

MAY CRAWFORD'S LAST QUARREL.

BY NELLIE DARLINGTON.

From New York Weekly

CHAPTER I. [CONTINUED.]

"I didn't really expect you to dinner," said May, "and so I didn't care enough about dinner myself alone to take any trouble about serving it nicely."

Linley looked up surprised.

"Why, May! I so seldom stay away from dinner—never without sending you word. And on Christmas Eve, of all night, what could make you fancy that I wouldn't come home?"

"I thought that you might stay and dine with Mrs. Rockford, since you've been there all day as it is—"

"What do you mean, May. [Who told you such a falsehood?"

"No one told me, except my own eyes, and I suppose even you will not contradict that evidence."

"But I will, though, or any other evidence that would persuade you of such a thing—"

"Why, Linley, I saw you about twelve o'clock going into Rockford's store, and Mrs. Rockford was standing at your side; and not half an hour afterward I saw you walking together in the street. It must have been at least three hours later when, returning home I passed Mr. Rockford's store again, and there you were, so close in conversation with his wife that neither of you saw me, though I looked in through the door straight into both your faces."

"And you didn't come in and speak to me, May!" said Linley.

"Not I." And Mrs. Crawford tossed her head. "I may be a fool, but I'm not quite such a fool as to interrupt a couple of old lovers when they are enjoying a little quiet flirtation in the absence of the respective husband and wife of each."

"May!" exclaimed Linley, shocking at this remark, and yet painfully aware that circumstances were against him, though he was upheld by the consciousness of innocence, and knew very well that a very few words from him could not only explain the situation, but also cover May with repentant shame for her doubts; but those words he particularly did not wish to speak just then.

May was made furious by his silence, and more still by his indignant, shocked tone in which he had spoken her name—the only remonstrance he deigned to make on her accusing words.

"I suppose you will not dare to say that Kate Rockford and you were not sweethearts before you met me? Oh, I suppose you were telling her how you regretted the past, and wishing it was last Christmas instead of this, that you might once more have had the choice of marrying her instead of me? You were—you were! You can't contradict me!"

And, carried away by a jealous rage, May Crawford stamped her foot angrily, and, for the first time in all their quarrels, Linley answered angrily, and, perhaps, with a touch of contempt, for his patience was sorely tried.

"I shall certainly not take the trouble to contradict you in this or any similar matter, now or ever, any more. I really think you

mean to cultivate your tendency to jealousy into downright insanity. It is a monomania now."

May was absolutely aghast. Never before had Linley answered her in this manner. He had always explained, protested, declared his love for her, petted and kissed her, till it really was almost an inducement to quarrel for the sake of making up again. But now he would not even deign to contradict the worst and cruelest things she had ever accused him of. And why? Because he couldn't. Because they were true, and she had seen his perfidy, and further denial was useless.

Yes, this must be the terrible reason why he no longer explained and protested—no longer declared that she was his first and only love. She burst into a passion of tears at the terrible thought, and, flinging herself down on the sofa, buried her head in the cushions, sobbing wildly.

Linley, with his match-box, his cigars and his ash-tray, betook himself to the library, for this time he determined to try the effect of a little wholesome sternness, and he knew well that couldn't hold out long if he stayed there in sight of May's tears and listening to her sobs.

As the door closed after him Mrs. Crawford looked up and found that she was alone. Her sobs ceased, and her tears seemed frozen at their source, but not because she had no longer a witness to her grief. Oh, no; it was because, foolish and causeless as her jealousy was, it was so terrible real.

"He leaves me," she thought. "Ah, then, all is over, indeed. He loves me no longer. He never loved me. Well, then, I will go. My mother will take me back again. I am not quite forsaken in all the world. A mother never ceases to love her child, and I scorn to remain longer where I am not loved, even if it kills me to leave him."

She dried her eyes, went to her room, and hastily dressed, and then, with her veil down, she might be less likely to attract attention, she softly stole down stairs, and out by the front door, which closed so gently that no one noticed the sound.

The sky had been dark and lowering all the afternoon, and already the snow was coming down with that fine, steady, continuous shower of flakes that betoken a heavy snow-storm. But May cared nothing for that. Indeed, she scarcely noticed it.

Their house was on the outskirts of a little town that, a few years ago, was only a village, and her mother's house was about three miles farther on and quite out in the county. But May had been brought up a country girl, and to her three miles, even in a snow-storm, was only a pleasant walk—at least it would have been had she been the happy, light-hearted girl she used to be. As it was, she thought nothing about it.

At first she walked rapidly and bravely, only conscious now and then how bitterly cold the wind was becoming when it drove the now thickly falling snow against her face; then the tingling of her fingers made her wish that in her hurry she had not forgotten her muff. But she never dreamed of turning back; but after while she pulled off her veil, for, frozen stiff

as it now was with the moisture of her breath and the pelting of the snow against it, it had become far worse than no defense against the storm.

It was quite dark now, for the light of the town had long faded in the distance; but, dark as it was, May discerned an unfamiliar look in the landscape. She stood still and gazed about her; and then a chill, colder than the icy wind struck her heart. She was not on the road to her mother's house. In the driving snow-storm, the darkness, and, worst of all, her own wild and whirling thoughts, she had missed her way.

But after the first terror she called back her courage, and remembering that she knew all that part of the country pretty well, and she could not be very far wrong. Then she struggled on a little way and came to a turning which she felt sure would lead her back to the right road.

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