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CLARA CHILLINGTON; OR, THE PRIDE OF THE CLIFF.

A STORY OF ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO.

BY

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CHAPTER XXXV.

PAINFUL SUSPENSE.

The recollection of the sound she had heard lingered in the mind of Lisette. To her, the excuse that it was an owl which had made the noise appeared absurd, and she treated it with contempt. That it was not that bird of night she was certain; but then what was it? A response to this question in the thought of what it was possible for it to be, came instinctively to the mind of Lisette as she passed a restless night, and she trembled for her apprehensions. Was the purpose of her coming to France about to appear and tax all her courage, and energy, and persistency, to reducing it to practice? The bare possibility of her wishes being realized peopled her imagination with such scenes, and figures as at length filled her soul with happiness. What would not Lisette have given could she have gone directly to the laboratory, and opening the door explore every nook and corner of it. But to attempt any such thing immediately she knew would be as futile as it would be insane, and there remained nothing for her but to exercise patience amidst her painful suspense.

The suspense of Lisette was shared by Monsieur, although the feeling tormenting him did not proceed from the same cause. The dinner party had left him churlish. He knew that to make the display which had brought forth such praises from his friends he had exhausted his resources, and the dinner was not yet paid for. This circumstance ordinarily might not be considered a good excuse for the display of anger; for such as had furnished the supplies had not yet sent in their accounts; but he knew they would send them in, and that he had not the means to meet them did they come. Yet even this was no reason why he should exhibit such churlishness, nor would it have done so existing alone; but he was aware that the report of the dinner would produce unlimited jealousy in the coterie, and exciting speculation among such as spent a great portion of their lives in discussing his affairs, might lead them to push their enquiries to an unpleasant issue.

These thoughts threw a lurid reflection across the mind of Monsieur, which, as the fiery rays of the sun when he sets behind the tempest cloud, made the darkness of his heart appear more dreadful. The friction of these upon his temper made him more churlish, and he snapped in a manner to startle all who dared to approach him on any subject. He now began to feel the folly of having lived to excite the wonder and envy of his neighbors, and for the moment to deplore it; for he well knew that the remotest sign of a falling off in his affairs would fetch him speedily to earth, and make him the scorn and ridicule of the district.

His creditors must wait; this was the only thought that afforded Monsieur the slightest relief. He had for many years paid their accounts with great punctuality, and they must now bear with him. Ordinarily this conclusion would have proved a sufficient emollient for the wound produced in his mind by the attrition of his condition; but hitherto he had paid promptly, and now to ask for credit he was apprehensive might raise an alarm, and exposing him to the shafts of the enemy, smash the fragile reputation he had held at such an extravagant height.

While Monsieur Du Boulay was annoyed by his circumstances, Lisette was not less annoyed by the conduct of his nephew. This for a time so tormented her, that had not her thoughts become absorbed in a more engrossing subject, it would have been intolerable. But of late his ardour had become cooler, and that too through a ludicrous occurrence in his wooing career. Excited almost to madness by the influence Lisette held over him, Henri had yielded the control of his few brains to the power of his passion. Having, therefore, parted with that shred of manhood, nature with a niggard hand had imparted to him, his conduct became ridiculous to a degree. Nor was this weakness removed by the steady refusal of the girl to credit his assertion that his affection for her was sincere. Being passionately entreated of him, Lisette had one evening left him in a manner more than usually abrupt, and as she did so, cast on him a look inviting him to follow her. This aroused his passion to a pitch of excitement uncontrollable. In an instant he flew to the door, but she was gone. Disappointed in not seeing her acted but as fuel to the flame of his desire, and he felt that might he but speak another word to her he would give his life, world, the universe, could be but command it; but it was impossible for him to pursue her further, for she had gone direct to her own apartment.

On entering her room, Lisette soon forgot the young Frenchman, and seating herself on the side of her little bed, looked out on to the labor-

atory as it stood out in the pale moonlight in grim, and to her horrible, distinctness. Her heart sank within her at the thoughts crowding upon her brain; and while the sound she had heard proceeded from that building came again to her recollection, she trembled and was sad. Lost in this painful reverie, she thought nothing of him, who seeing the light still burning in her room paced silently to and fro beneath the window, in the fond hope that she would come forward and look forth before retiring, or that at least her shadow might be seen by him. But this expectation of Henri was vain; as sitting where she did, neither her person, nor her shadow could be seen from without.

Distracted from the vehemence of his passion, Henri once more cast his eyes upward toward that window. Could he but reach that place, and speak but one word with Lisette, he could die happy. Passing beneath the ledge of the roof, and close by the coveted window, was a wooden water-course, which conveyed the rain water into a large tub placed beneath to receive it. The sight of this aroused afresh his feelings, and as it stood out, grimly pale and weather beaten in the rays of the pale moonlight, it seemed to invite him to reach the apartment in climbing the wall by its aid. The thought aroused his activity, and he determined to accept the temptation, and once more speak with her, even though he should break his neck in the effort. Seizing the trough, therefore, he began gallantly to ascend foot by foot toward the happy spot above him. For a few minutes, Fortune appeared to smile upon his perseverance, and to offer to him the prize of his desire. Higher, and yet higher, noiselessly he climbed; a few feet more and he could lay hold on the window sill and converse with her. Nearer he approached the object of his wishes; but just as he was stretching out his hand to make the final clutch, the spouting gave way, and he came down with a splash.

The noise of Henri falling aroused Lisette, and uttering a faint shriek she rushed to the window to ascertain the cause of the noise. Seeing the gutter torn away, the truth at once flashed upon her mind, and leaning further over she saw a pair of human legs rising above the edge of the water butt. In an instant she hastened from her apartment, and acquainting Monsieur with her suspicion, hastened to the scene of the accident. As she approached she heard a gurgling sound, and then appeared the dismal yet ludicrous fact. With the aid of the uncle the tub was pulled on one side, and the half drowned prisoner released from his confinement. This cold plunge bath did much to moderate the ardour of Monsieur Henri, and did much to relieve Lisette from his annoyances. Fortunately, being nearly drowned was all the injury he received from his fall. Lisette had now devised a plan for becoming acquainted with the laboratory, and awaited in a state of painful suspense the opportunity for reducing it to practice.

Monsieur Du Boulay also fretted under painful suspense, occasioned by delay in receipt of his income, and was almost distracted in the fear of it altogether failing him. It was evening, when the thundering rap of an important guest was heard at the door of the chateau. On hearing it, a ray of light shot through the soul of Monsieur, and illumined his countenance with the pleasure of a new life. It was too late in the day to be a rap proceeding from a creditor, and the sound was too well known for him to be mistaken. As the last of the series of raps reached the salon, Monsieur himself flew to open the door, and holding high a wax candle, drew back the ponderous bolt, and admitted the visitor.

"Mon Dieu!" he exclaimed, startled by the appearance of the figure before him; but quickly recovering from the surprise, in a manner most polite admitted a man with his forehead bandaged, and his arm in a sling. "Good evening to you, sir!" continued Monsieur, this time in English; and the rough response to the polite salutation revealed the skipper of the Nancy.

The wounded condition of Jack Pegden was the result of the favors of Lieutenant Luff, conferred upon him on the night of the conflict with the Revenue men. It was he whom that gallant officer had hurled from the edge of the rampart down to the rocks below. Twice he had shot him as he ascended the steep; the first bullet striking his hand, traversed the knuckles and came out on the other side; the second struck the upper part of his face, removing his left eye; but it was the stroke from the sword of old Luff which sent the ruffian to the beach. Being picked up by his crew, he was taken across the channel to Gravelines. There he had been nursed by his friends until thus far recovered.

As the story of the conflict and its results was told by Jack Pegden, Monsieur rolled his eyes, contracted his brows, and shrugged his

shoulders, in a feeling of perfect horror. Yet although apparently so deeply interested in the adventure, he could not keep his thoughts from silently wondering if the wounded man had brought him any money; but the smuggler did not keep him long in suspense; for drawing forth an old leathern purse, he counted out a number of English guineas and laid them on the table. Giving to him a receipt for cash received, Monsieur grasped the money with an eagerness which told how painful had been his apprehension lest he should never obtain it. This business being transacted the smuggler enquired,

"Well, how are things going on; all right?"

"All right, sir. Never better."

"Everything mum?"

"The utmost secrecy prevails."

"That's good. How's Nan?"

"Madame is well."

"She'll live forever."

"Madame is in health, and does not appear to grow older."

"And never will. She is like some kinds of wood which time can never destroy."

"Bon, Bravo! Monsieur is excellent at a joke."

"Well, I should like to see Nan."

"With pleasure, sir;" and at a signal given by Monsieur, Madame made her appearance.

"Well, Nan; how are you?"

"Why, goodness, gracious me! Jack Pegden; what is the matter with you?"

"Matter, indeed!" and the skipper again related the tale of his misfortune; but this time blended with it fearful curses and threats against all coast-guards, and against old Luff in particular.

"It serves you right," said Madame, when he had finished.

"Why, you old cat; what do you mean?"

"Mean? simply this; that your wickedness will some day find you out."

"Peace, Madame," said Monsieur; who saw at a glance that a storm was brewing in the mind of Jack Pegden.

This judicious act averted the fearful thunderings which threatened to burst forth against Madame. But thus prevented from rolling off the abundant expletives collected at the tip of his tongue, the smuggler plainly told out that he was thirsty. With a multitude of regrets, and numerous cutting remarks on his own forgetfulness, and want of hospitality, Monsieur produced liquors, and calling for hot water, Lisette entered the room. On seeing who was present she started,—turned pale,—but quickly recollecting the game she was playing, she immediately resumed herself-command and quitted the apartment.

"That is a fine girl you have," said the smuggler.

"It is true, sir; and she is good, too."

"Is she safe?"

"Perfectly innocent, sir. She is one who knows her position."

"That is well; and it is to your interest her goodness should remain."

"It will, doubtless."

"Where is she from?"

"A neighboring village."

"There is something sharp in her appearance."

"We have watched her, both Madame and myself, and we are certain of her innocence. There is nothing to fear from her, Monsieur, I do assure you."

"Pish! Set Nan to watch; what's the use of her watching? But no doubt you keep a good lookout yourself."

"Rest quiet on that matter. My eyes were made for watching; and they must be exceedingly clever who will take me by surprise."

Without regarding this boastful remark, Jack Pegden replenished his pipe, and smoking as a furnace, sat listening to the chatter of Monsieur. The talk of the latter was of no interest to him, who with that inherent hatred of a foreigner, which appeared to be born with the Englishman of the past century, despised him in his heart. Du Boulay was of advantage to the smuggler and his friends, for trade and other purposes, and from them it was he received the funds which sustained his position to the astonishment of the coterie. It has been already stated, that for reasons known to himself, Monsieur seldom left the chateau. What he did, therefore, in the line of smuggling, was done through the agency of Henri.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE NIGHT SEARCH.

The opportunity so earnestly desired by Lisette at length came. She wrapped her large cloak around her and prepared for her adventure. Noiselessly and stealthily she crept along the corridor and past the door of the room where Monsieur was sleeping.

Leaving the house she groped her way through the darkness along the paddock fence, frequently stumbling because of the irregularity of the ground. Drawing near to the laboratory she listened, but not a sound could be heard.

"Am I deceived?" she whispered. "Can it be that I have been practising a delusion on myself? Peace!" Uttering this word she drew herself closer to a small window. Placing her ear close to the wall, she fancied she heard amidst the wildness of the tempest the faint sound of a human voice. Holding her breath she again eagerly sought to catch the slightest noise, and as her beautiful face, now pale from agitation, rested against the cold bricks, her ex-

citement rose almost beyond restraint. "Hark!" I hear a sound; it is that of a man's voice. Pressing her ear to bricks still higher up the wall, it seemed to her that a man was standing within, near to the window, looking into the darkness and talking to himself. Expectation was now on the alert, and she heard distinctly the words,

"My condition is dreadful! Banished from all I love and shut up in this dismal den as though to deprive me of reason. I am a prisoner without knowing the term of my confinement. The clanking of this chain mocks me; the sound is wearisome and heart sickening; were my strength but equal to my spirit, this unsightly metal should soon be snapped. Could I but hear from home I would be more content; but not a sound reaches me; not a person visits me but the cadaverous wretch who calls himself my keeper."

Lisette raised herself on a stone to the level of the window, secured by iron bars as though it were a den, and gently tapped upon the glass. Again she touched it, for no response was given to her first attempt. On hearing the pane touched the second time, the prisoner approached and as he did so she whispered,

"Hist! a friend is here."

"Good heavens! he replied; has it come to it at last? I thought I heard the whisper of a human voice. Oh! this delusion, it is the first breaking down of reason. Save me from madness, O, my Father."

"Hist! a friend is here," repeated Lisette.

"Cruel mockery! Oh! my brain, my brain."

"Listen to reason. I am a mortal woman who has sought you out and have news for you."

"Are you deceiving me? Are you not the phantom which has before vexed my imagination, disordered by the cruel power of solitude?"

"I know Clara Chillington; she has tidings you are living, but knows not where you are."

"Is it possible?"

"Peace! I am your friend and hers, and having now found you am content."

Lisette learnt from Charles Freeman the terrible sufferings he endured in being chained and beaten under pretence of considering him a lunatic. This narrative aroused her womanly sympathy.

Leaving the prisoner, she groped her way back again, drenched with the heavy rain. Alive to every consideration, she had no sooner entered the kitchen then she stripped herself of her wet garments, lest the drainings from them should present an unusual appearance to the lynx eyes of Monsieur and arouse his suspicion. Having reached her little dormitory, she felt thankful for the discovery she had made, and for the success which had thus far attended her effort. Putting on dry clothing, she threw herself on her bed and tried to sleep.

The hands of Lisette moved mechanically in discharging her work next day. Morning rolled away and noon, and the afternoon sun was casting his oblique rays through the windows of the chateau, when Lisette saw approaching the back door of the house a stranger in rags.

On drawing near to the place, the mendicant, for such he was, pleaded for the love of heaven that something might be given him.

To the quick eye of Lisette it instantly appeared that the mendicant was playing a part. He was well made up, and his genuineness might have passed for years unchallenged, but she had seen too much of that kind of thing to be deceived. The beggar, who had bound up his jaw, as though wounded in the face, on first seeing the girl was unable to articulate, his tongue being sealed in surprise; but recovering his self-possession he resumed his plea for aid, and as she drew from her pocket a *sou* and placed it in his palm, she whispered a slang sentence in use among the gypsies. On hearing it the countenance of the beggar became radiant with delight, and while Lisette whispered the words "Yellow-Dick," the beggar replied, "The Princess."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A CONSULTATION.

The mutual discovery was a joy to both Lisette and the beggar, and seemed to demand of them an explanation; but the chateau was no place for this, as Lisette quickly informed her newly-found friend. By means of such slang, therefore, as could be understood by them both, an appointment was made to meet at the end of the shrubbery at one o'clock in the morning.

Lisette and Yellow Dick stood once more together, and as the stars of the autumnal night cast forth their brilliancy, they shone upon a youthful pair whose beauty and symmetry might have been envied by such as, in the conceit engendered by circumstances, would have looked down on them in scorn. Lisette was the first to speak, and enquired,

"What brings you to France?"

"I have business here."

"Some rascally business for Sir Harry Chillington?" At the sound of that name Yellow Dick fired up in indignation, and replied,

"Name not that villain to me, except it be to command me to shoot him."

"You are not friendly toward him?"

"Heaven forbid that I should be!"

"What is it?"

"My object in coming into this country is to search for you."

"Who told you that I was here?"