

CONTINUED FROM TENTH PAGE.

prize?" she whispered, stifling a laugh. "Well, it's there."

The count's eyes gleamed. "You are sure?" he queried.

"I heard the servants talking of the family heirloom, and the pity of not allowing Miss Woodford to wear some," was the strange reply.

A rush of cold air stirred the bare branches, and the woman glanced round suspiciously her face, lit by the lantern she carried, was recklessly evil in its girlish youthfulness, and, for one second, the light caught the gleam of her flaxen hair; then both stood in complete darkness.

The dismal shaking of the branches had put her on her guard, and she had deftly slipped the slide over the glass of the lantern.

Both listened in silence a moment, still as statues.

The wail of the cutting wind died away. "I must hurry in before I get thoroughly wet," the girl breathed, "and you had better remain in shelter under the window I will show you."

"And the signal?" he asked, as they moved noiselessly in the direction of the house.

"I will flash the light as a sign. This is a rare chance, my chief! A little drama shall occur, causing utter bafflement and confusion. How I revel in a task of this kind!" she added, and he knew that her eyes were full of mocking laughter.

They were now near the handsome building, and, suddenly, a curious trembling seized Count Lodi.

His hearing was strained to catch every note of the sweet refrain ringing out to smite him with the galling consciousness of his base unworthiness.

His wife was singing, and her voice thrilled to his crime-hardened soul—seemed to appeal to his better nature in strains of pleasing intensity.

He recollected St. Valentine's Eve, when his brief wooing had lifted Valtie to heights of unquestioning rapture her innocent faith in him as boundless as a child's.

Nothing but the evil mystery surrounding his own masked life had clouded that pure faith.

The bright wild flower of the valley shrank and dropped in the stifling atmosphere of villainy and intrigue; and but for his ugly secret, the tie uniting them might never have been relaxed.

Did regret quiver in the flood of sound that broke through the bleak night, stirring his heart to its profound depths?

Was she sorry that she had rejected the 'poor little bunch of violets' for a more dazzling gift?

Count Lodi stood lost in a tumult of strange emotion, and, when his companion's whispering accents broke in upon his reflections, he started, hissing savagely—"All is arranged! I will wait until the window is opened. Go back to your harmless duties, and beware of rousing the mistrust of the servants!"

He could not see how the girl's teeth met in mute vindictiveness at the sneer—how the pearly blue eyes glittered treacherously in the gloom.

"Do I need cautioning?" she retorted. "It would be odd if Natalie's were to fail at any crisis, my chief! Have I not served the cause too well to err in a matter so fate-ordained and simple?"

Her hand gripped hard the lantern she held, and her pale face gleamed with a venetian malevolence.

She hated the man she served, and there was a mutiny of strength smouldering within her; she was his accomplice no longer from choice, but because her life would pay the penalty of desertion from the gang he dominated.

"Go!" he repeated authoritatively, and she slipped lightly across the terrace, keeping close to the house, and soon after disappeared.

Marco Lodi stood, sheltered from the biting wind and the driven sleet, under the deep coping of a low window.

There was a soft, tender lingering of Valtie's now finished song in his ears, and it brought a sort of mist to his eyes.

Then he muttered to himself—

"It is too late to rectify and reshape my life! What would it bring? Naught but ruin, and she would be deprived of ease and affluence! Could I endure to see her want of the slightest comfort? Could I confess that all I possess is only mine by fraud—that my riches are gained through crime?"

The trees of the terrace shook in a gust of icy wind that made an ominous plaint round the lurking figure of the impostor, and, at the same instant, a shaft of light darted across the blackness of the garden path.

With a leap the Italian reached the ledge of the window.

He swung there, cool and calculating and took keen stock of the room within.

His confederate was not visible.

The unoccupied apartment was in a subdued glow, and the massive oak furniture looked almost ghostly in the gleam of the fire flames.

He let himself through the open window into the room.

His face was set, ashen hued, and his splendid eyes blazed with a singular brilliancy; he seemed bent on some desperate scheme of guilt.

What motive had he in this soundless quest?

Basil had not dared to trust himself to return to Valtie's side after he had listened to that sweet song of hers—a song often sung in the old days at Brookvale.

His love was so overpoweringly fervent that he must tell her of the blank in his life which she had caused.

How beautiful she looked, he thought, in her dress of white velvet, a wistful little shadow about her mouth! That she was far from happy was pitifully certain.

He stood aloof until she glanced up, meeting his troubled gaze with a brave little smile, and then he crossed to her chair, saying—

"I have never been able to hear the

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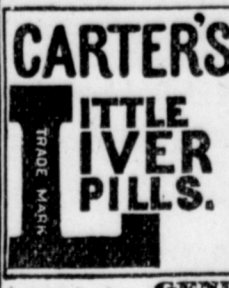
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sound of that song since you left Brookvale I wish you had chosen any other."

A fleeting flush tinted her pale cheeks.

"Did I vex you, Basil? How thoughtless of me! I sometimes sing it to Marc," she added, purposely dealing the barb as a check to the agitation apparent in his manner.

He winced at the rebuke, keeping all expression of regret sternly in curb.

He had no right to utter one word of complaint.

She was Count Lodi's wife and her sympathy ought not to be disturbed by any allusion to the pain she had caused another man.

Valtie was about to make some trifling comment, when a shrill cry put all but the certainty of some disaster from her mind.

Ethel Woodford came running from an adjoining room with the startled impetuosity of a frightened child.

"Papa has been robbed!" she exclaimed, pausing at Valtie's side in wide-eyed horror. Someone has broken open the safe in his study, and poor Benson is lying there dead, I think!"

Count Lodi was among the first to reach the door leading to the adjacent apartment from which he had but recently emerged, though no one had seen him return to the drawing room.

There was a slight pallor on his face, though he was cool and steady-nerved, even kneeling down beside the injured valet, who lay motionless on the thick rug, a ghastly stain creeping from his breast.

"This is a knife wound, and must be attended to," he said, rising and addressing Colonel Woodford in a quiet tone. "I expect the thief was nearly caught with his plunder, and just struck out with a sharp weapon, getting clean away with his prize."

Sternly composed, the colonel sent for a doctor, then summoned the staff of quaking servants.

"Can either of you account for this?" he asked, his eyes flashing over the straining group.

Each replied in the negative and the housekeeper, with more assurance than the rest, ventured to state—

"I had a young person to help set the table, and to see to the lamps and flowers."

"Where is she?" was the interruption.

"Of course she must be questioned."

The woman silently moved her ample body, revealing, to Valtie's petrified amazement, the slight form of the girl who had flung upon the waves those ill-starred immortelles!

CHAPTER IX.

No sign of recklessness marked her present aspect.

Demurely dressed in black and her flaxen hair neatly coiled she now made a picture of innocent simplicity, looking towards the colonel with a shy artlessness of protest.

"What is your name?" he asked, and, with pretty modesty, she told him.

"Natalie Dennie."

"Can you throw any light on this infamous affair?" he queried, his keen eyes piercing as a hawk's. "You must have frequently passed and repassed this room while attending to your duties. Did you not hear any sound—see any sign of something unusual?"

"I heard the one they call Benson cry out for help, and, before I could reach him, saw him fall. Nobody else was in the room the safe was open, and a cold draught made me look towards the window. It was open."

"What more can you relate?" Colonel Woodford asked, as Natalie Dennie, having given her simple explanation, stood retiringly beside the portly housekeeper.

"I know nothing else," she replied.

"Here is the doctor," Count Lodi interposed, with suave civility, and the attendant was told to go.

The guests gradually departed, rather disconcerted by the tragic incident, and, as the count and countess were being driven to Park Lane, Valtie kept contrasting Natalie Dennie's dove-like demeanour with her wild gaiety of that night when she had danced undaunted in the midst of so many people.

What could it mean? the young wife reflected, shivering with apprehensive mistrust.

Why had the girl ignored Marc, whom she knew? Why had he glanced at her

without the slightest sign of recognition? Suddenly Valtie's heart gave a leap of horror.

What if the two were conspiring to harm Colonel Woodford with the hideous tenacity of plotters devoted to the cause of a secret confederation?

For an instant she felt sick and faint with the awful significance of this terrible surmise.

She shrank back among the cushions of the brougham, white as snow, and, putting her arm round her supple waist, Count Lodi drew her to his side, an odd compression about his mouth.

"Are you getting tired of me, Valtie?" he said, his jealousy of Basil still rankling fiercely. "Do you regret leaving Brookdale for my sake? What a glorious St. Valentine's Eve that was?"

She looked up into his handsome face, a questioning wilderness in her gaze. Did she love this man, whose life was dark with mystery she could not fathom?

Her soul thrilled with mingled tenderness and loathing, with a queer pathos in her voice, she said—

"I wish Madame Delvont had less influence in our home, Marc!"

He laughed.

"Are you jealous of Pauline?" he exclaimed; and Valtie drew her head up, a slight flush tinting her pale cheeks.

"Not in the least, I assure you!" was the scornful retort.

When in the strong light of the drawing-room, Valtie noticed a peculiar glitter in Count Lodi's splendid eyes, and he seemed watchful and restless.

Was it because Madame Delvont had not yet returned from the opera?

She came in presently, calmly regal and inscrutable as some cold statue, and glancing into her glistening grey eyes, Valtie felt her dislike increase—experienced a creepy sensation of renewed repugnance, so strong and overpowering that she hurried away, seeking relief in the sanctuary of her pretty boudoir.

Taking off her rich dress, she put on a clinging wrap, and, drawing a chair close to the fire that glowed cosily in the low grate, unfastened the beautiful curly ripples of her red-gold hair.

At the same time her mind rapidly reviewed all that had lately tended to alarm and bewilder her, and the miserable mistrust ranking in her breast became a burden of crushing weight.

She felt ensnared in the midst of deadly schemes, whose deeds of mystery were concealed by treacherous manoeuvre and craft, and the shadow of evil was hateful to heart; she could hardly bear to think of the straits to which her rash elopement had brought her.

She heard the Count go to his room, and then a dead silence seemed to enwrap the household, while she stared with her blue, troubled eyes into the glowing depths of the fire, and wondered how she could endure the life long tie that must fetter her to the constant dread of seeing her husband arrested as the desperate chief of the lawless society he apparently ruled.

She sat pondering until a dull weight seemed to be about her forehead, and a drowsy weariness pressed down her delicate eyelids; with her ruddy head resting against the back of the lounge-chair, she fell asleep.

The fire was sinking into shallow caverns, when some slight sound disturbed her; she sat up looking around the room in vague bewilderment.

Then her breathing faltered, ceased, icy shuddering seized her frame, for Count Lodi, clad in his dressing gown, with fixed weirdly shining eyes and noiseless footfall, was coming towards her.

Something gleamed in his right hand—a sharp weapon stained red.

It almost touched Valtie as he silently drew near, she could have screamed with terror of that pointed blade, and of his blank, sightless gaze—could have thrown herself at his feet in the poignant agony that wrung her soul.

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What It Means.

Mr. Rural—"If there ain't no objection, me and my family will stop in here and take a rest. I see you've got a sign, 'Family Entrance,' over y'r door."

Lounger—"If you wasn't from Squedunk or some such town, you'd know that there sign means that this ain't no place for families to enter."

St. C. Warren's Morning Tab.

There is something extremely English in the story of Sir Charles Warren 'doing trimbles,' as Bouncer expressed it, in the open air on the battlefield. Val Kranz Sir Charles, under no circumstances, intermits his morning bath. On the occasion

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of Buller's fast effort to relieve Ladysmith Sir Charles found it impossible to leave his post, so when day broke on the battlefield he ordered his servant to bring his bath with sponge and towel, and there and then in the open air, Sir Charles Warren, commanding the Fifth division, proceeded to take his bath, sublimely indifferent to the fire of the enemy. The enemy were, perhaps, too much astonished at the British eccentricity of bathing at all, much more of bathing in this extremely public fashion to attempt any violent interruption.

THE GULF.

Great Satisfaction in Quebec in Regard to Dodd's Kidney Pills.

Mrs. Anna Mongren, of Grand Metis, writes—Suffered Severe Pain in Region of Kidneys—Three Boxes of Dodd's Kidney Pills Gave Her Relief.

GRAND METIS, QUE., May 7.—Throughout the Gulf district including the Maritime Provinces and Newfoundland, Dodd's Kidney Pills are conquering kidney disease and bring people health and happiness. Every day brings news of another person cured, another home relieved from anxiety and suffering owing to the use of Dodd's Kidney Pills. The fame of Dodd's Kidney Pills has extended into the Atlantic, and even on the fishermen's islands they have become the standard medicine.

It is a well known fact that almost all the common and most fatal maladies spring from diseased kidneys, and it is on this principle that Dodd's Kidney Pills have been prepared. They act promptly and safely on the kidneys restore them to perfect health and working order and thus cut away the foundation of nine out of ten of the diseases we hear most about today. Bright's Disease, Diabetes, Heart Disease, Rheumatism, Sciatica, Lumbago, Dropsy, Gravel, Inflammation of the Bladder, Women's Weakness and Blood Diseases all result from disordered kidneys, and Dodd's Kidney Pills cure them every time.

Mrs. Anna Mongren, Grand Metis, Que. writes: "I was suffering from a great pain in my side which caused me much pain and uneasiness. I took three boxes of Dodd's Kidney Pills and had no sooner taken them than I felt a great relief. I continued to take them and now I am perfectly cured and I think myself obliged to tell my friends. I thank Dodd's Kidney Pills very much for such a great benefit."

KRUGER AT CLOSE RANGE.

A Clergyman's Wife Tells What She Thinks of the Boer President.

Miss Susan T. Clark, of 799 Asylum avenue, Hartford, Conn., has recently received from a personal friend, wife of a Pretoria clergyman, a letter from which extracts were taken showing what is thought of Kruger, where he is known. The writer was Kruger's neighbor. The letter reads: "We daily hear of things which go to prove how long-seated has been President Kruger's hatred of the British. Once he was a field cornet, receiving British pay. He had £400 a year (\$2,000), an ample sum in those days, as he had his farm, his mutton, his grain, and his own tobacco, and needed only to buy sugar and coffee. His boots were home-made, veldt shoons, and he usually wore leathern shooting breeches, so his clothes did not cost him much. He had very little work, but he asked for £600 and when it was refused he vowed vengeance on the English, mercenary and full of avarice and greed he has ever been; but because he can talk religion and is sly and cute, he has fooled hundreds."

"I hope President Burger's memory will be honored now. President Kruger's slights upon President Burger, because the latter was cultivated and educated, have been numerous and contemptible. President Burger once said to our opposite neighbor, Mr. R. T. N. Jones a burgher of the State. 'Oh, that sly old field cornet Paul Kruger. He is bent on mischief. First he means to ruin me, and then defy the English. He will be a terrible foe for he is full of hate, and he will scruple at nothing. He has no conscience.' He undermined the influence of Burger by telling the old religious Boers that he was unorthodox and didn't believe the Bible."

"So far as we can ascertain now, he was merely modern. He told the people honestly that the earth went round the sun, and that the earth was round, and that David did not write all the psalms, and a few more of these very dangerous and alarming facts, so his people believed he was a skeptic and infidel and lost faith in him, and Paul Kruger helped that on. We always thought Paul could not speak English, but old colonists here who knew him when he was striving for office under the British tell me that he can speak it, and did. Clever he has been. And how terrible has been his power! We are only beginning to realize. I feel so sorry for the anti-Kruger men who in their loyalty to their land and country, must fight for him."

"It seems that the members of the Afrikaner Bond, the men who twenty years ago were plotting and planning and raising disloyalty in Cape Colony, approached Sir John Brand, that noble Free State President, and he spoke bravely and faithfully then, expressing his sentiments and telling his people that they would grow and wax strong, if they were honest and true republicans and refused to be drawn into pots and schemes and connivances. He said: 'I am a Dutchman and an Afrikaner. I love my people and country, but I am not bigoted and prejudiced. On the whole we have had far greater mercy and justice from England than we expected or deserved. England has treated us better than we treated the French Huguenots with regard to language, and better than any of us ever treated the natives. And if we are square and honorable this republic will grow grand and strong. But beware of social alliances. Beware of what are termed ideal political schemes. Beware of any trickery.' 'Alas, alas, Paul Kruger has won over the little once independent Orange Free State, and she has lost the prestige of her freedom and must fall because of her alliance with the Transvaal."

"Reports in some of the American newspapers are aggravating, such as that of the Rev. Burford Hooke, of the Congregational Council. He says: 'Kruger is a great reader of old writers—as Milton, Pilgrim's Progress &c.' He may possibly have seen the Pilgrim's Progress in Dutch and heard it, but I doubt if he ever heard Milton's name and he really can hardly read at all himself. So the Rev. Hooke gave a very wrong impression. He is more ignorant than a Kaffir."

Easy Escape.

"How did you finally get rid of that man who wanted you to become a millionaire by letting him put you in on the ground floor of a mining scheme?"

"Oh, I gave him 25 cents to buy his lunch."

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