



Aubrey's Revenge.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"Well, you shall. Alec Vancouver was one, and—"

"Alec Vancouver; why, the presuming little dude! I've never exchanged a dozen words with him. But the third one, mother?"

"Was Marshall Romaine, one of the best catches in the market. I can put my finger on a dozen pretty girls who would jump at such an offer. I feel proud of you, my precious little daughter."

Nothing pleases a girl more than to be loved and admired, and Kelpie was no exception.

Her pretty face dimpled with smiles, and her eyes sparkled like diamonds.

"I was never so surprised in my life," she said demurely. "But, mother, dear, you haven't told me yet why you wish me to look so pretty to-night."

"As if you couldn't guess, you black-eyed witch," said the lady, pinching the girl's flushed cheek. "You needn't try to throw sand in my eyes. You know that Carroll Fitzhugh is coming to put an engagement ring on your finger, as well as I do."

"Ah, my darling child," she went on, clasping the girl to her bosom. "This pretty romance has made your mother's heart grow young again. I know all about it, you see; how you loved Carroll's life, and how the white bird brought you the love gift under its wing. And then, when you ran off on that mad escapade, to think he should be the man who came to your rescue when you might have perished in the storm. I never heard of anything so wonderful, not even between the covers of a novel."

"And now, my dear, I have another chapter to add, which will make the romance complete. I told you when you first came to me, as you remember, no doubt, that I had selected your future husband. Well, Carroll Fitzhugh was the man I had in my mind, and I'll tell you why. When your father left you his handsome fortune, there was but a single proviso attached to his will. It was this, that some time between your eighteenth and twenty-first year you should marry the son of his much-valued friend and adopted brother, Colonel Randolph Fitzhugh."

"And Carroll is Colonel Randolph Fitzhugh's son?" said Kelpie quietly.

"Yes, his only son."

"If I refuse to marry Carroll, what then?" questioned the girl, after a moment's silence. "Do I lose my 'three millions'?"

Mrs. van Cortlandt inclined her head.

"Yes, my dear, in that case every dollar of your father's money goes for charitable purposes."

Kelpie made no comment; she stood quite motionless for a moment, her eyes downcast, the wild-rose color fluttering in her cheeks; then, without a word, she turned and left the room.

When Carroll Fitzhugh sent up his card at nine o'clock that evening, Kelpie went down to receive him without a moment's delay.

Snapdragon had obeyed her mistress' orders to make the young lady as charming as possible, and the result was wonderful.

Carroll Fitzhugh was dazzled, and, quite losing his head, went down on his knees, and made love to her in regular schoolboy fashion.

Kelpie listened graciously, her red lips dimpling, and her eyes dancing with mischief now and then, but when the young man begged for an answer and would have taken her in his arms and put a beautiful solitaire on her engagement finger, she drew away the hand and shook her head.

"I'll sleep on it, as dear old daddy used to say," she replied, "and give you my final answer later on."

The young man protested and entreated, up to the moment of his departure, but Kelpie could not be moved.

"I'll give you my final answer later on," she said, bidding her impatient lover a smiling good night.

"I'll write to daddy and Tom and find out what they've got to say about it before I commit myself," she said to herself, sitting alone in her own room, when she had dismissed her maid. "I don't think either one of them are overfond of 'the grand city chap,' as they called Carroll. But I'll tell them all about it from first to last."

CHAPTER XXX.

The lighthouse tender had brought a big batch of letters and papers to New Castle Light on Wednesday morning, and in the wintry twilight of the same day, when Tom Holland returned from Shoal City with a supply of household necessities, the old keeper met him with a radiant face.

"Better late than never, Tom," he cried, giving his assistant a rousing slap on the shoulder. "The little woman's been a long time making up her mind to write, but there's news from her at last; a letter for you and one for me."

"I haven't read mine yet," he added, with a childish laugh. "I've put it away, like I used to hide my nuts and apples, when I was a boy, until I can get time to sit down and enjoy it at my leisure."

Again he laughed, patting the breast pocket of his storm coat.

"Very good idea," assented Tom, who had sudden glow in his handsome eyes. "I think I'll follow your example."

Taking the letter tenderly, almost reverently he thrust it deep down in the pocket that was just above his great loyal heart.

There are some men—they are few and far between, alas! but we meet them now and then—whose love stands next to their faith in God. Tom Holland was one of these. His love for Kelpie was no selfish passion, blazing up one day and dying out in cold gray ashes the next, but a great, loyal, tender devotion, as undying and all enduring as his own soul.

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Tom had felt her loss keenly, but not a single word had escaped his lips. It was like death to be separated from her, but as long as her happiness demanded it, he was content to bear his pain in silence.

His honest face glowed with a great joy, as he put the precious letter in his pocket, and he set about the tasks that must be done with a glad impatient heart.

The evenings were growing long and wintry at New Castle Light, and old daddy and Tom had found them unmistakably lonesome. Pete, the parrot, was in the sulks for most of the time, and the underkeepers had pleasures and pursuits of their own. So the old keeper and his first assistant spent the better part of their time with a book before their eyes, or in gazing out across the storm-swept sea.

But Kelpie's letters had come at last, and they set about their evening tasks with eager alacrity, wondering within themselves what the dear little woman would have to say.

Their work was finished at last, the great lamps burnished like silver and brightly burning, and while the cook was down below, and appetizing odors ascended upward, the two, old daddy and Tom, sat down in the watch room to read their letters in the far-reaching glow of the great golden light.

Kelpie's letter to her grandfather was affectionate to a degree, and brimful of tender regret. She was his own dear little granddaughter, and always would be, no matter what people said, and she had never been one-half as happy as when she lived in the dear old lighthouse and went to sleep every night in her funny little den, close by his, with the sound of the sea in her ears.

Then she told him of the strange things that had happened, and begged him to advise her what to do.

"You never cared much about the 'city chap,' as you called him," she concluded, "and if you don't want me to marry him, daddy, dear, I won't."

Her letter to Tom was quite a different affair. From the very outset the foolish little girl was on stilts and addressed herself to her old comrade in a half-mocking, half-ceremonious way that struck the poor fellow quite dumb. She had heard from him indirectly, and begged leave to offer her congratulations and best wishes for his future happiness, since, if reports were true, he might not be at the lighthouse when she came down to make daddy a visit.

Poor Tom was utterly bewildered by all this, and what followed—quite took his breath away.

Kelpie told him of the gay life she was leading, of her French gowns, and costly jewels and laces, and of her wonderful social success.

She wrote:

"You will scarcely believe me, I dare say, when I tell you that my lady mother had three proposals for my hand in one day; three, mind you, and one of them was the 'city chap' whose life we saved at New Castle Light that night."

How little we dreamed then of what would follow. You remember, too, the little locket you found about the white bird's neck? Well, Carroll sent it, and Fate brought it through all the storm to my hand. Wasn't it wonderful?"

"And, stranger, still, when I went out for a run in a snowstorm a short time after I got here, and got lost and might have perished, Carroll was the man who came to my rescue and carried me home."

He loves me very dearly, according to his own confession, and is anxious to marry me, and, apart from all this, it has come to light that, according to my late father's will, if I refuse to accept him I lose all claim to my fortune of three millions that has been so much talked of, and shall be forced, perhaps, to return to dear old daddy and yourself, I was about to

add, but you will be married and gone by that time, I dare say.

And now, Tom, dear, I have reached the point in question: I want you to advise me what to do. Shall I marry Carroll, and secure the precious three millions, and make my pretty romance a reality, or not? Please don't say, "I don't know," Tom, but tell me what to do.

With love for everybody and a kiss on top of old Pete's green head, I am as ever, your faithful KELPIE.

P.S.—I forgot to say that I have forgotten our eight-o'clock promise more than once, and you have done the same thing, no doubt, for which I forgive you. But don't fail to keep the door of the storage room locked.

A hoarse old clock in the watch room began to strike eight just as Tom Holland finished reading this heartless letter. He arose and glanced at the door of the little storage room, as he had done every night since Kelpie's departure.

It was securely bolted. He went out on the parapet and looked out across the wild, restless, eternally restless, gray sea.

"God bless my darling and make her future life a happy one," he prayed, as the last stroke died away.

A hand on his shoulder made him turn, to find the old keeper at his elbow.

"Tom, my boy, it is just as I expected," he said, his voice broken and tears trickling down his cheeks. "She will never come back to us again."

Tom's heart was too full for speech, but he wrung the old man's hand, and they stood side by side for a moment or two, their heads bowed down by the weight of their great sorrow.

The big light glowed and glittered overhead; the wild sea tossed and moaned, and a strange stillness like the hush of death fell on the wind-blown parapet, where the two men stood with breaking hearts.

Then a noise from the storage room startled them, the sound of three pistol shots in swift succession.

(To be Continued.)

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