

A PRETTY COMPANION

By Louise Bedford.

CHAPTER VIII.—(Continued.)

"Tell me everything she said," Janetta answered, with a sickening dread at her heart that Mrs. Mortimer had guessed at or listened to what had passed between her and Captain Merivale.

"She says that you are deceiving me all the way round—that you are the most awful flirt, and she can prove it."

"Her first charge may be dismissed on that score, at any rate," Janetta said, a little bitterly. "The man I sent away just now—who, it is true, had had more than enough to drink—was my only brother."

Janetta's head drooped with shame as she made the confession.

"Oh, you poor darling!" cried Clarice, trying to possess herself of one of Janetta's hands; but the girl held them folded in front of her.

"Not yet," she said sadly—"not until you know everything. Go on."

"She said that you are deliberately setting your cap at Doctor Drake; that you made an appointment to meet him the day Harry left."

"It's a lie!" said Janetta desperately. "I met Doctor Drake that day by pure chance and I stopped to ask him if he could advise any method of treatment that would hasten your recovery. Anything else?"

"You carry conviction, as you always do," Clarice said, leaning back on her pillows. "I don't think I will even hint at her last charge; it is altogether too impossible."

"I must hear it," said Janetta hoarsely.

"She said you tried to make Harry false to me. Oh, dear, it's too shameful and wicked even to mention such an accusation to one so true as you are."

There was a long pause; then Janetta lifted her head and looked full into Clarice's eyes.

"In all my intercourse with Captain Merivale I never said one word to him that I would have been ashamed for you to hear."

Clarice gave a little sigh of relief. "I knew it, dear; but, just to satisfy me, tell me straight out that you did not care for him except as a friend. Only to please me, not because I doubt you?"

A shiver shook Janetta from head to foot. She tried to speak, but though her lips moved no sound passed them; then she threw herself sobbing at Clarice's feet.

"You are so good, so dear, I'll tell you all the truth, come what will. I do love Captain Merivale. I didn't know it, I didn't even guess it until the day before he went away; then I knew—but he doesn't. Nobody knows but God and you, to whom I now confess it in bitter repentance. I didn't mean to do it, and I have vowed on my knees that I will never see him again—never again! That is why I went away the morning he left." The words came fitfully between her sobs. She could hear Clarice's breath coming and going in broken gasps.

"And he?" she asked at last. "Has he given you any hint as to his feelings for you? Am I to believe that you have given your heart away unasked? Did he tell you he cared for you?"

"He said he might have cared—"

"If I had only been dead or out of the way," said Clarice, in a cold, hard voice. "There is no help for it, Janetta; I'm afraid we must part. Our lives have unfortunately clashed."

Janetta rose and left the room in silence.

CHAPTER IX.

Sleep was far from Janetta's eyelids that night. She did not even attempt to court it. She sat on hour after hour, still wearing her evening dress, with her chin resting in her hands, and gazed, with eyeballs that ached and throbbled, into the fire, trying to read the future in the dying embers.

"Mrs. Mortimer may feel satisfied with her work," she said, half aloud. "She and Mason between them have hunted me down."

She rose to her feet as she spoke, for she heard a sound as of some one moving gently about, and she went swiftly to Clarice's room to see if she were awake. A fresh wave of repentance swept over her, for Clarice's fair face, with the traces of recent tears upon it, was pressed against the pillows; but, to Janet's unutterable thankfulness, her regular breathing and fast-shut eyes showed her to be asleep.

She crept from the room, shutting the door behind her, and returned to her own; and then her heart stood still, for from behind her door stepped a man with a mask on his face, who rapidly shut the door and set his back against it, and Janetta caught the sound of a pistol lightly clicked.

"Now, my dear," said the burglar, quite softly, "don't scream. One scream may cost you your life. I only want a few minutes' talk with you, so that you and I can come to a good understanding. Sit down and take it easy. There can be no manner of good in making a fuss."

Janetta stood, trying to steady the trembling of her limbs by resting her hand on the table. She very well knew that her own life and that of her friend might depend upon her keeping self-control.

"What do you want?" she said presently.

"Much, my dear, or I shouldn't be

here," replied the burglar, in the same even tones. "First, all the money you have; next, all the money she has." He nodded in the direction of Clarice's room. "And then her jewels. She's got 'em quite handy, I believe—not even locked up in a safe."

Janetta had moved across the room, conscious that her every movement was watched by the burglar's eye. She went to a drawer and threw him her purse contemptuously.

"You're a plucky one," said the man, catching at the purse she threw; "but it's best with a fellow like me to keep civil. Three pounds ten," he continued, counting out the contents of the purse, and throwing it back empty, in exact imitation of Janetta's own gesture. "That's very little, my dear; what have you got besides?"

"Not a farthing," said Janetta; "you are at liberty to look."

The man, still keeping a wary eye on Janetta, came and tossed over her drawers, pocketing a bracelet or two, and taking her little watch from its stand, with many exclamations of disgust that his booty was so small.

"I'm wasting my time here; now we'll go to the other one," he said roughly.

Then Janetta's enforced self-control broke down.

"Not you—not you!" she pleaded passionately. "She's very delicate; a sudden shock might kill her, and it would be bad for you if it did. I'll creep into the room and bring you out everything of value in it."

The man stood with his back against the door. "I don't trust a woman, much less a pretty one; you've some dodge in your head."

"I swear my only object is to save Miss Seymour's life, and, in so doing, probably your neck as well," retorted Janetta. "She's asleep. I could get her money and jewels without waking her."

"You shall do it on one condition," said the man, with a brutal laugh. "I'll stand at the open door and cover you with my pistol. If I see you playing me false in the slightest degree, going near the window, or trying to rouse the house, I'll shoot both you and her, remember."

"I've given my word; I'll not play you false," said Janetta.

He opened the door and let her pass before him, with a mock bow, following close upon her heels. Janetta wondered if the thumping of her heart would wake Clarice; it sounded like a cannon in her own ears.

She took the precaution of slipping off her shoes at Clarice's door and set it wide, so that the burglar in the doorway had command of her every movement. At the opening of the wardrobe where her jewel case was kept, Clarice turned and moaned in her sleep, and Janetta paused, her finger uplifted for a moment; but the next instant she was satisfied that Clarice had dropped off again. So quick and deft was she that to collect every article of value in the room did not take her more than five minutes.

"We'll go back together, my dear, and just look 'em over," said the burglar, with his hand on her arm, pushing her before him. "I'll leave the cases and such for a keepsake. I always do the thing handsome when I get hold of an obliging female like yourself. Thirty pounds in gold! Yes, I understood as she'd had a little cheque cashed tonight; and these jewels haven't been overrated! They are first-class. Now, my dear, you'll swear to me, honor bright, that the old one hasn't anything worth my waking her up for! The less people awake over this business the fewer to tell tales, eh?"

He was retreating rapidly down the staircase with his spoils carefully packed away in a black bag; and he saw Janetta's eye travel towards the gong that hung half-way down the stairs.

"No, you don't," he said, reading her meaning. "If you make any effort to wake the house I'll silence you for good and all! You'll give me ten minutes' start, and then you can set the town crier at work if you like."

"Now, a word before we part. Tell your parlor maid to look better after her windows. That big one in your drawing room was not even latched. I didn't have to break a pane of glass. Ten minutes, mind! On second thoughts, you'd better make it a quarter of an hour, as far as you can guess it without your watch."

Janetta stood breathless at the top of the stairs, watching the burglar pass out of sight into the drawing room. Much must still depend upon her silence. She turned at last to go back to her room, when, to her horror, she saw Clarice, in dressing gown and slippers, hurrying towards her with a lighted candle in her hand.

Janetta caught her in her strong arms, almost lifted her back into her bedroom, and locked the door behind them.

"For heaven's sake, keep quiet, dear! Our lives may depend upon it!" she whispered. And then, as she placed Clarice in a chair, the light grew blurred and dim, and Clarice's white, frightened face seemed receding into the far distance; there was a singing in her ears, a cold hand clutching at her heart, and Janetta fell fainting to the floor.

CHAPTER X.

About 12 o'clock that same night Doctor Drake's night bell pealed nois-

ily, to be answered almost immediately by the Doctor's head thrust out of an upper window.

"What's up?" he inquired with characteristic brevity.

"Mrs. Eddy's baby, sir—its; don't think you'll find it alive when you get there," replied the messenger with a curtness that rivaled the Doctor's.

"Mrs. Eddy of Westbourne?"

"Yes, sir. She caught me as I was passing, and begged me very particularly to tell you."

"All right, I'll be off in ten minutes," said the Doctor, closing the window, not in the very best of tempers. He had been up for three nights running, with the result that his groom had a violent chill, and must not, in common humanity, be disturbed.

"I must put my own horse into the dog-cart and drive myself, unless," thought the Doctor, with a grim smile, "I wake up that worthless dog who is asleep on my surgery sofa. It would do him no end of good to drive five miles out in the night air. He shall help me to harness the horse, and can hold him for me at the other end; and on the road I'll talk to him and let him hear a piece of my mind."

Needless to say, the "worthless dog" referred to was Neville, whom Doctor Drake had taken in according to Janetta's request; but, determined not to pamper the youth, had offered him a resting place upon the couch in his surgery, which Neville had accepted rather shamefacedly.

"Wake up, will you?" said the Doctor, putting his hand on the lad's shoulder. "You can help me if you like. My groom is ill, and I'm sent for into the country; I want a hand with the horse."

"All right," said Neville, looking round him with rather dazed eyes. His sleep had sobered him, but he could not remember clearly where he was.

"You'll do now—you are fairly sober," continued the Doctor, with blunt frankness. "I'll lend you a great coat; the nights are cold."

In a few minutes more they were ready for the start, and presently the dogcart passed at a rapid rate up the hill on the side of which lay the Grange, standing out white and clear in the moonlight.

The Doctor pointed at it with his whip.

"That is where your sister lives."

"I know—I was there last night," said Neville.

"I thought it more than probable that you did not remember anything about it," replied Drake, not unkindly. "You may think me a queer fellow to bring you out with me like this in the dead of night. I did it partly for my own convenience, but more that I may give you a word or two of warning. I know little enough of you—only that you came half-sea-over to my house last night, and that you are giving that sister of yours a bad time of it. I'm older than you are—ever so much, some fifteen years I should think; and it seems a pity to me that a young fellow like you should be going straight to the bad."

The Doctor said much more in the same strain during the drive, and Neville had time for reflection as he walked the horse up and down the road whilst the Doctor watched by the cradle of the baby, whose life he was so anxious to save. Perhaps for the first time in his life he was thoroughly ashamed of himself.

No man had hitherto troubled himself to put the boy's conduct before him with such unvarnished simplicity as the Doctor had done tonight, and Neville was considerably taken aback by the picture.

"I've been a perfect beast," he said; "but there shall be an end of it from tonight!"

He repeated the assertion to the Doctor when at last they were upon their homeward way.

(To be continued.)

LOVE OF JEWELS.

In All Ages Women Have Been Dazzled by Rich Gems.

In all countries and in all ages women seem to have inherited a love for precious stones, and it is no wonder that these gems are popularly supposed to exercise some subtle magnetism that influences their natures. This inherent passion may account in a measure for the recent craze for some mascot jewel, a survival of medieval superstition. Upon impressionable people certain gems appear to wield a potent influence. Who has not listened to weird tales of some heirloom talisman, which, when lost or stolen, presaged the ruin of a noble house? A person with a vivid imagination might even believe in the theory of the Pythagoreans, who formulated the doctrine that inanimate things are endowed with souls. Certain evolutionists of today trace the origin of man back to stones, asserting that in their adamantine bosoms they contain the all-pervading essence of spirit, and that the spark emitted from their crystalline hearts is the revelation of the imprisoned soul within. From time immemorial offerings at holy shrines, as tokens of amity from one crowned head to another, as mystic messengers of affection between distant friends, as pledges of constancy exchanged between plighted lovers. Men have died and died, kingdoms have crumbled, families have been rent asunder, husband and wife parted over the disputed possession of some coveted jewel. Perhaps poor Marie Antoinette, of ill-starred memory, might have kept her pretty head upon her shoulders had it not been for the unfortunate affair of the diamond necklace. Women in all ages have succumbed to the temptation of gems. Faust bartered his soul for the love of a woman; Marguerite sold hers for a gem-starred bauble.—Chicago Chronicle.

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