

IN THE Clutch of Rome.

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CHAPTER IX—Continued. THE RESCUE FROM THE CONVENT.

Under the subtle influence of the priest of her early faith, (comparative stranger though he was) she had glided, as it were, into the confessional. So, blushing a little, she said: "No priest united us, Father St. John. We were married on the ocean by the captain of the ship on which we fled to America."

"The hand of the priest closed convulsively. This was the lever which he must press. "The convent from which you escaped was in a foreign country then."

"Oh, yes; in Spain, my native country."

"You might be a native of England or American, judging from your perfect English."

"Yes, by careful study and the best of teachers, I think I have mastered the language. Nevertheless, I come from old Granada. I was born and bred in sight of the famous old Alhambra."

"You will be surprised to learn that my mother was a native of Granada," said Fabio.

"Is it possible? You are also Spanish, then?"

And Mrs. Maxwell drew her chair a little nearer the young priest in pleased surprise:

"I can scarcely claim that distinction," said Father St. John, smiling. "My father, dead so long ago that my recollection of him is very faint, was an American, and married my mother, who died a few years ago, in this country, where I was born. I have a tender feeling for my mother's romantic birthplace, however, and I rather pride myself on my perfection in the musical tongue she so carefully trained in me. And I was given the Spanish name of Fabio at my baptism. But enough of myself, and pardon my seeming curiosity, Senora; will you not tell me under what circumstances you met your American husband, and of your subsequent flight from the convent? But, first explain why it is you are so unlike your countrywomen? My mother had jet black eyes and hair."

"My mother," said Mrs. Maxwell, "was pure Castilian. My father, like yours, died when I was so young I do not remember him. It was while we were visiting relatives in Madrid that I met him who became my husband at a ball given by the American consul. He spoke enough Spanish to interest me—and well it was the beginning of the happy end. We had acknowledged our love before my mother or my relatives awoke to what had been going on before them. Then I was hurried back to Granada; Mr. Maxwell was forbidden to even think of me, and I was told that a suitable husband would be found for me at once. I will spare you the details; suffice it to say, he followed me to Granada, here, thanks to the heavy bribes we gave to my duenna, we met very often. We had decided to make one more appeal to my mother to permit us to marry, when my duenna's conscience began to trouble her, and she told her confessor all that we had paid her to keep secret. He, as a matter of course, gave the information to my mother. She was furious. Locking me in my own room, and sending the duenna out of the house disgraced, I was told that I should not marry a Protestant American, though he were the president himself. My mother also told me I must swear on the crucifix to abandon all thoughts of the vile heretic as she termed him, or become a nun. I should not bring disgrace on two of the oldest and proudest families in Spain. In turn, became very angry and no doubt, used language unbecoming a child to a parent. My mother lost all control of her temper, and grasping my shoulders in her strong grasp, she shook me violently and said: 'You living shame! What curse on me when I gave you life! I don't believe even the heretic would marry you, if I gave my consent. He would never give such a frailty as you have shown yourself to be, what he would call the honor of his name. Men don't marry girls who fly at his bidding to rendezvous in old ruins and mountain ravines, with a duenna—curses on her—half a mile away.'

"Before I could reply to this terrible insult, I was alone, but not for long. Our family adviser and confessor entered the room. He, in turn, urged me in gentle, though firm language, to give up my alien lover. I was obdurate, and he also threatened me with a convent, if I did not yield. For several days, I was alternately threatened and entreated to give up my lover and to prepare to marry a young Spanish gentleman, whom they named to me. But I firmly resisted all their importunities. My courage was greatly stimulated by a note which my maid, after many promises on my part that come what would, I would never betray her, had given me on the third day of my imprisonment.

"It was from Mr. Maxwell, telling me to be of good cheer, and he would effect my release; that he had seen the old duenna, who, furious at being driven from the house and eager for re-

venge, had told him all that had occurred, that my maid, who was nearly related to the duenna, had agreed to keep her informed of all that took place, and she, in turn, would communicate with him. On the last afternoon of the week, my mother, very pale and resolute, came to me and made a final appeal, with the usual result. That night, as I was preparing to retire, I heard the key turn in the door, and before I realized what had happened, my arms were pinioned behind me, and a bandage tied tightly over my mouth. All resistance, as I well knew, would be in vain; and I gave myself up for lost. Mr. Maxwell had been too slow in maturing his plans. He had not counted on these extreme measures. Half fainting, I was carried out of the house, and placed in a closed carriage; and soon after the doors of the convent of St. Ignatius shut me out of the world, as I thought, forever. I had been in the convent nearly two weeks, when one day, during recreation in the garden, I heard the bell ring, and soon after I saw the portress hurrying into the convent. She soon returned, and admitted a gray friar who was apparently bent and decrepit with age or sickness. We were afterwards told that he was old and sick, but obliged to take a journey, and craved a rest of an hour or so at the convent. From the moment I saw the friar enter the convent gates, I felt a vague hope of something, I scarcely knew what, steal over me. The nuns and novices were in a remote part of the garden. I, gloomy and uncompanionable, seldom mingled with them. As the old portress was conducting the friar to the mother superior, he suddenly became very tottering and apparently fainting. The nun placed him on a bench, and called to me to bring a cup of water. I brought the water, and as he gave me back the empty cup, I caught a peculiar look from a pair of bright gray eyes which were well shaded by his cowl. In an instant, they became dull, and in a weak voice he said:

"My daughter, you wear the dress of a novice. Take this holy relic of a saint, which I have brought from a distant pilgrimage. Keep it with you always, and it will banish all desires to return to the world, you are so wisely preparing to leave."

"And he gave me a small package I took it saying reverently: 'It shall never leave me, Father.'"

"The aged friar and the old portress went into the convent and I, placing the sacred relic in my bosom, resumed my walk; for though I was wild to open the package, I dared not, till the hour of recreation was past, and we were all in our cells. At last the time came. I secured the door, and with my heart beating so fast that it nearly strangled me, I opened the package. The sacred relic, as I almost knew, was a note written by my lover and given me by himself. He told me his purpose was to feign sickness and extreme fatigue; and thus pass a few days in the convent. His plans were to take me bodily out of the convent, but if it proved impossible, we would find other means. I was nearly going into hysterics with the varied emotions which took possession of me—joy unspeakable at the nearness of the man I loved; and then the enormity of the presence of a young and handsome man in the convent, who was not a priest, but a heretic and an alien, came upon me with a crushing force, and in spite of the terror I felt as to consequences to himself, should he be detected, the ludicrousness of the situation forced itself upon me, and I had to smother my laughter in my robe, as in imagination, I saw the amazed and angry mother and the pretty novices being driven he ter skelter into their cells by the scandalized and terrified old nuns should James be discovered. Only think of it, your reverence, an audacious bird of prey in a cage of doves." And Mrs. Maxwell laughed at the recollection. And Father Fabio, alas! unnatural and wicked priest, but humor-loving man, he too, laughed at the pretty, unrepentant sinner's recital. But his watchful conscience reminded him that he was a priest, and his duty was to rebuke levity, not to join it. His face became grave, and crossing himself, he said:

"May our Lord Jesus forgive our untimely mirth and wicked laughter at the desecration of one of His holy sanctuaries. But your subsequent escape, Senora, how was it accomplished?"

"The first attempt failed miserably. The poor sick friar—the mouth of the priest quivered a little with a suppressed smile—in such a feeble condition that permission was granted him by the superior to rest in the convent for a few days. I found several opportunities for holding short conversations with him as he lay on a stone bench in the garden. He had on one occasion asked me if there was any other gate in the high wall which surrounded the convent other than the one he had come in at. I assured him there was not; that I had made the circuit of the wall many times in the vain hope of finding some way of escape.

"On the third afternoon of his stay, I sauntered over to him as he lay on his bench, and he told me he could no longer claim the hospitality of the convent, and that on the morrow during the recreation hour he would take his departure; and he said, 'Be sure you do

not fail to give me an opportunity to hand you a letter of instructions as to the manner of making your escape, for everything is so securely guarded here that I have racked my poor brains in vain for our escape together. However, I have thought of a plan which, if successfully carried out, will free you of your cruel chains. But I shall throw another around you, Carmelita, equally strong, though the links are made of welded love.' The exchange cannot be made too soon for my happiness," I replied, looking full into his honest eyes."

"You trust me fully, Amanda de mia," he questioned earnestly. I replied: "Querido, my faith in your honor has no limit. Farewell until tomorrow," and I sauntered away, for I knew the hour of recreation was nearly passed."

Father St. John moved uneasily. In truth he was reproaching himself for the interest with which he was listening to the recounting of a love scene which might have been an ideal one in the garden of Juliet, but which had been, to put it mildly, very reprehensible without the sacred enclosure of convent walls between a pretended priest and a disobedient girl.

"On the following afternoon," continued Mrs. Maxwell, "I was, of course, on the lookout, and when I saw the friar, leaning heavily on his staff, being conducted to the gate, I ran after him, exclaiming: Give me your blessing, good Father, before you leave, for alas, I am very unhappy."

He turned slowly around, and I knelt on the ground before him to receive his benediction. He laid his hand on my head and I knew he had placed a letter in the folds of my veil, which I had arranged for the purpose. Then after muttering a few words for the benefit of the old portress, he turned feebly around and made his way out of the gate, and I arose from my knees with the blessing securely hid on my person.

"As soon as possible," continued the lady, "I read the letter which told me that on the third night of my departure, I was to be in waiting at as nearly the hour of twelve as possible at the remote part of the wall we had previously selected; that he would first let down a white rope and I was to give a signal, by which means he would know if I was there. His purpose was to lower a light ladder, and I could ascend and rest on the top of the wall which was very thick, until he could pull the ladder back and I could then descend. He informed me that he would be in waiting for me every night for a week, and it at the end of that time I had not succeeded in getting to the place of meeting, he would try other means. He assured me that American ingenuity would conquer in the end. I realized it would be no easy task for me to find a way out of the convent at night. In fact once the doors were secured for the night, it would be next to impossible. I had been placed in a cell by myself, instead of sleeping in the dormitory with the other young ladies. This would prove a great advantage.

"On the third night after evening prayers, I hurried to my room pleading headache. It was not quite dark, and putting on a long black cloak, and pulling the hood well over my face, I waited for it to grow darker; and then I glided swiftly through the, as yet unlit, corridors to the covered arch way which connected the main building with the chapel. In this passage-way there was a door leading out to the garden. I succeeded in getting out unseen and then I was comparatively safe; for the shroubery was high and thick in that part of the garden. I soon reached the portion of the wall we had agreed upon, which was in direct range with a certain turret of the convent. It was scarcely nine o'clock, and I had three hours of suspense before me. I gathered my cloak around me and crouched down close to the wall. I was comparatively free from superstitious fears; but I felt nervous and uneasy on realizing that I was alone in the great garden at night, which the semi-darkness was filling with strange shadows, and the shrill siren cry of a night bird made me catch my breath with terror. I had, as near as I could calculate, waited about two hours, and my limbs had become cramped and numb by my position; so I arose and straightened myself against the wall. I fixed my eyes as I did so, on the dark outlines of the mountains. A slight rustle brought my eyes to earth very quickly. I had grown accustomed to the darkness which the light of the numerous stars and the new moon greatly relieved, and I could distinctly see a tall black figure with its hands clasped before it and its head bowed down, coming in my direction. I was paralyzed with terror. Tales of romance in which I had read of nuns who had broken their vows, being sentenced by Heaven to find no rest in death came vividly to my mind; and as if to confirm my horrible fears, I saw as the figure turned and commenced to walk to and fro past me, that it wore the black garb of a nun, and I heard it moan, and give vent to choking sobs at short intervals. As I gazed at the form walking before me, my hands, nerveless and rigid with fright, had relaxed their hold on my cloak, and not being properly fastened, it fell from me and I stood a dead white object against the dark wall. All at once, I became aware that the figure

was standing still, and then, in a dazed way, I realized that it was coming towards me in a slow, hesitating way. As it neared me, I saw that the face was ghastly white, and the eyes seemed to emit a phosphorescent light. When it reached me, I sank down on the ground in a fainting condition. But I was instantly aroused to painful awareness by feeling a strong clutch on my arm, and a voice which I knew at once belonged to the abbess, hissing in my ear: 'Get up, Senorita, and account for your presence at this hour of the night in the garden.' My supernatural fears gave place to alarm of another kind, and to anger. And I said, defiantly: 'I might with equal propriety ask you, Dona Abadesa, if it is your custom to walk nightly in the convent garden, like the spirit of some nun whom Heaven has sentenced to eternal unrest for dark sins committed in the flesh. But perhaps you are anticipating your fate.'

"For full two minutes the abbess stood looking at me with a strange expression on her death-like face. A wild idea flashed through my mind, to keep her disputing with me until my lover should come, for I knew it was nearing twelve. I even pictured him scaling the walls and gagging her."

Here Father Fabio crossed himself and shook his head, but his eyes shone with eager interest. Unheeding Mrs. Maxwell, continued: "Those great fiery eyes (for her face was so very thin and drawn that they always appeared preternaturally large and bright) so intently fastened upon me, seemed to read my mind, for with a quick movement, she pushed me roughly against the wall and held me there while she placed her hand against my mouth, and said fiercely: 'One scream, and I arouse the convent, and send for those who, when your lover comes, will receive him warmly and place him where you or the world will never hear of him again; and now, come.' And she dragged me away in the direction of the convent. I held back angry and frightened. But I was as a child in her grasp. She was a tall, muscular woman, and though she had seen sixty years or more, she was so vigorous and strong that I, a girl of seventeen, could no more get away from her than a lamb could get out of the talons of an eagle, which her skinny hands much resembled. Once my veil caught in a bush and she jerked me along with such force that it was rent in two. We entered the convent by the same door by which I had left it nearly three hours before. The abbess locked the door and put the key in her pocket. She then lit a taper and I noticed that my large black cloak hung on her arm. She must have picked it up as she dragged me from the wall. Throwing it at me, she said: 'Follow me to your room. And now tell me, she demanded, 'by what means you have managed to communicate with the man whose wicked toil you were supposed to be secure from; for, of course, I understand that you expected him to help you over the walls tonight.'

"I remained silent.

"Tell me, I say," and once more those strong, thin fingers closed over my arm. Then a sudden thought seemed to strike her, and she released me and sank down on a chair in a sort of terror, as she said: 'That wretched old friar, for whom I felt a strong repulsion, even when I gave him permission to rest himself a few hours. Those few hours lengthened into days; and now I believe he is in some way connected with tonight's escapade. I will have him tracked and dealt with according to his heinous crime.'

"The convent clock struck twelve. I knew that my lover was waiting, with intense anxiety, a signal from me. I thought of our terrible disappointment, which I now felt would be life long, and I grew reckless and malicious, and I said, looking full into the troubled face of the abbess: 'That poor, lame, sick old friar, to whom you gave shelter, had all and everything to do with it. But, Senora Abadesa, you did not give shelter to a sick, old friar, but you gave shelter to a young and handsome man—a heretic and an alien. For three consecutive afternoons he lay on a bench in your sacred garden, and talked love to me, and watched your sanctified nuns and your young novitiates take their recreation. When he first entered your holy gate, he gave me a warm love-letter, calling it a sacred relic of a departed saint. And under the very eyes of the portress, I knelt to receive his parting blessing, and the hand he had laid upon my bowed head, left, in the folds of my veil, as we had previously agreed that it should, the letter of instructions which caused me to be in the garden tonight. And now, seek him, Senora, if you will. Give this scandal to the world. Nothing matters to me now, and him you cannot harm."

"I shall not attempt to describe to you the effect my words had on the abbess. After a time, she said: 'You nameless creature, I thank the virgin she directed my steps in that direction tonight, when I was minded to seek the garden for prayers and meditation.'

"For prayers, no; for meditation, yes," I said. "And the virgin and yourself know on what dark subject. Not a happy one, I think, my Mother Superior, judging from your sighs and moans."

"Senorita," said the abbess, 'you are world-tainted and precocious far beyond your years. For twenty years and over I have been the mother of this convent. You have brought upon it the first disgrace. I have lived in this world sixty five years, and you have been the first to offer me an insult. You, a half-grown girl; but you are absolutely in my power, for your mother has renounced all claim upon you.'

"The more shame to her," I cried, "and may the saints never forgive her. 'Unheeding my interruption, she continued:

"You are destined to take the black veil, and you shall wear it sooner than I intended. Trust me, its heavy folds will shut your love up in your heart, and it will grow and wax strong, and rise up in your throat and all but choke you."

"In a nature like yours, nothing can kill it. I shall watch you day by day, and I shall know by your pale face that love and vain regret are feeding on your vitals; and I shall have my revenge for the insults you have given me, and for the stain you have brought upon my convent—a stain which you and I alone must know of. For you to you if you ever whisper to a living soul, even to the priest who confesses you, of the visit of that cursed heretic to this convent. I am all powerful here, as you shall learn in the future. If you ever tell of your love-making within the convent wall, I will give you such penance to purge you of unconquered sin as even your too fertile imagination cannot picture," and a diabolical smile passed over her pale lips. Her fiery eyes were fixed on mine and cast over me a horrible mesmeric influence which completely cowed me, and all the hot Moorish blood in her veins had warmed to fever heat, and I felt that she was a woman capable of any cruelty under sufficient provocation.

"And now, light your taper and go to bed," she commanded, and she passed swiftly out of the room, locking the door on the outside. When she left me there came a reaction of my overstrained nerves, and I felt an overwhelming desire to sleep. As I removed my clothing, I vaguely wondered how I was to account for my torn veil and for the dew-wet grass stains on my dress. I was sitting on the edge of my bed, looking in a dejected way at my arm, upon which the fingers of the abbess had left deep purple stains, when the door opened cautiously and the superior again confronted me. On her arm hung a fresh white costume. Something in my appearance seemed to touch her, for her stern, white face softened, and throwing the robe on a chair, she came toward me, and uttering a low exclamation, she sat down beside me, and gently took hold of my bruised and swollen arm.

"Is it possible," she said, 'that my fingers have left such unsightly marks on that tender, young flesh? I beg your pardon, Senorita; but all my energies were bent on preventing you, who have been trusted to me as a sacred charge, from escaping to your ruin. And you aroused all the evil in me, my child, by your gross insults to me, so many years your elder.'

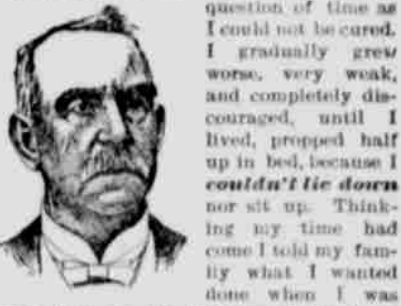
"This woman had dragged me from the arms of one who was more to me than all humanity; and after all, she had only done her duty. And I was so softened by her gentle manner that I burst into tears. Then she who had so short a time before threatened me with awful punishment, put her arms around me and said: 'Pobrecita, after all you were only obeying a great impulse of nature. In my judgment, your mother will have much to answer for. I think if the fates had cast my life in a different mould and had given me a daughter, I—She did not finish her sentence; but, rising suddenly and crossing herself, she exclaimed: 'Santa Maria! what wild thoughts am I, a woman full of years, and mother superior of a convent, giving utterance to! Surely the baser elements of our nature are the last to die. Ah! but it is a great law of nature. Pray for me, Nina; pray for your religious guide and instructor,' she said, sadly. Then gathering up my soiled clothes: 'Coco Doo, is the rule o' life.' The words of the abbess made a deep impression on me, in spite of my own great trouble, and I think I have repeated them to you word for word, Father."

Mrs. Maxwell continued: "The next day but one our abbess was taken very sick, and I took advantage of it and escaped in exactly the manner we had planned. I wrote to my former duenna, asking her how the discovery of my flight had been received. She wrote me that the abbess had nearly lost her position; that her illness alone saved her; that the great mystery had been how I could have found means to communicate with any one outside of the convent. She also informed that my mother had disowned me, and declined to give any assistance in tracing my whereabouts; that she had adopted a young girl who would virtually fill my place in her affection and home. Some four years ago she wrote me again, informing me that my mother was dead; that after bequeathing a large sum to the church, she had left her adopted daughter the residue of her immense fortune."

[To be Continued.]

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HEART DISEASE, like many other ailments when they have taken hold of the system, never gets better of its own accord, but constantly grows worse. There are thousands who know they have a defective heart, but will not admit the fact. They don't want their friends to worry, and don't know what to take for it, as they have been told time and again that heart disease was incurable. Such was the case of Mr. Silas Farley of Dyessville, Ohio who writes June 19, 1904, as follows:



"I had heart disease for 23 years, my heart beating me almost dead usually. The first 15 years I doctor all the time, trying several physicians and remedies, until my last doctor told me it was only a question of time as I could not be cured. I gradually grew worse, very weak, and completely discouraged, until I lived, propped half up in bed, because I couldn't lie down nor sit up. Thinking my time had come I told my family what I wanted done when I was gone. But on the first day of March on the recommendation of Mrs. Fannie Jones of Anderson, Ind., I commenced taking Dr. Miles' Heart Cure for 23 years, my heart beating me almost dead usually. The first 15 years I doctor all the time, trying several physicians and remedies, until my last doctor told me it was only a question of time as I could not be cured. I gradually grew worse, very weak, and completely discouraged, until I lived, propped half up in bed, because I couldn't lie down nor sit up. 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