

Written for THE JURY.

ROUGE ET NOIR.

By NINEPHUS, Sr. JOHN, N. B.

It was the close of a summer day. The sun was retiring as usual "with all his blushing honors thick upon him;" and the sea, gleaming and rippling placidly beneath the ever-changing glories of purple, gold and crimson, reflected them all with praiseworthy fidelity. Mr. Frederick Hart, pacing beneath a magnificent row of olms, caught a glimpse of this shimmering beauty every now and then and smiled upon it with patronizing approval.

For Mr. Frederick Hart was in exceedingly good spirits that evening. He was, figuratively speaking, in clover. Only a few minutes ago he had parted with one of the sweetest, prettiest darlings ever made, who had promised to elope with him that very night. She was sublimely indifferent to the fact that her lover's wealth consisted of love and love alone. But what did that matter? She was heiress to an enormous fortune: the precious, romantic, wealthy darling!

Taking these facts into consideration you will readily understand the exceeding buoyancy of Mr. Hart's spirits just then, and you will realize what a shock it must have been to him when, just as he reached the end of the avenue nearest the garden, a figure of a man confronted him, whilst a masculine voice remarked quietly.

"So you calculate upon running off with the heiress to-night, do you?"

"Cooke?" ejaculated Hart, in a tone of anything but pleased surprise. "Why, where did you come from?"

"Well, just about one short minute ago I rose from a most romantic rustic seat behind that clump of bushes. I have been sitting there for about an hour and a half."

He pronounced the last sentence with slow emphasis, glancing keenly at his companion as he spoke. Hart flashed a startled, anxious look at him and turned pale.

"And that is how I happened to overhear the neat little plot you and pretty little Miss McLean were concocting between you. I have learned all of your plans down to its smallest detail; and I congratulate you upon it. It is very romantic."

His congratulations were not welcomed with much warmth, but that did not trouble him. After a pause he continued in the same airy, pleasant strain.

"Let me see. You are to meet here to-night during the *bal masque* which the hotel gives. Your password is to be *rouge et noir*. Considered appropriate, for she is to wear a court dress of brilliant scarlet, whilst you will be clad in the sombre garb of the Black Prince. You are to wear your masks lest anyone should recognize you, until you are safely in the carriage, which is to take you to the next town, where you will drive to the hotel, change your clothes, and get ready to be married."

"You have evidently learned everything about my intentions," interposed Mr. Hart, mournfully, "and I suppose you want to be paid for holding your tongue. Well, how much do you want?"

The other winked a diabolical wink.

Then in low, earnest tones he proceeded to inform his friend that he was not so green as he looked; that he was quite aware that it was no part of his dear friend's intention to encumber himself with a wife; that he felt sure that Mr. Hart had only desired to gratify the romantic little fool by eloping with her, and at the same time giving her parents a chance to catch up with them, and allow them to pay him a good round sum to go quietly off and keep silent over the affair. "In such a case Mr. Cooke considered himself entitled to half the booty. He reminded Mr. Hart that they were sworn friends, comrades and partners who had had too many shady dealings with each other to make it safe for either to refuse to divide his gains. "In short, my dear boy," concluded Mr. Cooke, "I only desire to be remembered by you and for that purpose I have accosted you. To borrow the tersely happy phrase of the autograph album, 'I only seek this little spot in which to say forget me not.'"

There was a pause. Then Hart began to argue; but finding the other firm he was forced to give in. "Well, I suppose I must stick to my colors," he concluded at last, in a tone of utter wretchedness.

"Your colors? Oh, yes, red and black; or, to speak more correctly, *rouge et noir*. Eh, my boy?" said the other, with a heartless laugh, as they separated. But they would not have parted with such mutual satisfaction if they had known that this conversation was also overheard, and by no less a person than pretty little Ella McLean herself.

Half an hour later she lay on the bed in her own room in the hotel, sobbing bitterly and refusing to be comforted even by her bosom friend to whom she had told the whole story.

"Well, I am sure if ever a poor girl was tried I am," exclaimed the friend at length after trying in vain to soothe the grief-stricken maiden.

"This is the second girl that I have heard sobbing over a love trouble to-day. Poor Lucinda is fairly crying her eyes out."

"Who is Lucinda?" queried the woe-begone one, checking her sobs just long enough to ask the question.

"A lady of cullab, who generally tidies up my room and makes me her confidante as she arranges my bed."

Miss McLean gave one reproachful look into her friend's face and then sunk down to resume her tears, a forlorn little heap of woe and finery.

"Now, Ella," her friend's voice again interposed, impatiently, "do hush. What good do you expect to gain by blubbering away like that?"

"Dora Barry!" quoth Ella, with indignant emphasis, "I think you're just a real mean thing. How would you like anyone to say that you blubbered. Blubber, indeed!"

"Well, weeping then, if you like that better. But it doesn't matter what you call it. All the same you will make your nose red by it, and that with the black rims which grief has placed about your eyes will make your face another undesirable combination of *rouge et noir*."

This dire prediction had its effect. Miss McLean stopped sobbing and sat up, gazing mournfully at her friend.

"How sad are the effects of love," continued Dora, who was evidently in a teasing mood. "Now, Lucinda's case is different, but she feels quite as badly. She happens to be in love with

an individual whom she describes as a 'good for nuffin' niggah.' There is to be a wedding to-night to which Lucinda cannot go for the lack of a dress. Gracious!" The last exclamation was made with so much vigor that Miss McLean exchanged her expression of sullenness to one of startled interest.

"I have an idea," commenced Miss Barry, with animation. "A splendid idea. I think I can get you neatly out of this scrape you are in if you will only wear some other costume to the ball and let Lucinda wear your crimson dress instead. You see, I would like to let her have some pleasure for she really is the most civil servant that this hotel owns, and she is very anxious to go to this wedding, for she has a rival who she is afraid will cut her out."

"Gracious, Dora, I wish you would be a little less incoherent. I decidedly object to give up a pretty dress to a black servant," wailed the heiress, plaintively, as she attempted to arrange her disordered bangs.

"Well, you've just got to do it," responded Dora, with decisive sharpness. "I am going to dress Lucinda in your costume, give her the password, supply her with a mask, and send her to the elm avenue in your place. Your beloved Mr. Hart will then run off with her, and she will get a drive to the next town, where the wedding is to be held. It seems to me to be a splendid plan, for both your quondam lover and Lucinda's rival will be foiled. You can enjoy yourself to night without a pang of conscience. Neither Hart or his friend will dare breathe a word about it after being fooled in that way. Gracious, what would I not give to see his face if Lucinda should happen to take off her mask." And she went into a fit of laughter at the thought.

Of course it was not to be expected that Ella consented at once to such a plan, but Dora's stronger will carried the day, and it was a tragic story that Miss Lucinda Jackson told her the next morning as she made her bed. "Ya'as, Miss Barry, I wore de dress and went to de weddin'. It's mighty queer ef I didn't knock spots clean out ob dat conceited Melia. Dat good fer nuffin' niggah, Tom, didn't look at her once frou de evenin'. But, tell yo' what, Miss, I couldn't go dat feller dat druv me into de town. It was all very well when he met me under de elums, called me his angel an' led me off to de kerridge. It was all right when he sat dar in de dark wid his arm roun' me; an' t could bear it when he took off my mask an' began kissin' me like 's ef 'e'd neber leabe off; but when a light fell on my face an' he saw it, to hear de names dat man called me an' de way he swore was too much. Guess I looked too scrumptious to be called names by him. So I jes' pitched in 'um, den and da."

"You did? Oh, Lucy, you're a jewel!" cried Dora, gleefully.

"You kin jes' bet I made de wool fly. I've a good strong fist. Guess he'll hab to stay home some time to mend his broken nose."

Miss Barry's triumph was exceedingly joyous.

"It was *rouge et noir* to him with a vengeance, wasn't it?" she said to Ella. "Now, my dear, you will please to behave a little less like a romantic little goose, and marry some good man with your parents' consent. As for Mr. Hart, I would advise him to take a few lessons in boxing before he next attempts a game of *rouge et noir*."

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