

The Witch of Cragenstone

By ANITA CLAY MUNOZ,
Author of "In Love and Truth"

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The arrested the next morning. By heaven, Margaret, behind an iron grating I could not see thee—could not lie there like a wild thing, a caged lion, unable to move from thy cousin's awful griping. Sweet, for a time the blow was so heavy that I was near bereft of my senses.

The situation that confronted me was so desperate that I fairly sickened. Then I gathered courage, knowing that I had had no night and take what was to come, the path through the forest to Stenderford, where methought, there, with bribes of land and gold, I would follow to ride back with me, to the guards, storm this rotten prison and rescue thee. For two days, desperate, beside myself with a desire to adventure, thinking always of thy suffering, I feverishly cut and pushed my way through the dense and gloomy forest, fearful to lie down at night on account of the wild beasts that come from their lairs at nightfall and too eager to get on to rest. Damme, but I found a time to make the stoutest heart faint!

On the third morning, when I had gained the last drop from my flask and was in great distress that I might lose my bearings, methought I saw a lost man of a human voice and the sound of a human voice speaking in great agony. Drawing my sword, I ran in the direction of the voice and came suddenly upon a man struggling for his life in the close embrace of a mountain bear. So intent was the animal upon its prey that it did not notice my approach. With one well aimed thrust I ran it through the heart, and the beast sank with a convulsive motion to the ground.

The man, exhausted and bleeding from many wounds, fell at its side, unconscious of his close proximity to his rescuer and dead to everything about him. Sweet, I stanchd his wounds from a brook near by brought cool water and bathed his head, so that his shivering returned. But the man had received a blow on the heart and so many broken bones that he could not live. I saw that he was dying rapidly, so kneeling at his side, I gave him my name, offering to do anything in my power to make him comfortable. To make a long tale short, sweet Margaret, as we have not much time for tarrying, the prostrate man was a Puritan from parts distant from here, by name Ezekial Mason, and was on his way to Cragenstone to see the invention of a prison lock; also to conduct the affairs of those executions. When he had told me that much and given me the password he expired. Hastily searching his clothing and a pocket he carried, I found bread and wine, which I ate and drank ravingly; also the lock he wished to sell and a council of introduction to the elders and councilmen from prominent men of the village. Margaret, the man's face had not relaxed in death ere it had occurred to me to don his clothing, stain my face and beard with the juice of berries, and as Ezekial Mason was dark and swarthy, and return to Cragenstone representing myself to be his man. By the Lord, 'twas a serious undertaking, but with what success all was accomplished thou dost know tonight.

"God's mercy," she exclaimed softly, something in his embrace. "Thine adventures were desperate and terrible, but praise him that the man fell in my arms, otherwise I fear we had both been lost."

Just then a light sound as of a footfall under the window was heard. Both sprang apart, listening with pale faces. La Fabienne, donning his hat, pulled up his coat collar, carefully opened the door upon Margaret and, pointing by the recumbent figure of Matchless Allen, walked out of doors and gave a careful, searching glance in all directions, but all now was quiet. No sounds reached his ears save the whinnying of an impatient horse not far distant down the roadway. So, after convincing himself that no intruder was about, he re-entered the prison, sitting at once to Margaret's cell.

"All is well," he hastened to assure her. "The wind is rising, and the ground no doubt was but the creaking of a loose grating. Gads, the villagers were sunny tonight; they may get good rest for tomorrow's gala day. But we do tarry here too long. Here's the Puritan bonnet—'twill disguise thee, Margaret—and throw this cloak over thy shoulders. In passing through the guard thou must droop thy head and appear languishing, as thou art supposed to be a maid suddenly taken ill of the pest of measles now prevalent about here, whom we are anxious to send to her home at Stenderford. As Ezekial Mason he hath perambulated to see thee and thy relatives safely out of the village."

"By our lady, 'tis a greivous joke, sweet, but thy face looks downcast. Thou wert ever one to enjoy a spice of danger. What gloom hangs over thy glance expressed great tenderness as he clumsily tied the gray bonnet strings.

"The awful fear of my cousin that still lies heavy on my heart," she

replied, hurriedly fastening on her shawl. "Mayhap he hath suspected thee, Godfrey, and may entrap us yet."

"Nay, love, put by such fearsome misgivings." La Fabienne laughed lightly. "Parbleu, in all this village no man rests so securely in the trustfulness of the new jailer, no man hath such confidence in the stern Puritan, Ezekial Mason, as thy kinsman Josiah. So throw fear of him from thee, Margaret. No man will molest us."

Taking her hand, he led her to a small door at the back of the prison that was opened by the slipping back of some heavy bolts, and he stepped out on to the ground.

As the cool night wind blew on her face and the broad expanse of country stretched out before her, with freedom so close at hand, Margaret, trembling and terribly excited, drew back. Her lover held her hand strongly in his own. Still she hesitated, afraid almost to venture forth.

"Margaret, my love, take courage," he urged. "Art thou never coming through the doorway?"

At his words she seemed to grow braver and, raising her head with a movement that indicated sudden resolution, said firmly: "I am coming now, dear rescuer, over the threshold—ever will I bless it, Godfrey—of hope, liberty, love and life!"

La Fabienne retaining her hand in his strong clasp, they ran swiftly down the dark pathway under the protecting shadows of the trees.

A short time later Josiah Taunston, sleeping the uneasy, fitful sleep of the guilty, was disturbed by the sound of horses' feet going down the mountain road. Raising himself in bed on his elbow, he listened intently.

"Halt, friends! Advance one with the countersign!"

A silence for a moment, then the clattering noise of horses' hoofs pounding the ground, at first loud, then growing fainter, until the sounds passed out of his hearing.

With a sigh of relief Taunston fell back upon his pillow muttering: "Ha, they ride away! 'Tis some good Puritan, perchance, going down the mountain to meet friends coming up the roadway. Strange how the suspicion hath ever beset my mind that Margaret Mayland's lover would return to rescue her. Ho, ho! Let him come tomorrow night! Let him come, anon, tomorrow night with a great army. I challenge him! The man he called a coward doth challenge him, lovesick laggard that he is, to rescue his lady tomorrow night!"

His harsh, exultant laughter, grating and discordant, rang out through the dark bedchamber as, his mind now at ease, he settled himself more comfortably upon his pillow, prepared to sleep until the dawn.

The Matchmaker

By MARTHA C. SANFORD.

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Katherine opened her eyes with a start and looked over the edge of the hammock. Below her on the green velvety grass sat a two-year-old baby, wrinkling up his chubby face and letting out little gurgles of laughter.

"Oh, I know your joke, young man," she laughed back at him. "You kissed Katha, didn't you, and woke her up? Now, come here, you rogue, and I'll pay you back in your own precious coin."

Without any pretense of denial or defense, young Reginald allowed himself to be gathered up into a shapeless, dimpled mass, squeezed, shaken out and spanked. Suddenly, waiving the conventionalities of announcement, a man interrupted this glorious game of retribution. In a flash Reginald turned state's evidence.

"Man say—kiss Katha," he said, pointing an accusing finger at the approaching interloper.

"Why, no, Reginald," Katherine remonstrated hastily, "man didn't say anything of the kind."

"Kiss Katha—man," transposed Reginald, with conviction.

At this Katherine sat up straight and forbidding.

"Mr. Kingsley," she began, and her tone was very chilling. "Will you be good enough to carry Reginald into the house and then come back again? I have something to say to you."

"Sure, Katherine," asserted Jack Kingsley, his natural light-heartedness quite unobscured at the hint of an impending reprimand. "I'll be back so soon you'll never miss me."

When Jack returned Katherine still sat in the hammock, her spirits as visibly crushed as her flimsy summer frock.

"I wouldn't have believed it of you, Jack," she said disconsolately.

"Believed what, Katherine?"

"That you'd do what the baby said."

"Kiss you?" he asked bluntly.

"Take such an advantage of me—kiss me when I was asleep," differentiated Katherine indignantly.

"But I didn't."

Katherine looked at him searchingly.

"But Reginald said—"

"I realize," interrupted Jack, with good natured sarcasm, "that compared with whatever that two-year-old prodigy may say any words of mine—"

"Just the same," broke in Katherine. "It wouldn't be the first time that

truth has come out of the mouth of babes."

Jack laughed appreciatively, but Katherine maintained an injured silence.

"It couldn't have been the baby," she announced at length, as if thinking aloud. "He isn't tall enough. But I'm determined to find out who it was."

"What will you do to him," asked Jack—"punish him as you did the baby?"

Katherine very properly ignored the suggestion, but Jack was undaunted.

"You're sure it was a man?" he asked nonchalantly.

"Why, of course it was!" flashed Katherine scornfully. "Who else would—"

"Exactly," Jack agreed. "Who else would?"

Katherine made a desperate effort to keep back the tears of vexation and succeeded to a very commendable degree. One or two, however, refused to be kept within bounds. She made a quick little dab at them with her handkerchief, hoping Jack did not notice.

"Tell me all about it," he urged sympathetically. "You haven't given me a very definite idea of what really happened yet."

"Oh, I was asleep in the hammock," explained Katherine, as if the details bored her, which they did not, "and woke up suddenly. Some one had kissed me. I thought it was the baby—the villain!"

"Reginald a villain!" exclaimed Jack, with feigned astonishment.

"You know whom I mean," answered Katherine, unresponsive to any humor in the situation.

"No, really I don't. Whom do you mean?"

"The person who kissed me," Kath-

erine replied, blushing over the unavoidable baldness of the admission.

"Oh," commented Jack placidly. "Well, granted it was a man, would you recognize it a second time—that is, if you had your eyes closed and the same man kissed you again, could you identify the kiss, do you think?"

"How perfectly horrid of you to suggest such a thing!" accused Katherine. "You don't consider my feelings in the least. Just like you brutal, cold blooded lawyers. You can't be human if you try."

In spite of his effort at control the betrayed young attorney burst out laughing. It was a most unfortunate thing for him to have done, for immediately Katherine buried her face in the hammock cushions and began sobbing convulsively.

Jack watched her perplexedly. She looked very appealing in her graceful slenderness. He could think of only one thing to do—and he did it.

Katherine was on her feet in an instant, her cheeks tear stained and flushed with indignation.

"So it was you the first time after all, Jack Kingsley!" she exclaimed. "I think you're too contemptible for words. You're a thief and a—and you don't tell the truth, and so—"

"Not so fast, not so fast," begged Jack gently. "I really wasn't the first one. Katherine, upon my honor, but—"

"Well, what in Cupid's name are you two quarreling about?" called Bill Heming from the rear background. "Can't an unmarried man pardon me, I should have said an ineligible man—find one undisturbed spot in this hymeneal garden? Just passed two other lovers down the path who seemed to be a bit out of tune. It must be the weather."

"I assure you the weather has nothing to do with it, Mr. Heming," answered Katherine haughtily.

"She's right, Bill," asserted Jack genially. "The cause of our seeming disagreement is purely—"

"Imaginary," interrupted Katherine, with such manifest alarm that both men laughed heartily.

But in spite of this little diversion the conversation dragged along apathetically, and Bill at length gave up his attempts to mend the situation.

"Well," he said, yawning ostentatiously, "guess I'll go in and play with the infant. He's nearer my level than you self absorbed grownups. By the way, Miss Katherine, how did you like our little joke?"

"Whose—what little joke?" demanded Katherine apprehensively.

"Reginald's and mine, of course. We watched you asleep for awhile; then we thought it would be great fun to wake you up. So we kissed you."

"Mr. Heming!" gasped Katherine. "You don't mean to say that you—"

"Bless you, no, my dear. I just helped Reginald."

"But what—what did you run away for?" Katherine pursued inquiringly.

"Oh, that's a little habit of mine, Miss Katherine," was Heming's cavalier reply as, musing, he walked toward the house.

"Queer old duffer, isn't he?" commented Jack by way of giving Katherine time for a bit of mental readjustment.

"The rest of the house party call him 'Bill the Matchmaker,'" she remarked. Her manner was wholly impersonal.

"I don't wonder," Jack assented. "There was an awkward little altercation."

"Jack."

"What is it, Katherine?"

"What were you going to tell me was the cause of our quarrel?"

"I started to say the cause was purely—ocularatory."

"Jack!"

"Well, wasn't it? Tell me, Katherine, were you really awfully angry with me?"

Katherine nodded. "For two reasons," she said, with emphasis, "one because I thought you had been the first one who kissed me and that you had lied about it."

"And the second?"

"Because if you weren't the first I—was sorry you had not been, Jack."

For several seconds there was untroubled quiet in the "hymeneal garden." Then Jack broke the serenity with a question.

"When shall we tell the others?" he asked softly.

"Oh, not for days and days," declared Katherine jealously. "It's such fun to have a secret."

But inside the house, without waiting for authority, a two-year-old baby was babbling to the admiring group gathered about him.

"Man say—kiss Katha. Kiss Katha—man." And all smiled comprehensively.

The Girl Graduate.

Did you ever have a girl graduate from the high school out of your family? If so, you know what it is, but if you have not you have missed about all that is worth anything in life. There is nothing like it. The happiness, the satisfaction, the success that has come is worth many times the money and effort put forth. What is the finest product of America? Secretary Loeb insists it is rabbits, Carnegie stands for libraries, Mrs. Hetty Green considers it ready money, while Secretary of Agriculture Wilson crowns over the American hen. They are all wrong. It's the girl graduate. As Daniel Webster remarked of Massachusetts: "Gentlemen, she needs no apology. There she stands!" For years father has poured out his money in buying her frocks and laces and hats, in paying for her chemistry and music and chewing gum. Mother has spent years of her life in teaching her morality, truth, the catechism and the proper way to do up her hair. And they feel that she's worth all the trouble and care and money she has cost.—Lawrence Journal.

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