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Carol Richmond

OR

THE MAN WITH THE BLACK GLOVE.

Continued.

Every day that passed served to increase the feeling of mingled dread and hatred which the one bore toward the other, and Lawrence Richmond was fast becoming desperate.

This last demand on the part of the soldier for his daughter served to cap the climax. In spite of his terrible temper and strange actions at times which would seem to belie the fact, this man sincerely loved his child.

She was the only link that bound him to a past that had been full of happiness and sunshine until that dreadful blow came which deprived him of his loved ones except Carol, and left him behind to mourn when he could not be comforted.

The Captain held his secret, and it must needs be a terrible one to cause a man of Lawrence Richmond's iron will to bow the knee to one whom he looked upon as his inferior. Could it be, then that this frightful devastation in his household was the visitation of Providence, as a just reward for the crime of the past?

Alone in his library the master of the Terrace paced to and fro like a caged tiger.

His hands were behind him, his head low upon his breast, and his every step quick and agile, showing his irritable, nervous temperament. That he was wrestling with some fearful question could be plainly seen and there was only one thought that had power enough to chain his mind at present.

So earnestly was he engaged in this strange species of amusement that he did not notice the presence in the room of the Captain, until the latter gave utterance to a low, metallic laugh.

It was a strange thing for him to be hunting down this old man while at the same time he had an avenger on his trail in the shape of his antagonist in the duel—Nora Warner, the wronged wife of Roger Darrel, who had escaped from the mad-house, and was on the trail of vengeance! But it is ever thus with human nature—diamond cut diamond—the world over, and it would be indeed hard to find any object in the shape of mankind so low and insignificant but what there may be some to do him homage and fear the nod of his head.

The old man looked up quickly, and the keen-eyed soldier noticed a wild, half-eager look upon his face that he had never seen there before.

He has settled upon something; I can see it by the glitter of his eyes and the way he shuts his teeth. Have a care, my old gentleman, or you will find your claws ripped still closer, for no man ever plays with fire unless he gets his fingers burnt, and to you I and the secret I hold constitute that fire.

Thus he muttered, as he waited for Mr. Richmond to speak.

You here? said the other, at last; what a wonder I knew it not, for generally I feel the evil influence of your presence like a deadly vapor falling from the horrid up-as-tree.

You are disposed to be both sarcastic and complimentary, Mr. Richmond, but under the peculiar circumstances I can forgive you. I am come to ask a little temporary loan of you, which I am sure you will not refuse—a matter of a mere thousand or two.

Curses on you and your loans; you will drive me to distraction yet. What if I should go mad? Why man, I would tear you limb from limb, I hate you so. Do you not ever think of the risk you are running in persecuting me thus?

The old man certainly looked wild enough when he spoke, but the Captain only laughed. He would have laughed had he been standing over a powder-magazine, to which the fuse was lighted, and, indeed, to tell the truth he was actually doing that now, and he knew it.

I have done nothing so terrible, my dear old gentleman. The case lies in a nut-shell. You had your choice between

providing for me with a small portion of your immense worldly goods, or else losing the whole of them, your liberty and, perhaps, your life. That you have chosen the former only proves your wisdom.

You hate me, you say. What cause have you to do so? Had it been another man, duty would have led him taking the other course, and you would have lost all. No; on the contrary, you should thank me. There was always a chance of finding it out, and lightning seldom strikes the same tree twice. I hold your secret, and while you act like a rational being there is no chance of its being discovered by any one else. Defy me, and—well, what is the use of threats? You know me enough to be sure of what I would do.

There was conscious power in the voice of the Captain that was peculiarly aggravating to the old man, but he calmed himself as well as he was able, though his eyes still glittered with that strange, metallic gleam that boded no good to the object of his anger.

I hate you, not so much for what you are doing, man, but because you know I am perfectly innocent of that crime, and yet knowing this you still blackmail me. That is why my brain seems bursting at times, and I could cut your very soul from you body to send to Hades, where it properly belongs.

That is a very nice statement for you to make, dear sir, but how are you going to prove it in any way?

Ha! devil, schemer, there more of your cunning crops out. The papers that would exonerate me you have stolen and hold over my head. To save them from being destroyed and myself from future trouble, I have been buying your silence and consideration in the past, but now your demands are growing too preposterous. For the last time I ask for your mercy, your forbearance. I would not have your blood upon my hands for a great deal, but I feel like a man hunted by a human blood-hound and who must, unless the dog gives up the chase, either fall himself or destroy the hound. Plainly, Captain Grant, is it your life, or mine?

Then hear me, old man; I utterly refuse all compromise. I have no other means of living at present except on you, and as, for reasons of my own, I expect to make America my home in the future, I may as well provide against a rainy day. You have too much, I too little. It is but fair, then, and there should be an equitable division; so make up your mind to that.

Lawrence Richmond knew, then that this man possessed a heart of adamant, and that words would not leave the faintest impression upon it.

His own face whitened, and the skin seemed drawn like parchment over his bones. His teeth were clinched as if set in agony, and the wild gleam deepened in his eyes.

He reached out his hand and it fell upon a peculiar nail in the wainscoting, a brass-headed nail which would not have been attracted passing notice. As his finger pressed against this, a portion of the oiled floor of the library suddenly yawned open, leaving an aperture of perhaps a width of four feet, down which the Captain would have been hurled like a cannon-ball, but for the fact that he gave an agile spring just as the trap fell, that landed him beyond the danger line.

The trap was an old relic of revolutionary days, and possessed quite a thrilling history, but it had nothing to do with our story.

Quickly the Captain whipped out a little, silver-mounted revolver.

Foiled again, old man: You see it is useless to fight against fate, for your limbs are tied. I am ready for any such emergency. Better luck next time; and turning, he left the room.

Curses on him! muttered the old man, deeply moved, he bears a charmed life. Satan protects his own; but I will yet burst asunder the bonds of fate, and then let him beware!

CHAPTER VII.
LIKE A WOMAN, SHE WEPT.

Carol Richmond knew not the deadly warfare existing between her father and the man who wore the mysterious black glove, but she was well aware of the fact that the captain held some power over her parent, else he would have never acted toward her in the way he did.

She was wretched as any girl could be. The days went by without any light coming to her, and yet to her there was little or no difference in them, for when hope and anticipation have utterly died out of the heart, it makes no difference whether the sun rises or sets, for the same dreary future lies beyond, which cannot be lightened by any earthly means.

In spite of all that had come to her, she loved Roger still.

To her, he had come as a knight in the olden days of chivalry, and he had wooed and won her so gently, that when he had gained her love it was forever.

She believed in him so thoroughly that, although he was now apparently lost to her forever, she would hold him in reverence until the day of her death.

Such a love as that was beyond all price, and there are few men in this world to whom is granted the privilege of possessing a heart that nothing can alienate.

That deeper sorrow and distress were in store for her, Carol had never imagined, and yet such was indeed the case.

Although she believed that Roger had a mad wife confined in a lunatic asylum, it had never entered her head that he meant her wrong when he won her love. She knew that he had fought against it, and was sure that he would have told her of Nora Warner at some day before the end came. In his soul, she had recognized true nobility, and it could not be that this man would ever commit a crime.

any time he could get a divorce from her and had been hoping that all would yet turn out well, while he allowed himself to be carried along by the resistless current of fate until the climax had come.

Carol looked at the matter in a different light.

To her, divorce was something that she thought of with horror, and yet she knew that the act was sanctioned in the olden times by God, but all her life she had believed that it was not right for either party to marry again during the lifetime of the other.

With such a bleak future stretching out before her, it is not to be wondered at that Carol paid but little heed to affairs passing around her.

She saw that the Captain came home wounded, and it instantly entered her mind that he had been engaged in a duel with her lover. The thought filled her with alarm, and she could not rest until she had seen Roger riding on his horse, and evidently unhurt.

This was witnessed from the shelter of the trees, for she would not have let him see her for the world, after what had passed between them.

When he had gone from her sight, she wandered on, almost unconscious of the direction she had taken, and finally came to a pause at the old resting spot by the brook, where clustered memories that were now sweetly sad to her.

While she stood there, she became conscious of the fact that she was no longer alone, and turning found herself face to face with a stranger. She would have moved away, but there was some strange fascination in his eyes that seemed to bind her there.

A strange shudder passed over her frame, as if her soul recognized in this person one who was destined to be connected with her future.

I did not intend to alarm you, Miss Richmond, but, seeing you here, the impulse came to me, and I am here. I would like to speak a few words to you. That I have no wrong intentions in doing so, I will prove by saying that I am talking to you for your own interest. I come to speak to you of your lover.

Carol realized then that she had not been mistaken when, in her heart, she suspected the presence of this man was connected in some way with her whole future.

She summoned up her resolution and stood there bravely.

Whatever you have to say to me, say it at once, and without fear as to the result, for I am prepared to hear anything.

You speak bravely, and believe me, I do not wish to inflict needless pain upon you. What I say now may seem cruel to you but it will save you from much suffering in the future. You believe in your lover—must believe in him, else you could never love him. To you he is, no doubt, the soul of honor, and a model of manly chivalry. Poor girl, it cuts me to the heart to hear the veil from your eyes but it must be done. Besides, you will not be the first who has nursed a heart that was broken, and wept tears of blood over the ruin caused by that man.

His voice was low and full of passion, which flashed from his eyes too, how could Roger have wronged him? Carol waited in dread suspense for what was to follow.

There was one whom I knew; a fair girl, whom every one loved because she was gentle and kind. She lived with her old father, and very happy they were until a serpent entered their Eden. One day a man was thrown from his horse near the house and carried in almost insensible. He had received some injuries that would keep him quiet for weeks, and during that time he was taken care of as if he had been a relative. He was handsome, talented, and with such a gentlemanly air about him that he won the hearts of both father and daughter. Time passed on, and what seemed inevitable came to pass. He had given his name to them in the beginning—it was Roger Darrel.

Although she had suspected this, Carol felt a chill pass over her frame, but she shut her teeth hard and uttered not a word. Evidently, terrible as the story of the gipsy girl had been, she was about to hear something that would shock her still more cruelly.

He was so handsome and devoted, and she so innocent and artless, that the son won her heart, and so well did she love him that there was nothing under Heaven, it seemed, that she would not have done for him. I can see, by the way your cheeks turn white, that your love for him has also been of that nature; and that while you lurk his image away from your heart, it is like death. What fatal power does that man possess, that the hearts of women should bow to him? May the curse of Heaven rest upon him, and his future be full of darkness.

"Hush," said Carol, almost with a gasp; do not say such dreadful things, but go on with your story. It interests me so that I can scarcely breathe.

I will be brief, for it pains me to dwell upon the story. He made love to her and won her heart. She vowed to be his through good and evil report, for hers was a love that was worship. Her father took a sudden dislike to him, for news had come to him that this man had done something in Russia that made him a branded criminal, and while he could not order the adventurer from the house, he gave his child to understand that of all things upon earth, that which she must not do was to think of Roger Darrel in the light of a lover. It was too late.

Already was she in his body and soul, so completely wrapped up in his existence, that the words of the father, who had hitherto been all in all to her, fell upon deaf ears. In later times, looking back, how often did she bemoan the evil influences that had prevented her from regarding the words of warning uttered by this beloved parent; but as she made her bed, so must she lie. It was but just that she should suffer for her wicked disobedience, but all the sorrow did not fall on her alone. Listening to the beguiling words of the tempter, she fled with him. They were married in the city, but her happiness was brief, indeed. Her husband soon tired of her and tried to break her

heart. Something arose whereby it was necessary for him to be free of her, and, in this dilemma, he proved himself capable of anything. Too cowardly to take her life, even when she begged him to do so—to kill her at his feet, and let her in dying serve him—too cowardly to do even this, I say, the infamous wretch had her seized and borne away to a mad-house, where for weeks and months she was kept a prisoner, subject to all the horrors of such an institution, gotten up to make people mad first, and then keep them in that condition.

You are speaking of Nora Warner? cried the girl, excitedly.

Yes, I am speaking of Nora Warner, though how you came to know of her I cannot conceive, since he would never dare to whisper her name. She remained an inmate of that mad-house, God alone knows how long. It may have been but months, though to her it seemed years. Then she effected her escape. Mad rage filled her heart instead of the idolatrous love she had entertained for him; yet she would torture him before she dealt him his death-blow. At last she has found him, after a long chase through Europe, and it may be that in this quiet place the tragedy will be made complete. Look at me, fair girl. I am but a wreck of my former self, but, such as I am, you gaze upon Nora Warner!

Carol shrank back as she saw the hat removed and the shower of curls descend, for was she not gazing upon Roger's wife, the woman who had held the position she had hoped to occupy, and who had even suffered the torments of the mad-house for love of that handsome devil, who had been her evil genius.

She felt no loathing for her.

On the contrary, it seemed as though some kindred spirit drew them together. Both were victims of man's inhumanity, and the fact knit the bonds of sympathy more firmly.

I have told you all that is necessary now. Understanding that you were about to marry him, I thought it my duty to warn you. Have I done well, or do you blame me, Carol Richmond?

I thank you. Though you have added to the load on my heart, and almost rushed me, yet the fault is not with you. Leave me now please; I would be alone. We will perhaps meet again.

With rare tact the disguised girl saw that poor heartbroken Carol wished to be alone, that she might find solace in tears, and with low, muttered words on her lips against the arch-fiend, Nora Warner withdrew.

What amazement and tremulous joy would have filled Carol's heart could she have known that Nora Warner's words were meant for another than the one she loved; but this was not to be. Like a red she bowed to the storm; like a woman she wept.

CHAPTER VIII.
"YOU ARE THE MAN."

When the gipsy girl, Barbara Merriles, rushed away from the spot where stood the young master of Darrel Chase, she had no idea whether she went, so that for the time being lost herself to that man.

He had done much for her in the past, and yet it seemed as though she was fated to be the cause of his life. Unintentionally she had up to this time been the cause of much trouble to him, and now through her hand had come this last terrible blow.

Her mother, the old gipsy queen, believing him to be the Roger Darrel who had robbed her of her child, had cursed him and his forever, and it was to this legacy of hate that the young man referred when he spoke about Barbara Merriles and the past, at the time Carol told him what she had discovered.

For quite a time the black-eyed gipsy girl ran like a deer through the woods, and at length, finding herself far away from the spot where she had left the other, she came to a pause.

In her excitement, however, she seemed to forget that she had ruined the happiness of Carol Richmond and the man she loved, by the story she had poured into the girl's ear, believing, as she did at that time, that the master of Darrel Chase was the man whom she had known to be lost in the past.

If she did think of it, the idea was pushed aside, for it was so easy to believe that those two would come together again as lovers generally do, by natural attraction.

Thoughts rushed into her brain, and she saw things she had not contemplated before, but which were now becoming very plain.

The evidence against Roger Darrel was very damning, and yet there were strange things that would have to be explained before he could be either proven guilty or innocent.

While she stood there, calming her heart which beat like a trip hammer under the intense excitement that filled it, she heard approaching voices, and, with no definite purpose in view, save to hide herself from observation, she crouched down at the base of a monster oak.

Nearer came the speaker.

The voice of one was unfamiliar, and evidently that of an old man, as her keen ears told her, but the other—something about it sent a shiver over her.

She looked up.

What she expected to see she could not have told herself, and hence she was not terribly disappointed when she saw that the owner of the voice was evidently a stranger to her.

Let us start here, Captain Grant, said the old man, and before doing so, I wish to fully understand your plans.

They are simple enough Mr. Richmond, knowing what I do, and possessing a paper that is worth to you even more than all your wealth, you do not dare to refuse me. You thought to be rid of me by means of that trap in the floor, but I was too cunning for you. Now we will square accounts. One week from to-day I will be on hand with a minister, who will come prepared to unite me to your daughter, no matter whether you are willing or not. Do you understand old man?

To be continued.

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