

AN EVENTFUL NIGHT.

BY CLARA PARKER.

(Copyright, 1899, by S. S. McClure.) The window was either higher than I had calculated, or I fell upon standing ground, for I struck so solidly that I had the breath knocked out of me...

"Run," I whispered, and we ran, like some spirited young deer in its first encounter with the hounds, and I—really after the way I spun along that night I cannot see how she could suspect such a pair of heels as I showed to the old house behind us...

Quick as our flight had been, it was begun none too soon, for by the time the darkness swallowed us, the whole house seemed suddenly to blaze up with hurrying lights, while a loud shout reached us and increased our pace.

"Do you know which way to go?" I muttered. "I haven't the faintest idea," came the cheerful whisper, and then we were off running again, with more care of our strength, this time, and I, possessed by lively expectations that at any moment we might puncture some snowdrift and find that it was but the upper crust of a bottomless abyss.

The main road we must not take even could we find it, which seemed anything but likely, and we plunged about knee-deep in snow. Blanketed by fear settled on me as I realized the dangers we were facing.

"Whoever saw anything so pitchy-black as this night," I exclaimed, peevish with alarm for my companion; for myself the galleons seemed so imminent that all lesser terrors paled before it.

"Yes, but it's the only thing that saves us, you know," tranquilly observed Miss Brandon, as I picked her out of a small ditch. "But what that stuff is, she said, and she shrunk toward me in a way that shook my moral nature again to its very center.

It was a dog! A chained dog, indeed, with all its fury spent and nothing much you could call dog left about it but a drugged shape and a snarl for its only dangerous to us if it was disposed to haunt our path, for who could tell at what moment it might break out into the melancholy baying which had before alarmed us.

"I must kill it," I muttered to myself, but Miss Brandon heard me and faintly screamed. "Run on a few steps, please! To that tree," I said gently.

With a little shudder she obeyed me, putting her fingers in her ears as she ran, while I brushed up like a huge ball upon my prey, soon put as merciful an end to him as possible, considering my only weapon was my pocketknife.

Once dead, though, he must be hidden and in great haste I tumbled snow and brush upon him. Then—for I either heard voice, or all the excitement I had been through was rendering me fanciful—rose and ran toward the spot where I expected to find Miss Brandon, only to spring back nearly restraining a shout of terror. She was gone!

"They have taken her," I gasped, a sudden Mank regret which I had no time to analyze sweeping over me. Then setting my teeth, I plunged forward and with two strides found myself stepping into space. The fifteen or twenty minutes during which I seemed to be steadily falling gave me the impression of being infinite. But I finally struck, fortunately for my earthly career, in a bed of snow, through which I rolled and gasped, finally catching up with a painful thump against something so solid that my airy, light-headed sensation of infinite space was immediately swallowed up in acute physical pain.

"Oh, so you fell too!" exclaimed some one close beside me. "How queer we should both do it? Really now we ought to be thankful; it might have been quite unpleasant."

"Might have been quite unpleasant." And there I sat, with every part of my clothing filled with melting snow and my head ringing. Really, if she had been a plain woman—but here! I belie myself. I have quite a reputation for courtesy, and I think that I partially deserve it, for, after coughing up much melted snow, I asked her, in a strangled voice, if she was injured in any way.

"Not the least bit in the world," she answered cheerfully, whipping at the back of my collar with her handkerchief. "My, but you're full of snow though! Do you know, it is so funny; but I actually brought you about the whole way down here with me! You'd better put it on now and warm up. You may have strained yourself somehow, but they say if you keep warm you won't stiffen."

"That shawl again! It was too much!" "Miss Brandon," I cried, excitedly springing to my feet; then I stopped abruptly, and taking her by the arm drew her as far back as possible in the shelter of the rock against which I had grazed in my fall. "Hush, hush!" I whispered uselessly, for she had made no attempt to speak, and I pointed upwards as I crouched beside her, for lights were beginning to dot the gloom above us in many places; hurrying lights, held low

and tearing headlong, like so many burning eyeballs. "They have tracked us," I groaned, for I heard a shout. "There is nothing for it, we must run again. But which way? This thing seems to begin and end in snow."

"Oh, there's no great hurry," said my companion coolly, with a little nod which I could see plainly as I gazed at her in horror. "I shall get by breath first, and besides there is some snow down my collar which must be got out or I shall be in a dreadful condition."

"But Miss Brandon," I protested sternly. "They are close upon us. They—" "She gave a goodnatured little laugh. I could scarcely believe it, but she did. "How funny men are!" she said pleasantly, working at her collar, with success I knew, for bits of snow flew into my horror-stricken face as I leaned over her. "Why don't you see that the fun of it is, they must take their time about getting here? They won't dare

start up with a cry of terror and that cry, which told that life had not deserted her, brought me back with a rush of shame to my surroundings.

"I'm sure I can't say," she retorted, eyeing me askance as she unhooked a smoky lantern from its peg. "I only know Cousin John's way of his time in the summer peddling with him; then leaves him here to eat his head off in the winter. If I could only beat him, he wouldn't live a minute, I can tell you that!" and opening the door, she led me forth into what seemed a wilderness of snow-filled legs and boxes, all of which I am quite certain that I stepped into.

I arrived at the small stable in no mood to endure the undignified commotion set up by a roost of old hens and a solitary cock, as I stepped into the light and found myself upon them. It was maddening, out upon a secret mission as we were, to note the zeal with which the cock set about his crowing, and to have the hens come squawking down upon me for the sake of a few dollars the morning sun had tumbled boldly in upon them. Even Mrs. Brown found it trying, and cried tartly for the rooster to "shut his head" as we fought our way through to the horse's stall beyond.

"Accurately speaking we found no horse, but lying prone on some musty hay, we discovered a four-legged, gray thing which, beyond snorting a trifle as Mrs. Brown thrust the lantern contemptuously under his nose, took no further notice of us. "There he is," she said, bitterly. "Nothin' but a rat hole to pour oats into. He hasn't had a bit between his teeth for two months, but you may take him and welcome."

"After digging in vain about his bony frame for some trace of life, I was left in despair, but I had no choice. Together we pried him from his ill-smelling bed, and he developed, as she slowly unfolded his joints, into a regular carcass of a horse, with great holes which it would have taken the earnings of a whole race of peddlers to round out with high-priced hay. "Are you sure he is strong?" I gasped. "Will he be up to a trip, you know?" It seems to me he looks awfully shaky.

"She wouldn't answer me; but kept on dragging out moldy pieces of harness and moth-eaten robes, until I had an outfit the match for any rag-picker's trap.

"Heavens!" I moaned, as I mounted the sleigh, jerking at the rotten straps which were all the hold I had on that great brute. "He has our lives in his hands. He couldn't feel the strain of these lines if I were to drag them across his naked eye. Have you no respectable looking ropes?" I called fretfully, resolving to drop to even that, for the sake of security. But Mrs. Brown was at the bottom of an old feed box, and rose to the surface with such a disgraceful contrivance in the shape of a whip that I felt it would be madness to appeal to any sense of decency within her.

Cautionously I steered my beast up to the door and left him in charge of Mrs. Brown, while I went inside for Miss Brandon. As I entered the house a clock struck two clattering strokes. "And to think," I exclaimed absentmindedly, "that I dined with Flo last night at 6!"

The statement here in upon me no impression of the truth after I had made it, but it startled Miss Brandon to hear me talking to myself, so I told her I had asked if she was feeling any stronger. It seemed human to retain her confidence in my sanity; my own faith in it was so badly shaken.

"And now you're off," cried Mrs. Brown joyfully a few minutes later as I cracked the whip over the back of Cousin John's nag.

I think that I would have been content to drive on that way all night, not speaking at all, but sitting there, half frozen and wholly irrational, dreaming of my foolish dream. But suddenly down went the curtain with a crash upon performed knight and smiling lady and up it rose on me, the married man, the trusty doctor. "Oh!" my companion burst out suddenly, turning her face toward me, "but a white blur. "I am sure no father could have been kinder to me than you have been tonight and that, too, without knowing my story. Why don't you ask me about myself?"

Swallowing the "father" like quinine which has stuck in the throat, I suggested faintly that there had been no time, but no sooner did my voice break the silence than she stopped with a nervous start. "I don't want to talk with you so well in the dark," she said unceasingly. "I haven't seen your poor face really, it's been done up so; but, somehow, when I can't see your bandages, you seem so different. You're

the floor, shot from my sight into a small closet or pantry, immediately slamming the door, and applying an eye at once to a good sized knob, just above the knob. I suppose it was the state of my nerves, for I can make no one quite understand the feeling it gave me to know that the one staring eye was upon me and that, whichever way I turned, I would follow me; follow me as I moved. Miss Brandon in her chair, near the smoldering fire, follow me while I wrapped the shawl about her and her neck, poked the sticks of sputtering wood. All the time there was a stealthy rattling sound coming from the closet which somehow bore in upon me the impression that with one long arm the woman was gradually raking everything movable within easy reach. Why, I could not guess until, happening near the door in my desperate search for drink, it was jerked open a few inches and a thin skeleton was flung at me through the aperture.

"Stop that, woman!" I called sternly, for though the action had broken somewhat the spell of that immovable eye, the situation was such a disgraceful one, that you'll get the sad-iron next," came the dogged answer, and I could hear her hand drawn breath rushing through the keyhole.

There was no time to be lost. I was meditating means of obtaining myself strictly without mistaking the woman when a languid voice recalled me to Miss Brandon's side, and to my great relief I found her sitting up, wiping the blood from her face, and looking quite herself. "Oh, do take me out of this horrid place," she whispered in a strangled voice, and I saw her with such an expression of terror that I wondered if she, too, could feel that eye upon her.

"I must get something to refresh you first, and something to carry with me down," I whispered in return, and then I advanced carelessly toward the door, only to be met with the promised "sad-iron," hurled at me with a right good will. Evidently our hostess was determined to should parley with her only at a distance, and I saw that I must humor her, for a nervous cry from Miss Brandon warned me to tamper no further with her overstrained nerves.

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"I was to marry whom I pleased and if I did marry I was to take my property and use it as I pleased, but if I didn't marry, Uncle Rupert was to take care of me and all my money until I was 21 and that's going to be next week."

"Next week? So soon?" I cried in surprise, for the wonder of her flight, when escape was so near, almost formed itself into words upon my lips.

"Soon, so soon!" she cried, and now with real anger in her voice, though not, I felt, against me. "It may seem soon to you, but he will be just six days older and then deny I ever had any, or will claim that they are the ones that turned out badly, though there weren't mine at all, but his. Yes," she cried, defiantly facing me, "I don't deny that I have listened at keyholes, and pried into letters, and done lots of dreadful things to find all this out; but I've had my disposition just ruined by being kept mewed up all these years. How I used to rage when I could feel myself getting more and more poky, and then to have only a few dollars sent out to me at a time when I knew that Cousin Harold, whom I just hated, was spending all my money, and putting off marrying me until the last moment, because I had been shut up in a convent until I was a perfect dowdy," and here she broke down in angry tears, while I sat a statue of fear and longing—longing to comfort and protect her as no staid, middle-aged doctor would be supposed to comfort a young and helpless woman, and fear least the stern self-control I had been able so far to exercise should break down utterly under the strain of that low sobbing.

"My dear Miss Brandon," I said, low and hurriedly, "calm yourself, I beg. Are you quite certain about that will? Certain that you were left free to marry whom you chose?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, I should think I am," she burst out indignantly. "Why it was for that reason and no other that I was kept mewed up in that stuffy old convent all those years and never a man to look at but priests and some old things that did work about the grounds."

It is pitiful to confess that I winced at this. It did not please me that she should ever have wished to meet other men and when you recall that she had never really seen me and had only looked upon me as a married person with a swollen eye, you will wonder at my folly. "What right had you to want to see men?" I wanted to ask her hotly, but instead I cried softly, "Hark! I hear horses' feet behind. They are coming fast. Do you hear them?"

"This dried our stormy tears at once and breathlessly we sat and listened. Yes, it was right. From far up the steep road there came to us swift, hard strokes, breaking startlingly upon the silence and filling us with chill premonition of pursuit and capture when our victory seemed all but accomplished. "They are following us," my companion whispered fearfully, creeping nearer to my side and resting there tremblingly. "They will not let me go, I know it. Tomorrow my uncle was to meet some men and flush the sale of my mines. They will hit me if they find us here. Oh, what shall we do?"

What should we do indeed? At that moment, as if to increase our perplexities, the moon, which had been hiding all night beneath a blanket of clouds, burst suddenly forth, clothed in glistening garments, which lighted every nook and cranny of the rugged scenery about us. Far above towered the snowy peaks, while way down below, a dim radiance, nestling close like a cirelet of gems against the earth's dark line, the lights of the city lay. Above and below us stretched a tortuous path upon which impatient hoofs

driving on that way all night, not speaking at all, but sitting there, half frozen and wholly irrational, dreaming of my foolish dream. But suddenly down went the curtain with a crash upon performed knight and smiling lady and up it rose on me, the married man, the trusty doctor. "Oh!" my companion burst out suddenly, turning her face toward me, "but a white blur. "I am sure no father could have been kinder to me than you have been tonight and that, too, without knowing my story. Why don't you ask me about myself?"

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"I was to marry whom I pleased and if I did marry I was to take my property and use it as I pleased, but if I didn't marry, Uncle Rupert was to take care of me and all my money until I was 21 and that's going to be next week."

"Next week? So soon?" I cried in surprise, for the wonder of her flight, when escape was so near, almost formed itself into words upon my lips.

"Soon, so soon!" she cried, and now with real anger in her voice, though not, I felt, against me. "It may seem soon to you, but he will be just six days older and then deny I ever had any, or will claim that they are the ones that turned out badly, though there weren't mine at all, but his. Yes," she cried, defiantly facing me, "I don't deny that I have listened at keyholes, and pried into letters, and done lots of dreadful things to find all this out; but I've had my disposition just ruined by being kept mewed up all these years. How I used to rage when I could feel myself getting more and more poky, and then to have only a few dollars sent out to me at a time when I knew that Cousin Harold, whom I just hated, was spending all my money, and putting off marrying me until the last moment, because I had been shut up in a convent until I was a perfect dowdy," and here she broke down in angry tears, while I sat a statue of fear and longing—longing to comfort and protect her as no staid, middle-aged doctor would be supposed to comfort a young and helpless woman, and fear least the stern self-control I had been able so far to exercise should break down utterly under the strain of that low sobbing.

"My dear Miss Brandon," I said, low and hurriedly, "calm yourself, I beg. Are you quite certain about that will? Certain that you were left free to marry whom you chose?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, I should think I am," she burst out indignantly. "Why it was for that reason and no other that I was kept mewed up in that stuffy old convent all those years and never a man to look at but priests and some old things that did work about the grounds."

It is pitiful to confess that I winced at this. It did not please me that she should ever have wished to meet other men and when you recall that she had never really seen me and had only looked upon me as a married person with a swollen eye, you will wonder at my folly. "What right had you to want to see men?" I wanted to ask her hotly, but instead I cried softly, "Hark! I hear horses' feet behind. They are coming fast. Do you hear them?"

"This dried our stormy tears at once and breathlessly we sat and listened. Yes, it was right. From far up the steep road there came to us swift, hard strokes, breaking startlingly upon the silence and filling us with chill premonition of pursuit and capture when our victory seemed all but accomplished. "They are following us," my companion whispered fearfully, creeping nearer to my side and resting there tremblingly. "They will not let me go, I know it. Tomorrow my uncle was to meet some men and flush the sale of my mines. They will hit me if they find us here. Oh, what shall we do?"

What should we do indeed? At that moment, as if to increase our perplexities, the moon, which had been hiding all night beneath a blanket of clouds, burst suddenly forth, clothed in glistening garments, which lighted every nook and cranny of the rugged scenery about us. Far above towered the snowy peaks, while way down below, a dim radiance, nestling close like a cirelet of gems against the earth's dark line, the lights of the city lay. Above and below us stretched a tortuous path upon which impatient hoofs

driving on that way all night, not speaking at all, but sitting there, half frozen and wholly irrational, dreaming of my foolish dream. But suddenly down went the curtain with a crash upon performed knight and smiling lady and up it rose on me, the married man, the trusty doctor. "Oh!" my companion burst out suddenly, turning her face toward me, "but a white blur. "I am sure no father could have been kinder to me than you have been tonight and that, too, without knowing my story. Why don't you ask me about myself?"

Swallowing the "father" like quinine which has stuck in the throat, I suggested faintly that there had been no time, but no sooner did my voice break the silence than she stopped with a nervous start. "I don't want to talk with you so well in the dark," she said unceasingly. "I haven't seen your poor face really, it's been done up so; but, somehow, when I can't see your bandages, you seem so different. You're

the floor, shot from my sight into a small closet or pantry, immediately slamming the door, and applying an eye at once to a good sized knob, just above the knob. I suppose it was the state of my nerves, for I can make no one quite understand the feeling it gave me to know that the one staring eye was upon me and that, whichever way I turned, I would follow me; follow me as I moved. Miss Brandon in her chair, near the smoldering fire, follow me while I wrapped the shawl about her and her neck, poked the sticks of sputtering wood. All the time there was a stealthy rattling sound coming from the closet which somehow bore in upon me the impression that with one long arm the woman was gradually raking everything movable within easy reach. Why, I could not guess until, happening near the door in my desperate search for drink, it was jerked open a few inches and a thin skeleton was flung at me through the aperture.

"Stop that, woman!" I called sternly, for though the action had broken somewhat the spell of that immovable eye, the situation was such a disgraceful one, that you'll get the sad-iron next," came the dogged answer, and I could hear her hand drawn breath rushing through the keyhole.

There was no time to be lost. I was meditating means of obtaining myself strictly without mistaking the woman when a languid voice recalled me to Miss Brandon's side, and to my great relief I found her sitting up, wiping the blood from her face, and looking quite herself. "Oh, do take me out of this horrid place," she whispered in a strangled voice, and