

CONVENT OF THE SACRED HEART.

CHAPTER VI.

The messenger received the letter from Mr. Joslyn, and hastened to give it to the mother superior, who eagerly awaited his coming in her private apartment.

"Now," she exclaimed, "I will see how he receives the news. If he acquiesces, all is well; if not, why, we must make it well."

She dipped her fingers in a glass of water and moistened the flap of the envelope, then held it over the gas jet.

In a moment the steam had softened the mullage, and she opened the letter. Reading it carefully, she gave vent to a burst of laughter.

"Coming to take her away in the morning? Ha! ha! You will be too late. Had you followed the old adage, 'taken Time by the forelock,' coming with your letter, it might have disarranged our plans. It will be taking Time by the fetlock. Come tomorrow, agnostic fool, and accept your trouble for your pains. Not often does the church have such an opportunity. We save a soul and win appreciation from the world for having such a pupil, and if we retain her, there is a millionaire's fortune to be hers and the holy church's."

She rang the bell, and a sister answering, she gave orders to send Sister Eudocia at once.

Sister Eudocia entered, quietly as a ghost, which she now resembled, except that her dress was black instead of white. She was a beautiful, queenly woman, even in the plain dress of a nun.

Her manners retained the refinement and culture received when she had been in the world. Her face had a wax-like whiteness, from the seclusion from sunlight common to all recluses. A strong face was hers, with the exception of a narrowness at the temples indicative of the weakness of character which is the strength of the zealot.

"Sister Eudocia, I have sent for you," said the superior, "to avail myself of your wonderful imitative talent with the pen. Here is a letter, read it, and then write one in the same hand as I dictate."

Sister Eudocia bowed, seated herself at the desk and glanced at the letter.

"I am ready," she said, laying it down, and taking up the pen.

"MISS ZELDA JOSLYN.—You have shown how recent you could be to the confidence I reposed in you. How weak and idiotic you are. You need not have troubled yourself about writing to me, for you are now none of mine. You are not my daughter, and may I never see your face again. In this your mother joins, and even Mr. Kensett, who happened to be here when your letter came, says I cannot be too severe with you, or make a father's curse strong enough. Do not write again, nor think you have a home here. Go with my curse on your head."

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She had a cardinal's blue robe, her anxiety. Her quick words, she once grasped the contents, and she would have fallen had not the superior caught and guided her to the sofa. She clasped her forehead with her hands, and locking up into the superior's face with an expression which would have melted the heart of any one not ruled by religious bigotry, she moaned: "Oh! what have I done? What have I done? Father! father! mother! dear mother! is your heart become so hard, unfeeling as his? Am I never to see you more? And Mr. Kensett! You said without asking, you loved me, and is this your love? Oh! that I might die! that I might die!"

The superior quietly placed her hand on the brow of the suffering girl, and said softly:

"It may not be as you now fancy. Your father wrote in the moment of hot anger. He will think it over, and tomorrow will be as far the other way."

"Oh! you know not my father. He is proud of his opinion, and inflexible. He never turns back from his word. Many times have I heard him say that he never spoke until he was certain, and then it was final. Oh! he is heartless, cruel! I am homeless!"

There was a fathomless depth of woe in the accent she gave that word.

"Homeless!" she repeated, "and fatherless, motherless—an orphan, an orphan—and have lost the respect of my dearest friends!"

"And gained," the superior replied solemnly, "the love of Jesus, and of his church, even to the salvation of your soul!"

There was something grand and awe-inspiring in the words and manner in which they were spoken, which turned the current of her grief. The superior saw that she had gained an advantage. She waited the proper moment to follow it, which soon came.

"Where shall I go? What shall I do? Oh! advise me, Mother Superior! The world is all taken from me!"

"If it be so, then I would become a bride of heaven. I would become one of the holy ones loved by Jesus; blessed by Him above all women. Become a novice, lead a life of purity and holiness, devoted to charity and deeds of kindness. Become as Sister Eustace, a part of heaven rather than of earth."

Sister Eudocia arose to her feet. Her bosom heaved with emotion. She strove hard to restrain herself. Her lips parted, but no sound came therefrom. The superior glanced fiercely at her, and divining that she would utter words in conflict with her purpose, arose, and gently taking her arm, and clasping it until the sister winced with pain, led her to the door and said: "Send Father Frantz here," and when she had passed out, she shut it, saying: "Poor child she is overcome by the zeal with which she engages in her good works."

Father Frantz soon made his appearance.

"Father," said the superior, "here is one who desires heaven more than earth. Will you absolve her, and dispense with the delays of novitiate, and at once make her a bride of Jesus?"

"All things are possible," replied the priest; "all things which redound for the good of the church."

"Is it your desire to retire behind the veil?" interrogated Frantz in a tone which implied the hope and expectation that she would say no.

"It is unnecessary to ask her," said the superior. "She is anxious for the happy event."

"The instructions," responded the priest, "are strict. One who takes the step from which there is no retreat must do so of their own choice and free will."

"The superior has spoken for me," responded Zelda in a subdued voice.

A sad expression stole over the face of Frantz as he said: "We will repair to the chapel; call the sisters, and the ceremony shall be at once performed."

The superior took Zelda's arm and said: "Dear child, come with your mother, who will henceforth be more than mother."

She led her through the subterranean passage to the chapel, where the sisters were soon gathered, the pupils not being summoned, as their presence was not thought desirable. The priest went through the forms and ceremonies, and read the oaths and obligations, which Zelda did not hear or understand. Then the superior greeted her as a sister of the Order of Black Nuns.

By what strange transformation or exchange had the superior become Mrs. LaFarge? The superior of the school had been exchanged for the superior of the convent.

"I am delighted, dear sister, whom we now call Stantia, for your name is left behind you in the world. Delighted to meet you here. It is the place for you, and you will find a field of labor in the heavenly vineyard for your great love."

The sisters came crowding around her, and greeted her by her new name. She was lost to herself. It was like a horrible dream. Oh! that she might awake, and find it a phantom of the night.

When the superior reached her room she found Father Frantz already there, lounging on the sofa.

"Why this hot haste, mother? I did not ask, for I had no opportunity, and I supposed you had ample reasons."

"Ah! yes, I had ample reasons. Now I shall have to ask your advice. Zebina's father is coming for her to-morrow, and unless she enters the convent today, we shall have to give her up."

"And why not give her up? He is entitled to her, and she is better off at home."

"Do you not know that the Bishop Lopez has commanded it?"

"The bishop! No! I did not know, else I would have cut out my tongue rather than obeyed you. Why should the bishop be allowed to destroy this girl?"

"Have a care, Father Frantz; have a care, or, as much as I respect you, I shall be obliged to report you to the bishop."

The priest bit his lips until the blood started. He arose and paced the floor.

"Where is Eudocia?" he asked suddenly.

"The good sister has retreated, to hold a sacred meditation."

"You have not been giving her another dose of penances?" he asked threateningly.

"Why should I? She indulges in self-imposed penances far more than I wish, or is for her health."

Let me not hear of your condemning her to wear broken glass in her shoes again, or any other such devilry. Do you know, I am proud to say it, I will defend her to the last, even if I die for it!"

He was intensely in earnest. The superior was subdued by his towering passion. She dared not even say that she would report him.

"So," he said, more calmly, "the father is robbed of his daughter for the good of the church! And I—born in the freedom of the Alps, for all my early years breathing the breath of liberty, radiant and proud in my strength, have been reduced by a series of lies to condone the most damnable crimes, and become a fraud and a sham, and see the one I love better than life perish because I have renounced the duties which are mine."

"I will be obliged—"

"No, you will not report me. Do so if you dare. I am not shut in by iron bars, and provoke me and I will pull down this structure over your head, as Sampson did of old."

Saying this he strode out, leaving the superior intensely angry and filled with revenge.

"I desired his assistance," she said to herself, "in planning a scheme to put her father off tomorrow. I presume he would halt in telling a story, and the devil prompts him to heed his conscience. He is a dangerous man, and will make the church trouble unless checked in the career he has started on."

CHAPTER VII.

It was an anxious night for the Joslyns. Sleep came not to the eyes of father or mother. Caleb, the colored coachman had received orders, repeated a dozen times to have the coach in readiness at an early hour. Mrs. Joslyn said she must go also, for she could not wait the coming of her daughter. They were both overcome with an overshadowing thought, as though awaking from a dreadful nightmare, that a great calamity had impended over Zelda, and now that it had been removed, it was like welcoming her to life again.

The best equipped carriage which rolled through the streets of San Angelo that morning was the Joslyns'. The horses stepped the highest, the coachman was the proudest, and the occupants were the most expectant and happiest. With a great flourish of his coachmanship the driver pulled up in front of the iron gate of the Sacred Heart. Mr. Joslyn sprang out, knocked at the gate and was admitted. A messenger met him half-way up the walk and conducted him directly to the superior's room. There were several sisters present, and that lady received him with a great show of cordiality; not waiting for his inquiry for his daughter, and the hesitancy which might be annoying, she said softly: "I suppose, Mr. Joslyn, you came to see your daughter?"

"Thank you, not only to see her, but my carriage waits to take her home."

"How unfortunate," replied the superior. "The young lady has been deeply interested of late in a companion who returned to Paris by the steamer sailing last evening. This lady had a brother; a fine gentleman no doubt—you understand—the gentleman was fascinating—I cannot blame her, and there was something said of a marriage—really I don't know exactly what, or where, either in this city, on the steamer or in Paris; at any rate your daughter, whom I loved as my own child—foe she was a sweet, dutiful girl."

"What of my daughter?" exclaimed her father, out of all patience, "what of my daughter? Where is she? I can't wait; I must see her at once."

"Oh! my dear sir, I pity you—sincerely, deeply pity you if you feel in that way, for your daughter, whom I trusted with implicit faith, left the school, how I don't know, nor can any one find out."

"Left the school, do you say? Sister woman! Speak! For God's sake, what is she now?"

"Calmly, dear sir calmly. The school—this is not the way, is now far out on the ocean, for

with those friends I speak of, on the ship which sailed last evening."

"My daughter! and she wrote in the afternoon, a lie, an infamous lie to throw me off the track, to deceive me! It cannot be true!"

Here the sisters advanced, and one of them, at a signal from the superior, said: "It is grievous for you to hear, good sir; but you have heard the truth, as we can all witness. Your daughter slept next to me. We retired early. At nine o'clock—I know the hour, for the clock had just struck in the tower—I heard her arise, but I was overcome with sleep and did not recall the matter until this morning when she was not to be found."

"She told me last week," said another meekly, "that she intended to go to Paris, and if otherwise disappointed, as her friend had determined to take the veil, they would together enter a convent. This she said would be impossible for her to do here on account of her father's opposition."

All this was related in such a ready, off-hand manner that any doubt which might arise was disarmed.

The strong man broke down under the strain, and was speechless. He staggered as one intoxicated out of the room, and along the passage. The outer door opened, and the air revived him. In mockery the sun was shining in the clear sky, and the birds were singing happily in the trees. How can nature be so radiantly happy when the heart is full of pain? In a moment more he must meet his expectant wife, and tell her the dreadful story. How could his tongue speak the words which would smite her heart like a blow? He forgot that his face told her more clearly than words.

"Zelda," she asked.

"Zelda," he answered, "is not here. She has gone on a ship to a convent in France."

Mrs. Joslyn did not cry out; she did not weep. She was as one turned to stone. Her very blood stood still, and her heart with a great choking throb ceased to beat. Caleb as ordered turned the horses slowly. He gave no flourish of whip, and his voice was not encouraging to them. Something he knew was wrong about his beloved Zelda, which he must trust to fortune to have revealed to him. As he neared home they met Mr. Kensett slowly approaching. The driver bowed recognition and said in an undertone: "Mas'r, Kensett, we did not get her."

Mr. Joslyn at that moment caught sight of the artist, on whom he relied for his cool judgment, and said: "Get in, Kensett; of all men I want to see you most."

He then related the events before recorded. After a pause Kensett replied hotly: "It is all a lie; an infamous, damnable lie. Your daughter has not gone away. She is there within the walls of the convent, and these despicable priests have determined to make her take the veil, if she has not already done so, and thus effectually keep her in that prison for life."

Mrs. Joslyn aroused at these words and grasping his hand exclaimed: "Do you think so? Has she not gone? Tell me if I shall see her again?"

"I most earnestly believe what I have said, and that you will see her."

"How? oh, how? Can you not tell us? You are strong. Can you not bring her to her mother, whose heart will break, yes, break if she does not come?"

"If it is possible she shall be released; and if impossible I will give such an exposure of this infamy, that no other daughter will be torn from her parents and sacrificed on this blood-enraged altar."

The new hope buoyed up the mother, but when she reached home her disappointment came back to her in two-fold measure, and with a sense of irreparable loss she threw herself on her bed. For weeks she suffered from brain fever, wildly delirious at times, calling and calling for Zelda to come and lay her cool hands on her burning brow.

The effect on Mr. Joslyn was apparently not as severe, but in reality equally prostrating. Earlier in life it would have been a spur and made him invincible. At his present age he had not force to react, and he sank into an apathetic condition, leaving to others to do what he ought to have done himself. He was poisoned by his grief.

(To be continued.)

PRÆCOGNITA.

Two Mottos.

The motto of Abraham Lincoln, (killed by Romanists), was: "A government of the people, by the people, for the people, and all men free and intelligent." The motto of the Romans, (who oppose our public schools, and who are opposed to self-government), is: "A government of the pope, by the pope, for the pope; all men his slaves and ignorant."

Blaine's Letter.

Mrs. Blaine, sr., is an American Catholic, and not a Roman Catholic?

Mrs. Blaine, jr., is a Roman Catholic, and not an American Catholic?

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