



CHAPTER VI.

A lovely morning it was that beamed on Sibley and the broad and beautiful valley of the Cloudwater when once the sun got fairly above the mist horizon.

Once each day at 7:30 a. m. the doctor trudged across to the hospital and looked over the half dozen "hopelessly healthy" but who are invalids who wanted to get off guard duty or a morning at the range.

A fair picture never did dark beauty present than Alice Renwick as she bent among the bushes or reached high among the vines in search of her favorite flowers.

Was she faltering? He watched her eagerly, narrowly, almost wonderingly. Not a trace of confusion, not a sign of fear, and yet had he not seen her and that other figure?

"I wish you could sleep as I do," was the prompt reply. "I was in the land of nod for ten minutes after my head touched the pillow, and mamma made me come home early last night because of my journey today. You know we are going down to visit Aunt Grace, Colonel Magyard's sister, at Lake Sablon, and mamma wanted me to be looking my freshest and best," she said.

"And now, with paling face and wild apprehension in her eyes, she turned and gazed beyond him, past the vines and the shrubby veranda, across the sunshine of the parade and under the old piazza, searching that still closed and darkened window.

"Who?" she implored, her hands clasping nervously, her eyes returning eagerly to his face.

"I have seen him and promise he will come. To all appearances, he is the last man to suffer from last night's affair. He went on restlessly, almost brutally, but she never wined. "It is odd you did not hear the shots. I thought yours was the northwest room—this one," he indicated, pointing overhead.

for me?" she blithely laughed, striving to break through the awkwardness of his reserve, "or are you worn out with your night watch as officer of the day?"

"How did you know I had so long a vigil?" he asked, and the cold, strained tone, the half averted eyes, the pallor of his face, all struck her at once. Instantly her manner changed.

"I have had a bad night," he answered, "but I'm growing old and cannot stand sleeplessness as you young people seem to."

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Renwick had retired as soon as the colonel arrived. The old soldier seemed to understand the glance, "she would not listen," he said proudly.

"I know," explained Chester. "I think it best that no one but you should hear anything of the matter for the present until I have investigated further. It was nearly half past 3 this morning as I got around here on 5's post, inspecting sentinels, and came suddenly in the darkness upon a man carrying a ladder on his shoulder. I ordered him to halt. The reply was a violent blow, and the ladder and I were dropped at the same instant, while the man sprang into space and darted off in the direction of No. 5. I followed quick as I could, heard the challenge and the cries of halt and shouted to Leary to fire. He did, but missed his aim in the haste and darkness, and the man got safely away. Of course there is much talk and speculation about it around the post this morning, for several people heard the shots besides the guard, and although I told Leary and others to say nothing, I know it is already generally known."

"Oh, well, come in to breakfast," said the colonel. "We'll talk it over there."

"Pardon me, sir, I cannot. I must get back home before guard mount, and Rollins is probably waiting to see me now. I—I could not discuss it at the table, for there are some singular features about the matter."

"Why, in God's name, what?" asked the colonel, with a sudden and deep anxiety.

"Well, sir, an officer of the garrison is placed in a compromising position by this affair and cannot or will not explain."

"Who?"

"Mr. Jerrold, sir."

"Jerrold! Why, I got a note from him not 10 minutes ago saying he had an engagement in town and asking permission to go before guard mounting, if Mr. Hall was ready. Hall wanted to go with him, Jerrold wrote, but Hall has not applied for permission to leave the post."

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"Do come in and let me give you a rose," she opened the gate and held forth one long, slim hand. He took it slowly, as though in a dream, raising his forage cap at the same time, yet making no reply. He was looking at her far more closely than he imagined. How fresh, how radiant, how fair and gracious and winning! Every item of her attire was so pure and white and spotless; every fold and curve of her gown seemed charged with subtle, delicate fragrance, as faint and sweet as the shy and modest wood violet's. She noted his silence and his haggard eyes. She noted the intent gaze, and the color mounted straightway to her forehead.

"And have you no word of greeting to me?" she blithely laughed, striving to break through the awkwardness of his reserve, "or are you worn out with your night watch as officer of the day?"

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