

WON AT LAST.

CHAPTER XIV.

The affair passed off with that, Mademoiselle was voluble and eloquent about it at dinner, but, with her usual tact, took her cue from madame's face, and, seeing that the subject was not a congenial one, soon let it drop. Nat's pretty face was a little pale when she came down, and she was rather silent through the meal, but she did not drop so much as a syllable with respect to the late scene. But by and by, when we were back in the drawing-room, with mademoiselle as usual at the piano and madame at work by her special little table by the fire, I spoke of it, being, in fact, bubbling over with curiosity. Nat had, according to her custom of late, established herself upon one of the wide window-seats, half crouching, half sitting upon its broad cushioned ledge, with her book on her lap. But she had apparently forgotten it, and her eyes were straying out to the bright December moonlight, when presently I crossed over to her and touched her shoulder.

"I say, Nat!" I whispered, and she turned with a start.

"How you startled me, Ned! I didn't hear you. What did you say?"

"Why, so far, I haven't said anything beyond 'I say.' I returned, laughing. 'What a lark that was upstairs just now, wasn't it?'"

"A lark, do you call it? I don't. It frightened me."

"Yes, I dare say; but then I didn't see it, you know. What on earth was it all about, though?"

"Why, they quarreled. That is all I know."

"Yes, of course; but why did they? People don't throw water-jugs at each other for nothing."

"I tell you I don't know. They were as quiet as could be before Val la struck Virtue, both helping me to dress, for I came up awfully late, you know. There was no warning—no word. The blow was given in an instant."

"And then Virtue pitched the water-jug, eh?" I said, laughing at the idea of the scene.

"Yes. Wasn't it an awful crash?"

"Rather. How came Mistress Val la's turban and hair down, though?"

"Oh, she pulled it down! She always does when she is in a temper."

"By Jove! I say, Nat, if I were you, I'd give her a good talking to. Tantrums of that sort are altogether too much of a good thing. I suppose now she'll be sulky for a week, won't she?"

"What—with me?" cried Nat.

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opening her eyes at me. "No. To-night I shall have quite a scene with her. It is always so. She goes down upon her knees and cries and kisses my hands. It is painful—worse than her temper itself, poor thing; but I can't help it. I dare say she has beseeched me to forgive her for some such bit of passion twenty times since I have been here, and always in the same wild, raving kind of way."

"And you will, I suppose?" I said.

"What—forgive her? Of course. Why, if anyone I was fond of tried to till me and then seemed sorry I couldn't help making it up! Oh, Ned, let us have a game of chess! I am tired of this stupid book."

She jumped off her perch and crossed to the fire, leaving me to get out the chess-board and men. When I had found them, we established ourselves close to madame's work-table, mademoiselle's soft, dreamy music forming a pleasant accompaniment. We played a couple of games, Nat winning one and I the other, and was placing the men to commence a third, when my mother looked up from her work and checked us by saying:

"Natalie, my dear, I have been thinking that you ought to have your ewels."

"What—to wear, madame?" cried Nat, twisting round in her chair.

"Of course, dear."

"But I thought you said you didn't like girls to wear jewelry," said Nat, slyly, leaving her seat to kneel in her childish fashion by madame's knee.

"I said I did not like to see the wear overmuch, I think," my mother corrected, her fine white hand caressing the silky black curls. "But I should like you to wear some of these this Christmas, I think, since we are to have so much gaiety. They were your mother's, were they not?"

Nat nodded.

"Yes—all of them. They were the principal part of her dowry, I think. No one has worn them since she died. I never wore them in Jamaica; I didn't like to."

"Then it is quite time they saw the light again!" madame said cheerfully.

"Where are they, mother?" I put in.

"Where they have been ever since. Natalie came here, my dear—in the plate-chest in the strong-room. Why?"

"Can't we get them out to-night. It will fill up the time to look over them. It isn't late."

"To-night!" repeated my mother doubtfully. "Would you like to, Natalie?"

Evidently Natalie would, for her black eyes were sparkling, and a quick color had flushed her little dusky face. Madame noted this, and rose with a smile.

"You are a perfect baby!" she said, with the caressing gentleness which she used to no other person. "Well, we will have these wonderful jewels out then. Some may want resetting. I am not sure."

Mademoiselle had stopped playing when the subject began, although she still kept her place at the piano, her thin white hands moving over the keys without striking them—a favorite trick of hers. But she rose now in her quiet, graceful way, and came forward.

"Pardon, madame—can I assist you?"

"No, thank you, mademoiselle. No, don't come, Natalie, my dear, I shall not be many minutes."

Madame went out. Mlle. Valdin glanced after her, and then moved to the fire, holding out her hands to the blaze. She was shivering, and Nat looked at her wonderingly.

"Are you cold, mademoiselle?"

"A little—yes. I stayed too long by the piano."

"It will be more than a little to make you shake like that," I said, for she was fairly shivering. "Shall I get you a glass of wine, mademoiselle?"

"Thank you—no. It's nothing. It will pass," she returned, in her usual way; and then, as if vexed at not noticing her, she walked over to the window, and, drawing aside the curtain, stood looking out with her back to us.

Nat, kneeling on the edge of the marble fender, crossed her two forefingers and glanced up at me with a laughing grimace. I nodded expressively. Mademoiselle, pattern of propriety as she was, was quite capable of losing her temper. For a little while we were silent.

"I say, Nat—those jewels of yours are valuable, aren't they?" I said then.

"Very, I think. Madame said so when I came here, you remember. Before, I had never thought much about them. I don't think my poor father really remembered that I had them. I'm glad madame is going to get them out. There is one dear little diamond cross that I want to give Alice. They ought to be valuable, at any rate," she concluded, with a laugh—"locked up among all the silver dishes and the best forks and spoons."

The rustle of madame's silken skirt sounded outside, and she came in, followed by old Styles the butler bearing half a dozen shabby-looking morocco cases. We turned round from the fire.

"So they are all safe and sound, madame!" Nat cried, gayly. "I'm glad no one has run away with them. I—Oh, what's that?"

For Mlle. Valdin had suddenly recoiled from the window with a cry that made the room ring, and, clasping her hands over her eyes as she shrunk back, staggered for an instant and then dropped to the floor in a fainting fit.

CHAPTER XV.

There was a "scene" of course. Nat gave a scream hardly louder than madame's exclamation of astonishment, and Styles, dropping all the cases on to the table with a clatter, ran across to help me to raise the insensible woman. Her spare, thin figure was not of much weight, and between us we got her upon a couch. Old Batteredbin came hurrying in in reply to my mother's loud ring; and then what with vinegar, brandy and smelling-salts, Nat and I were pressed out of the sympathetic circle gathered round the couch.

"What is it, Ned?" she whispered in my ear.

"Goodness knows! One would think she had seen a ghost."

"I believe she did see something."

We both turned instinctively toward the window. The thick curtain hung just as mademoiselle had dragged it in falling. Deep blue winter sky, a large bright moon, bare tree trunks, a light sprinkling of snow—that was all I could see. Nat's bright eyes, peering out too, evidently could make out no more.

"Well, I can't see anything," she said. "What are you going to do?"—for I was unfastening the hasp of the window.

"Just have a look around. Don't say anything. I won't be more than a minute."

I had a look round, but I did not discover anything. I peered about among the clumps of bushes, went down the Lady's Walk, peeped into the Lady's Chapel, stumbled over a

barrow load of rubbish which some idiot of a gardener had left about, and finally got back to the house at the end of about five minutes, no wiser, though a good deal colder, than when I went out. Nat still stood at the window.

"Well, did you see anything?" she demanded eagerly.

"Not a thing. If she fancied she saw anything, it must have been through the reflection of the moonlight."

"Perhaps so, I say, Ned, are all those footmarks yours?"

"Eh?" I ejaculated, pausing as I was about to shut the window. "I guess so. Why?"

"Some of them look larger than the others. I fancy. Were there any marks before you went out?"

"I declare I didn't notice—never gave it a thought. I don't think so, though."

"I don't think so, either, but I'm not certain. It was very stupid of us not to look."

It was, and I thought so, although I felt pretty sure too that all the footmarks made in the thin covering of snow came from my own boots. I closed the window, pulled the curtains together, and then followed Nat to the couch. Mademoiselle had recovered consciousness now, and was leaning back, still deadly pale. Madame had dismissed Batteredbin and the rest of them, and was herself urging the governess to take some more brandy. Mademoiselle demurred.

"Nonsense, my dear!" my mother was saying with unusual kindness, but with the quiet determination to have her own way which was natural to the mistress of Chavasse. "Brandy is the best possible thing for you. Come—I must really insist."

(To be continued.)

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2. Within the Municipal Limits any person throwing stones in the said streets shall be liable to a penalty not exceeding Five Dollars for each offence.

3. No person shall play games in the highways or other places calculated to inconvenience or annoy under a penalty not exceeding Five Dollars for every breach of this Regulation.

NOTE.—The property of parents may be liable under distress for any penalty imposed on a minor.

Given under my Hand, at the Court House, St. John's, this 20th day of November, A.D. 1912.

J. G. CONROY,
Stipendiary Magistrate.

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