Nettie's Trial.

BY MARY PRESTON.

CHAPTER I I.

"OH, TRUST ME! ONLY TRUST ME!"
From New York Ledger:

Still, she said nothing after her return to the house, and Marion was too ill to question her. For two days Marion had been fighting symtoms that were dangerous in their character, and when Nettie, pale but tearless, came to her side, she found her writhing in pain.

"Poor Marion! Oh! if I could have spared you!" she cried. "Dr. Nelson so warned us against all excitement, and you have had a shock that was terrible. If only I had known what that letter contained!"

"Even if you had, I must have seen it," whispered the invalid "Send for Dr. Nelson! This pain is unendurable!"

Days of agony, followed by utter prostration, ensued, and Nettie was an untiring, faithful nurse. But neither skill nor love could overcome the fatal symtoms developed by the shock of some dreadful tidings. Only a few weeks before Nettie's betrothal, Marion had followed her only child to the grave. She had wearied herself with nursing; she had left the house for the only time in years, to attend the funeral, and had so added to her already heavy illness, that the doctor had warned Nettie that any further strain, mental or bodily, would be fatal. Tenderly, Nettie had endeavored to spare her all care or agitation, but her love had been powerless against the fatal shock that had reached her cousin through the post-office.

Absorbed in Marion's danger, watchful of every symtom, Nettie had thrust her own heartache into the background, though some silent tears would fall when she thought of Stephen.

And Stephen, in his hotel room at Bay water, where he had come for a summer vacation, to be near Nettie, raved about woman's perfidy, judged harshly and spoke cruelly, and yet alternated these bitter hours by softer regrets, when he longed unutterably for a touch of Nettie's hand and a word of love from her lips. Every day he resolved to leave Bayswater, every night he determined to wait one more day, with the faint hope of some explanation to reconcile him to Nettie.

Two weary weeks had passed, when a note was handed him:

"I need a true friend, who will perform a service for me without question, and who will keep a secret. Will you come?"

No, he would not, he resolved. He had been deceived, and would not play cat's paw for any woman. And yet—

A fair, pure face; eyes, innocent, shy, love-lighted; lips that spoke only tender maidenly words—these rose to confront him, and still reluctant, he took his hat, and went to Alton Hill.

"I knew you would come," Nettie said, springing gladly to meet him, as of old; not lifting her shy blushing face for his caress, but pallid, careworn and sad, a very gray shadow of her bright little self.

"Will you go for me, without question, on an errand of life and death?" she asked.

"I will," he said, gently, but not tenderly.

"In Heath street," she said—and he shuddered, for only the most wretched of Bayswater lived there—"in Heath street, you will find a Mrs. Smith's. It is No. 85. Ask for Bill Jones, and tell him he must come here to-night, after dark."

"Nettie!"

"Oh, trust me! Only trust me!" she pleaded.

"Is there no other message?"

"None! I dare not send one. But he must come!"

With a heart heavy as lead, and yet strangely move to obey her request, Stephen left Nettie, to seek for Bill Jones. He was not surprised to see the tall bearded man he had seen once before at the quarry. But he was shocked to recognize upon his face the unmistakable signs of mortal illness. Evidently whatever the man's life had been, it was nearly spent. A dry hacking cough, extreme emaciation, hollow eyes and hectic flush all told plainly their piteous story.

And the message brought on such violent agitation, such an exhausting fit of coughing and suffocation that in mere humanity Stephen granted the stranger's request that he would accompany him to Alton Hill, and went to secure a carriage for the drive.

It was dark when they reach the house, and Nettie was watching. She did not seem to be surprised to see Stephen, but motioned him to wait, while she led the strange visitor up the broad staircase.

The little mantle clock chimed three times, and midnight had nearly come, but still Stephen lingered. Some strange hope held him to the room where Nettie had left him, and he paced up and down, waiting.

Waiting till nearly at night's noon, the door opened, and Nettie came in.

"I hoped you would wait," she said. "Will you come with me?"

Up the broad staircase, to a large room above. Upon the couch there dressed in a snowy wrapper, lay the still form of Marion Raymond dead, and beside her on the floor crouched the man Stephen knew only as "Bill Jones."

"You must help us," Nettie said, "and Marion told me to trust you. You guess who this is?"

The stranger lifted his head.

"Tell whom you will," he said, in a hollow, faint voice; "I'm almost gone! I've killed my wife! I've starved, begged, stolen! What does it matter now? Bring the police, and tell them Henry Raymond is found at last!"

"Your cousin's husband?" Stephen whispered, throwing off the burden on his heart in one deep sigh.

"Yes; I met him, at her prayer, to give him money to flee again from justice. But he has been so ill, he could not go. The shock of his return, after so many years' absence, killed Marion. You will help me to conceal him? He cannot live many days."

(To be Continued.)

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