

The Planter's Daughter

OR FATE'S REVENGE

By MRS. ALICE P. CARRISTON

Author of "A Waif from the Sea," "Her Brightest Hope," "Wayward Winifred," etc.

CHAPTER III.—(Continued.)

It simply seemed incredible that it was the haughty, high-spirited Sylphide Couramont who obeyed the nonchalant command with the submission of a lamb. What power did this rude fellow exert over this defiant girl? Had she met her master in him?

He pointed to the easy chair which she had left but a minute before, as she sank into it, he carelessly tossed his dripping hat upon a dainty sofa covered with pale blue satin embroidered with apple blossoms, and braced himself against the toilet table, the muslin drape of which became crushed and soiled by contact with his muddy boots.

"First of all," he began, sneeringly, "your tragedy airs are out of place. So long as you do not bring us face to face I do not care a pin to meet him; what is more, I no more want to kill him than I want to marry you—for love."

He paused abruptly, and little by little she raised her great, dilated eyes to his face like two burning stars.

"It may touch your vanity in a vulnerable spot," he continued, sitting down upon the edge of the table and crossing one foot over the other, "but I don't love you a speck and never did; so you may as well know, first as last, that if you hadn't been worth your weight in gold, I wouldn't have looked twice at you. You're not my style. I'm hot-tempered enough myself, and bringing a firebrand into my camp wouldn't have helped matters."

While he spoke the defiant look had been creeping back into Sylphide's face, brightening her eyes and curling her red lips.

"So you sought to marry me for my money?" she murmured, looking him steadily in the eye.

"Most assuredly; for no other reason."

"You have lost me and my money, too!" she cried, springing to her feet.

"You, yes; but not the money. Your father left a will, did he not?"

"No."

It is doubtful whether, had a bomb exploded at his feet, Oscar Couramont would have started more violently.

"Left no will?" he cried.

"I tell you, no," Sylphide replied with a steady, level glance.

Couramont shrugged his shoulders and resented himself upon the edge of the table.

"In that case," he rejoined, "all the property comes to you. Well, so be it—I must change my tactics. You must hand over to me the half of the estate, which by right your father ought to have left me."

The indignant reply that quivered for utterance upon Sylphide's lips was checked by a sudden knocking at the locked door which communicated with the corridor.

"Miss Sylph, Miss Sylph!" called a woman's voice from the other side of the door.

With a wicked glance in her eyes, Sylphide turned upon Couramont.

"It is Diana, my maid," she said; "she will secure my release."

"Bah!" growled the rascal, "tell her to go away; I'm not half through talking to you. Do as I bid you; it is worth your while!"

Taking a step toward that thin partition that separated her from deliverance, Sylphide raised her voice, said:

"I do not need you, Diana. Continue with the packing." Then, with the darling gleam again shining in her eyes, she supplemented, "and if in half an hour I am not down stairs, ask Mr. Courtlandt to come up for me!"

"Fool!" sneered Couramont; "well, a woman always will have the last word, so I suppose I ought not to blame you for what you can't help. All is, we shall have to talk fast, as I see no occasion to soil my hands with this fellow's blood. So, by packing up, you intend to leave Rosemont?"

"I do."

"Then we will proceed to business and settle everything up before you go—Sylphide, I want my share of the estate, and I want it now—to-night!"

"How dare you?" she demanded, turning upon him, imperiously; "your share? What do you mean?"

"Just what I say—I want my share."

"There is no share for you; I doubt if my poor father ever thought to leave you so much as one cent."

"That is quite possible," retorted Couramont with his imperturbable smile; "the old man never loved me, but he feared me. And I intend that you shall atone for his lack of common sense and your want of forethought in marrying this interloper."

As he spoke he advanced upon her where she stood in the center of the chamber, and drew from an inner pocket a slip of paper.

"I am not stupid enough to suppose that you have a sum of money upon you to-night sufficient to satisfy my demands. Therefore, this letter, addressed to your executor, and stating that in accordance with an expressed wish of your father that his estate be equally divided between us two, his only heirs, you will sign."

"Never!"

He drew back a step and glared upon her so balefully that she recoiled and caught at a chair for support.

"Do you refuse to sign this paper?" he asked, steadily; "be warned in time!"

I know the secret of your life, a secret which can crush you forever, even invalidate your marriage!"

"What do you mean?"

"Sign this paper, or I inform your husband that your mother was a slave."

Like a flash of lurid lightning all that had been incomprehensible to her in her father's behavior burst upon the unhappy girl; his nervousness, his strange desire to marry her to Oscar Couramont, his wild entreaty for her to believe no evil gossip of her dead mother—all, all came back to her in that dreadful moment with the overwhelming force of a conviction. Yet even then she would not believe it.

With hands cramped like the talons of a bird of prey, she sprang at her tormentor, uttering shriek after shriek of rage, horror and dismay.

"It is a lie, a lie, a lie!" she panted; "out of my sight! You—you—!"

She staggered, beat the air for a moment with her arms, then with a low moan of fathomless agony, fell, face downwards, with a dull crash, like one stricken with death.

Too late Oscar Couramont discovered that he had over-reached himself. Sylphide was now incapable of signing the instrument which would make a wealthy man of him; besides, her cries had aroused the household, hurrying feet were mounting the stairs, already they were knocking at the door, and a man's voice in excited accents was calling upon her to open. In less than half a minute the barrier would be broken down!

Snatching up his hat and revolver, Couramont sprang to the window.

"We shall meet again, my lady, never fear!" he hissed, menacingly; "we shall meet again, when my grip upon you shall be stronger than it is now!"

CHAPTER IV.

Four years have elapsed since the events narrated in the preceding chapter, and the flight of Courtlandt and his bride has ceased to excite comment and gossip long since.

Already the year 1862 is pregnant with its greatest day, Sept. 22, when the martyr President issued his immortal proclamation declaring the freedom of all slaves in the States and parts of States then in rebellion.

Since that memorable night of darkness and storm, in October, 1858, the face of the mistress of Rosemont has never once been seen upon her hereditary estate. Having been left in competent hands, the plantation has yielded its accustomed income, all of which has been transmitted through the bankers at Mobile to Lucian Courtlandt in whatever part of the world he chanced to be.

For a year the young lawyer and his beautiful wife traveled from place to place in the Old World, following the fashionable season from London to St. Petersburg, returning along the shores of the romantic Mediterranean.

It had been a term of unalloyed delight to Sylphide, and when, at the close of the year, a lovely baby boy came to join their party at Nice, the young wife trembled at her happiness. The horror of her wedding night with its appalling revelation now seemed so far away that she often wondered whether it had been reality indeed, and not the delirium of a fevered dream. In the peace and joy of her maternity she persuaded herself that cruel Fate had forgotten her, and that henceforth she was destined to live in the auspicious light of favoring Fortune.

Oscar Couramont had given no sign of life; perhaps he had repented; perhaps he was dead. Sylphide could afford now to wish him no evil, since his baleful shadow had not crossed her sun-lit path.

Of course an explanation of her insensible condition when found in her chamber at Rosemont on that fatal night was inevitable; she owed it to her husband, and she gave it him according as she thought best.

"You see, I scarcely know how it was," she murmured as she lay in his arms upon her recovery to consciousness, "but when I entered my own room for the last time and glanced about me upon the familiar objects, it seemed as if father came back to me from the grave, his face wan and pallid, his two eyes burning like coals of fire. I was terrified, and, falling upon my knees, I besought him to tell me in what I had offended him, but he only shook his head and slowly vanished; and then I shrieked and fell fainting."

Lucian Courtlandt smiled a trifle uneasily as he replied:

"I don't believe in visions myself; yours, however, must have been some what out of the ordinary run of unaided ghosts. Were you aware that your airy visitor wore muddy boots and a wet hat?"

"Lucian!"

"It is a fact. The print of his hat has left an indelible stain upon your sofa, and the muslin drape of your toilet table is 'red' and torn."

With ready tact, Sylphide glanced up, terror stricken into her husband's face.

"Then burglars must have entered my room while we were at church!" she cried.

"Do you have burglars in this part of the country, Sylphide?" asked Courtlandt with an amused smile.

"Well—if not actual burglars," was the innocent reply, "thieves at least, and plenty of them."

"Ah! But it strikes me as a little strange that you did not notice these signs of disorder when you entered your chamber."

"Now, Lucian, what an idea!" she exclaimed; "is it likely that, in the dim candle light and considering the excitement I was laboring under, I should be struck by the sight of a few rain drops and a smother of mud? How absurd! Why should the damage not have been done by one of the dogs? They are fond of me, and often come up to my room."

"Dogs do not climb veranda posts to second story windows, my dear; and your doors were locked."

"I locked them!"

"But I found your window open!"

"Upon hearing my approach, the dog might have escaped by that means!"

"You say the dogs are fond of you, and dogs in general are too intelligent to risk any such jump as that. No, my love, it was no quadruped that entered your chamber to-night. It was a man!"

He felt her weight grow heavier in his arms, but she managed to preserve consciousness enough to falter:

"What makes you think so?"

"I have instituted a search of the place, and have made certain discoveries."

Her hands set like a vise upon his arm.

"Discoveries!" she gasped, "what discoveries?"

"That some one climbed the pillar of the veranda nearest your window by means of the vines, and that the print of a horse's hoof is fresh in the soil of the lime-tree walk that leads up to that side of the house. Which facts incline me to your belief, that thieves have entered the house."

"Lucian, I told you so," she cried wildly; "it is true. There must have been a plot to rob us while we were at church. Don't you see?"

Lucian Courtlandt pressed his lips upon the damp, pallid brow, and gently depositing the graceful form upon the cushions of the sofa, he rose with the words:

"You are over-excited and tired, poor child. You had better rest here to-night. We will leave Rosemont at daybreak. Nay, lie still; I will send Diana to you."

She dared not remonstrate for fear of arousing the suspicions which she had lulled into oblivion. So she closed her eyes with well-feigned weariness, and Courtlandt left her to summon her maid.

No sooner had the door shut his manly figure from view when Sylphide started up upon her elbow, her dilated eyes burning with that deep red fire that one sees in a hungry wolf's. She held her breath and counted his retreating footsteps, till they fell away into silence at the extremity of the long hall. Then she sprang to her feet, her pallid face aflame with animation, every nerve vibrating like the rudely swept strings of a harp.

"Saved!" she panted triumphantly; "saved! But what a narrow escape. I have bridged the abyss with a straw, and passed safely over. I shall be on my guard in future; it can never happen again. Were I to meet Oscar Couramont a hundred times, I should never be such a fool again."

The exultant soliloquy was cut short by the abrupt opening of the door, and a young mulatto girl, with a remarkably pretty, keen face, entered. She paused at sight of her mistress pacing to and fro so excitedly, and Sylphide paused also, fixing a sharp, questioning glance upon her maid.

"What is it, Diana?" she demanded, swiftly; "you have heard something; I see it in your face."

"I haven't heard anything, Miss Sylph," replied the girl, "but I've seen something—Mass' Oscar."

Diana did not draw a breath for fully a minute after that unwelcome announcement, for Sylphide's small hand was set upon her lips like a seal.

"Hush!" she breathed, "do not dare to slip his name until we are gone. My husband does not know of his existence, and must never know, if we can help it. Where was my cousin?"

"In the lime-tree walk, Missy—mountain his horse."

"Thank heaven, he's gone, then, for the night! Are the trunks ready packed, Diana?"

"Yes, Missy, packed and strapped."

"See that they are loaded on the wagon to-night; we start at daybreak, and you go with me. I may have need of you in more ways than one."

Scarcely had the eastern horizon begun to flush with the promise of day, when the family coach, followed by the baggage wagon, rolled swiftly down the road that led into the river valley; and two hours later Mr. Oscar Couramont rode into the court yard at Rosemont, to be informed that, if he had come to breakfast, his meal must be a solitary one.

(To be continued.)

Apt to Be Charitable.

"The impromptu speaker may be all right in his way," said Deacon Jones, "but as for me, give me the minister who writes his sermons every time."

"Why?" asked Deacon Smith.

"He is more likely to realize their length," was the significant reply.

As Others See Us.

"You always say the wrong thing at the right time, Henry," said Mrs. Packem. "Now, I always think twice before I speak."

"Yes, my dear," replied the meek and lowly Henry, "but you are one of those rapid-fire thinkers."

As It Should Be.

"I suppose," said the visitor to police headquarters, "that every officer knows a rogue when he sees him."

"Sure," replied the desk sergeant; "but every officer doesn't seize a rogue when he knows him."

The man who originated the motto "Live and Let Live" didn't take the undertaker into consideration, but fell into his hands just the same.



Dude—They say cigarettes will turn the skin yellow. Mrs. Prim—That's so. Every time I catch my boy smoking he gets tanned.—Mail and Express.

"Do you think you could ever marry for money?" "No. But I'm sure I could soon learn to love a girl who had a million or two."—Chicago Record-Herald.

Sportsman—Any good hunting in this part of the country? Native—Lots of it. Sportsman—What kind of game. Native—No game at all. Just hunting.—Illustrated Bits.

Willie—Mamma, I told Aunt Helen she grew homelier every day. Mrs. Stimson—You didn't tell her I said so, did you? "I had to, or she would have whipped me."—Brooklyn Life.

"What are they going to do when they get through tearing up the streets?" "Lay 'em down again, of course! How else would anybody be able to tear 'em up later on, silly?"—Baltimore News.

Reeder—Scott said a clever thing today; said that luck is a good bit like lightning, for it seldom strikes twice in the same place. Heeder—Yes, and as a rule neither of them needs to.—Pennsylvania Punch Bowl.

Hannigan—Shure, there scales is no good at all fur me. They only weigh the heft of two hundred pounds, an' Oo'm near to two hundred and fifty. Flannigan—Well, man alive, can't ye git on thim twice?—Philadelphia Press.

Playgoer—I suppose the leading lady is very happy after getting all those bouquets. Usher—Oh, no. She only got five. Playgoer—Gracious! Isn't that enough? Usher—No; she paid for six, I believe.—Philadelphia Press.

Kittie—Paul told me last evening I was the prettiest girl he ever saw. Bessie—Oh, that's nothing; he said the same to me last year. Kittie—I know, dear, but his taste may have improved since then, you know.—Boston Transcript.

"Prisoner, why did you strike this man?" "If you please, your Honor, he came to me suddenly and said, 'How old is Ann?' 'Well, what hurt did that do?' 'Why, you see, your Honor, Ann is my wife.'—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

A Volcano.—"What is a volcano?" asked the teacher. "A mountain with a fire inside," said one. A smile of comprehension spread over the puzzled face of the smallest scholar as she asked, surprisedly, "Is that a mountain range?"—Harper's Magazine.

She—I have two very dear friends—Agnes and Florence—He—Which is the more popular? "Oh, Agnes is much more popular than Florence—among the girls." "Introduce me to Florence. I am partial to good-looking girls."—Kansas City Journal.

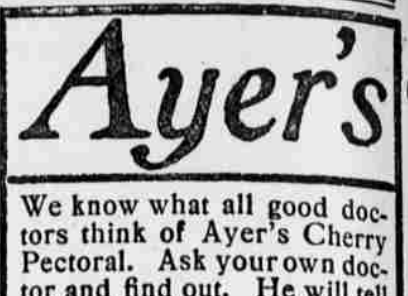
Mrs. Kalling—You haven't got that splendid butler now—Mrs. Parvenu—No, he was a fraud. Mrs. Kalling—Indeed? Mrs. Parvenu—Yes, he forgot himself once and neglected to drop his "h's," so we discovered he wasn't English at all.—Philadelphia Ledger.

He—How did you enjoy the opera? She—Oh, it was just splendid. He—Really? But it was all French, wasn't it? She—Oh, no! Of course, some of the handsomest ones were unmistakably Parisian, but there were many pretty gowns that were evidently made here.—Philadelphia Press.

Launched on His Literary Career.—"I understand your son has decided to go in for literature." "Yes, and he's made a splendid start already." "You don't say?" "Yes; he went to auction this morning and bought a second-hand writing desk for only four dollars and ninety-eight cents."—Catholic Standard and Times.

"Now," said Mrs. Biggleson's cousin at breakfast on the morning after her arrival, "don't make company of me. I want to be treated just as if I were one of the family." "All right," replied Mr. Biggleson, helping himself to the tenderest part of the steak, "we'll try to make you feel right at home."—Chicago Record-Herald.

The squire's pretty daughter (examining the village school)—Now, children, can you tell me what a miracle is? The children look at one another, but remained silent. "Can no one answer this question?" the new curate asked, who was standing behind the squire's daughter. A little girl was suddenly struck with a brilliant idea. She held up her hand excitedly. "Well, Nellie?" the squire's daughter asked, smiling approval. "Please, miss," the small child replied, breathlessly, "mother says 'twill be a miracle if you don't marry the new curate."—London Tit-Bits.



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This Is Awful. "Why do you always write in your shirt sleeves?" asked the free lunch editor. "Because," answered the joke carpenter, "that's where my funny bone is located."

Motion Overruled. "I say," said the captain of bachelors' hall in the boarding school, "let's be swell and call our dormitory the Latin quarter."

"No! No!" shrieked the rest of the crowd. "Because," ventured one of the protesting mob, "all the other fellows will be coming here trying to borrow the quarter."

And so it was thus that the dormitory went nameless.—Baltimore American.

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