

Condensed Novels — Miss Mix

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Miss Mix

By Ch—l—tte Br—nte

CHAPTER I

My earliest impressions are of a huge, misshapen rock, against which the hoarse waves beat unceasingly. On this rock three pelicans are standing in a defiant attitude. A dark sky lowers in the background, while two sea-gulls and a gigantic cormorant eye with extreme disfavor the floating corpse of a drowned woman in the foreground. A few bracelets, coral necklaces, and other articles of jewelry, scattered around loosely, complete this remarkable picture.

It is one which, in some vague, unconscious way, symbolizes, to my fancy, the character of a man. I have never been able to explain exactly why. I think I must have seen the picture in some illustrated volume when a baby, or my mother may have dreamed it before I was born.

As a child I was not handsome. When I consulted the triangular bit of looking-glass which I always carried with me, it showed a pale, sandy, and freckled face, shaded by locks like the color of seaweed when the sun strikes it in deep water. My eyes were said to be indistinctive; they were a faint, ashen gray; but above them rose—my only beauty—a high, massive, domelike forehead, with polished temples, like door-knobs of the purest porcelain.

Our family was a family of governesses. My mother had been one, and my sisters had the same occupation. Consequently, when, at the age of thirteen, my eldest sister

handed me the advertisement of Mr. Rawjester, clipped from that day's "Times," I accepted it as my destiny. Nevertheless, a mysterious presentiment of an indefinite future haunted me in my dreams that night, as I lay upon my little snow-white bed. The next morning, with two band-boxes tied up in silk handkerchiefs, and a hair trunk, I turned my back upon Minerva Cottage forever.

CHAPTER II

BLUNDERBORE HALL, the seat of James Rawjester, Esq., was encompassed by dark pines and funereal hemlocks on all sides. The wind sang weirdly in the turrets and moaned through the long-drawn avenues of the park. As I approached the house I saw several mysterious figures flit before the windows, and a yell of demoniac laughter answered my summons at the bell. While I strove to repress my gloomy forebodings, the housekeeper, a timid, scared-looking old woman, showed me into the library.

I entered, overcome with conflicting emotions. I was dressed in a narrow gown of dark serge, trimmed with black bugles. A thick green shawl was pinned across my breast. My hands were encased with black half-mittens worked with steel beads; on my feet were large pattens, originally the property of my deceased grandmother. I carried a blue cotton umbrella. As I passed before a mirror I could not help glancing at it, nor could I disguise from myself the fact that I was not handsome.

Drawing a chair into a recess, I sat down with folded hands, calmly awaiting the arrival of my master. Once or twice a fearful yell rang through the house, or the rattling of chains, and curses uttered in a deep, manly voice, broke upon the oppressive stillness. I began to feel my soul rising with the emergency of the moment.

“You look alarmed, miss. You don’t hear anything, my dear, do you?” asked the housekeeper nervously.

“Nothing whatever,” I remarked calmly, as a terrific scream, followed by the dragging of chairs and tables in the room above, drowned for a moment my reply. “It is the silence, on the contrary, which has made me foolishly nervous.”

The housekeeper looked at me approvingly, and instantly made some tea for me.

I drank seven cups; as I was beginning the eighth, I heard a crash, and the next moment a man leaped into the room through the broken window.

CHAPTER III

THE crash startled me from my self-control. The housekeeper bent toward me and whispered:—

“Don’t be excited. It’s Mr. Rawjester—he prefers to come in sometimes in this way. It’s his playfulness, ha! ha! ha!”

“I perceive,” I said calmly. “It’s the unfettered impulse of a lofty soul breaking the tyrannizing bonds of custom.” And I turned toward him.

He had never once looked at me. He stood with his back to the fire, which set off the herculean breadth of his shoulders. His face was dark and expressive; his under jaw squarely formed, and remarkably heavy. I was struck with his remarkable likeness to a Gorilla.

As he absently tied the poker into hard knots with his nervous fingers, I watched him with some interest. Suddenly he turned toward me:

“Do you think I’m handsome, young woman?”

“Not classically beautiful,” I returned calmly; “but you have, if I may so express myself, an abstract manliness—a sincere and wholesome barbarity which, involving as it does the naturalness—” But I stopped, for he yawned at that moment—an action which singularly developed the

immense breadth of his lower jaw—and I saw he had forgotten me. Presently he turned to the housekeeper:

“Leave us.”

The old woman withdrew with a courtesy.

Mr. Rawjester deliberately turned his back upon me and remained silent for twenty minutes. I drew my shawl the more closely around my shoulders and closed my eyes.

“You are the governess?” at length he said.

“I am, sir.”

“A creature who teaches geography, arithmetic, and the use of the globes—ha!—a wretched remnant of femininity—a skimp pattern of girlhood with a premature flavor of tea-leaves and morality. Ugh!”

I bowed my head silently.

“Listen to me, girl!” he said sternly; “this child you have come to teach—my ward—is not legitimate. She is the offspring of my mistress—a common harlot. Ah! Miss Mix, what do you think of me now?”

“I admire,” I replied calmly, “your sincerity. A mawkish regard for delicacy might have kept this disclosure to yourself. I only recognize in your frankness that perfect

community of thought and sentiment which should exist between original natures.”

I looked up; he had already forgotten my presence, and was engaged in pulling off his boots and coat. This done, he sank down in an armchair before the fire, and ran the poker wearily through his hair. I could not help pitying him.

The wind howled dismally without, and the rain beat furiously against the windows. I crept toward him and seated myself on a low stool beside his chair.

Presently he turned, without seeing me, and placed his foot absently in my lap. I affected not to notice it. But he started and looked down.

“You here yet—Carrothead? Ah, I forgot. Do you speak French?”

“*Oui, Monsieur.*”

“*Taisez-vous!*” he said sharply, with singular purity of accent. I complied. The wind moaned fearfully in the chimney, and the light burned dimly. I shuddered in spite of myself. “Ah, you tremble, girl!”

“It is a fearful night.”

“Fearful! Call you this fearful, ha! ha! ha! Look! you wretched little atom, look!” and he dashed forward, and,

leaping out of the window, stood like a statue in the pelting storm, with folded arms. He did not stay long, but in a few minutes returned by way of the hall chimney. I saw from the way that he wiped his feet on my dress that he had again forgotten my presence.

“You are a governess. What can you teach?” he asked, suddenly and fiercely thrusting his face in mine.

“Manners!” I replied calmly.

“Ha! teach *me!*”

“You mistake yourself,” I said, adjusting my mittens. “Your manners require not the artificial restraint of society. You are radically polite; this impetuosity and ferociousness is simply the sincerity which is the basis of a proper deportment. Your instincts are moral; your better nature, I see, is religious. As St. Paul justly remarks— see chap. 6, 8, 9, and 10—”

He seized a heavy candlestick, and threw it at me. I dodged it submissively but firmly.

“Excuse me,” he remarked, as his under jaw slowly relaxed. “Excuse me, Miss Mix—but I can’t stand St. Paul! Enough—you are engaged.”

CHAPTER IV

I FOLLOWED the housekeeper as she led the way timidly to my room. As we passed into a dark hall in the wing, I noticed that it was closed by an iron gate with a grating. Three of the doors on the corridor were likewise grated. A strange noise, as of shuffling feet and the howling of infuriated animals, rang through the hall. Bidding the housekeeper good-night, and taking the candle, I entered my bedchamber.

I took off my dress, and putting on a yellow flannel nightgown, which I could not help feeling did not agree with my complexion, I composed myself to rest by reading *Blair's Rhetoric* and *Paley's Moral Philosophy*. I had just put out the light, when I heard voices in the corridor. I listened attentively. I recognized Mr. Rawjester's stern tones.

"Have you fed No. 1?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said a gruff voice, apparently belonging to a domestic.

"How's No. 2?"

"She's a little off her feed, just now, but will pick up in a day or two."

“And No. 3?”

“Perfectly furious, sir. Her tantrums are ungovernable.”

“Hush!”

The voices died away, and I sank into a fitful slumber.

I dreamed that I was wandering through a tropical forest. Suddenly I saw the figure of a gorilla approaching me. As it neared me, I recognized the features of Mr. Rawjester. He held his hand to his side as if in pain. I saw that he had been wounded. He recognized me and called me by name, but at the same moment the vision changed to an Ashantee village, where, around the fire, a group of negroes were dancing and participating in some wild *Obi* festival. I awoke with the strain still ringing in my ears.

“Hokee-pokee wokee fum!”

Good Heavens! could I be dreaming? I heard the voice distinctly on the floor below, and smelt something burning. I arose, with an indistinct presentiment of evil, and hastily putting some cotton in my ears and tying a towel about my head, I wrapped myself in a shawl and rushed down stairs. The door of Mr. Rawjester’s room was open. I entered.



MISS MIX saves the life of MR. RAWJESTER.—
(After BRONTE.)

Mr. Rawjester lay apparently in a deep slumber, from which even the clouds of smoke that came from the burning curtains of his bed could not rouse him. Around the room a large and powerful negress, scantily attired, with her head adorned with feathers, was dancing wildly, accompanying

herself with bone castanets. It looked like some terrible *fetich*.

I did not lose my calmness. After firmly emptying the pitcher, basin, and slop-jar on the burning bed, I proceeded cautiously to the garden, and returning with the garden engine, I directed a small stream at Mr. Rawjester.

At my entrance the gigantic negress fled. Mr. Rawjester yawned and woke. I explained to him, as he rose dripping from the bed, the reason of my presence. He did not seem to be excited, alarmed, or discomposed. He gazed at me curiously.

“So you risked your life to save mine, eh? you canary-colored teacher of infants.”

I blushed modestly, and drew my shawl tightly over my yellow flannel nightgown.

“You love me, Mary Jane—don’t deny it! This trembling shows it!” He drew me closely toward him, and said, with his deep voice tenderly modulated:

“How’s her pooty tootens—did she get her ‘tittle tootens wet—bess her?”

I understood his allusion to my feet. I glanced down and saw that in my hurry I had put on a pair of his old india-

rubbers. My feet were not small or pretty, and the addition did not add to their beauty.

“Let me go, sir,” I remarked quietly. “This is entirely improper; it sets a bad example for your child.” And I firmly but gently extricated myself from his grasp. I approached the door. He seemed for a moment buried in deep thought.

“You say this was a negress?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Humph, Number 1, I suppose.”

“Who is Number One, sir?”

“My *first*,” he remarked, with a significant and sarcastic smile. Then, relapsing into his old manner, he threw his boots at my head, and bade me begone. I withdrew calmly.

CHAPTER V

MY pupil was a bright little girl, who spoke French with a perfect accent. Her mother had been a French ballet-dancer, which probably accounted for it. Although she was only six years old, it was easy to perceive that she had been several times in love. She once said to me:

“Miss Mix, did you ever have the *grande* passion? Did you ever feel a fluttering here?” and she placed her hand upon her small chest, and sighed quaintly, “a kind of distaste for *bonbons* and *caramels*, when the world seemed as tasteless and hollow as a broken cordial drop?”

“Then you have felt it, Nina?” I said quietly.

“O dear, yes. There was Buttons—that was our page, you know—I loved him dearly, but papa sent him away. Then there was Dick, the groom, but he laughed at me, and I suffered misery!” and she struck a tragic French attitude. “There is to be company here to-morrow,” she added, rattling on with childish *naïveté*, “and papa’s sweetheart—Blanche Marabout—is to be here. You know they say she is to be my mamma.”

What thrill was this shot through me? But I rose calmly, and administering a slight correction to the child, left the apartment.

Blunderbore House, for the next week, was the scene of gayety and merriment. That portion of the mansion closed with a grating was walled up, and the midnight shrieks no longer troubled me.

But I felt more keenly the degradation of my situation. I was obliged to help Lady Blanche at her toilet and help her to look beautiful. For what? To captivate him? Oh—no, no,

—but why this sudden thrill and faintness? Did he really love her? I had seen him pinch and swear at her. But I reflected that he had thrown a candlestick at my head, and my foolish heart was reassured.

It was a night of festivity, when a sudden message obliged Mr. Rawjester to leave his guests for a few hours. “Make yourselves merry, idiots,” he added, under his breath, as he passed me. The door closed and he was gone.

A half-hour passed. In the midst of the dancing a shriek was heard, and out of the swaying crowd of fainting women and excited men a wild figure strode into the room. One glance showed it to be a highwayman, heavily armed, holding a pistol in each hand.

“Let no one pass out of this room!” he said, in a voice of thunder. “The house is surrounded and you cannot escape. The first one who crosses yonder threshold will be shot like a dog. Gentlemen, I’ll trouble you to approach in single file, and hand me your purses and watches.”

Finding resistance useless, the order was ungraciously obeyed.

“Now, ladies, please to pass up your jewelry and trinkets.”

This order was still more ungraciously complied with. As Blanche handed to the bandit captain her bracelet, she endeavored to conceal a diamond necklace, the gift of Mr.

Rawjester, in her bosom. But, with a demoniac grin, the powerful brute tore it from its concealment, and administering a hearty box on the ear of the young girl, flung her aside.

It was now my turn. With a beating heart I made my way to the robber chieftain, and sank at his feet. "O sir, I am nothing but a poor governess, pray let me go."

"O ho! A governess? Give me your last month's wages, then. Give me what you have stolen from your master!" and he laughed fiendishly.

I gazed at him quietly, and said, in a low voice: "I have stolen nothing from you, Mr. Rawjester!"

"Ah, discovered! Hush! listen, girl!" he hissed, in a fierce whisper; "utter a syllable to frustrate my plans, and you die; aid me, and"— But he was gone.

In a few moments the party, with the exception of myself, were gagged and locked in the cellar. The next moment torches were applied to the rich hangings, and the house was in flames. I felt a strong hand seize me, and bear me out in the open air and place me up on the hillside, where I could overlook the burning mansion. It was Mr. Rawjester.

"Burn!" he said, as he shook his fist at the flames. Then sinking on his knees before me, he said hurriedly:

“Mary Jane, I love you; the obstacles to our union are or will be soon removed. In yonder mansion were confined my three crazy wives. One of them, as you know, attempted to kill me! Ha! this is vengeance! But will you be mine?”

I fell, without a word, upon his neck.

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