Co., Limited, Toronto. Every box of the genuine bears the portrait and signature of A. W. Chase, M.D., the famous Receipt Book author.

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s in honor of the men. After rvice is over, a company of s fire 30 volleys, the pipes play nt and the trumpets sound the ost, for the soldiers who have he greatest thing in the world, own his life for others. I will ome flowers to lay with the ross ones when they take him to that cemetery among the I hope that you will believe rom first to last, that sisters resses and the boys in the ward from the Red Cross have tried for the boy what we feel you have liked to do for him if ad been here.

deepest sympathy is yours, Mrs. Carr. e writing this letter, I have d with great grief, that you ost your other son, (in action) ll. His young friend came to ospital and told us after Ver-death. It is terrible that you I have such a two-fold sorrow, not say how distressed I feel u, I wish I could comfort you y way, but I feel sympathy is comfort, though if it is any at lease accept my deepest sym- it's will write to you. She was o good and kind to Vernon in- ness. She came often to the al and sat beside him for hours, t to do all she could for him. is some talk now of Peace, it comes you will feel that you our boys have given all that not dear to you for it, and love and self-sacrifice are the essence of a good life, surely ay feel that you and they have their best for your fellow man. God bless and comfort you in ad hour.

Mrs. Carr.

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