

# The Planter's Daughter

## OR FATE'S REVENGE

By MRS. ALICE P. CARRISTON

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

### CHAPTER XII.—(Continued.)

In the dimness of the shadowy hall after the outer glare she scarcely noticed the form that loomed before her until two arms encircled her and she felt herself drawn into her father's embrace. "Claire, my darling child!" exclaimed the old man fervently; "how happy, how unutterably happy I am to-day! Dr. Gresham has just left your mother. He has made a thorough examination, and is entirely satisfied with her condition. A great change has taken place in her, which he assures me will be permanent. Claire struggled out of that fond embrace, and stared at her father in amazement.

"What do you mean?" she faltered; "can it be that mother's life was in danger?"

"We have purposely kept you in ignorance of the facts," was the smiling reply; "but now that all danger is past, I can speak frankly. Yes, we entertained the gravest fears for your poor mother's life. Gresham warned me that our miserable poverty was killing her by inches. 'Killing her!' gasped the girl; 'killing my mother!'"

"Yes, my child; and her salvation is due to the thought of your marriage, of your happiness—to this respite of peace and comfort."

Claire turned away with a ghastly pallor overspreading her countenance, which the dim light of the hall served to conceal; and staggering towards the staircase she supported herself for a moment upon the newel-post.

"Merciful heaven!" she thought, her brain in a dizzy, sickening whirl; "my refusal to marry signifies our return to the misery of poverty, and that will kill my mother. Father, if I have been of advantage to you, do me a favor in return!" She paused an instant for breath, and then went on swiftly: "When Mr. Courtlandt asks for me, beg him to excuse me; say that I am overcome with diffidence—anything you choose, so long as I do not see him until to-morrow. Father, will you do this for me?"

"Certainly, my child," was the surprised rejoinder; "you shall not be disturbed to-day, I promise you. But, Claire," he added hastily as she seized the stair rail and sprang up a few steps, "there is something it is our duty to inform you of to-day!"

"Yes, yes, I know!" she panted, glancing back at his anxious face; "you mean the poor little child whom we have to recognize. I agree to it; I will receive him whenever Mr. Courtlandt sees fit to bring him to me."

And as if patience and fortitude had alike departed, she fled up the staircase and vanished in her chamber, locking the door behind her.

No less mystified than relieved, Philip Burgess gazed after the white robe with its fluttering violet ribbons until it was lost to view.

"She knows all!" he muttered; "who could have told her?"

In spite of the innumerable questions with which he was plying concerning Claire's mysterious disappearance, the old man was as good as his word, and insisted upon his daughter being left undisturbed.

All that day and until the following morning—Claire's wedding morn—peace and quiet reigned throughout the Burgess mansion. It was not until Martha Dunn entered her young mistress's chamber at 8 o'clock that the very shadows that lurked in the radiant sunlight were startled by the tidings that she brought down to Philip Burgess.

"Send for the doctor!" cried the faithful creature; "Miss Claire is ill, very ill—and looks as if she were dying!"

It was no exaggeration. Poor Claire had passed a night the horrors of which must ever remain a secret with her, so that when the dawn broke it found her in great exhaustion.

Gresham, upon his arrival, added fuel to the fire of excitement by stating that Claire might be able to be dressed and stand long enough to be married in the house, but he should forbid her making the exertion of going to church, as she might expire on the way. To Lucian Courtlandt, who drove hastily over upon the receipt of the startling tidings, the wily doctor said:

"It will be just as well, perhaps, for you to make no public parade of the ceremony, since I am informed that your first wife intends to be present."

"Sylphide—here!" gasped Courtlandt, in dismay.

"She is staying at the village inn under the name of Mrs. Hastings. So the sooner and more quietly the affair is gotten over the better!"

### CHAPTER XIII.

Dr. Gresham's advice was followed in every particular, and while the little church in the village was filling with a crowd of townsfolk, curious to see the strangers from the city, the clergyman was speeding away in his carriage to solemnize the wedding ceremony at Elinwood.

When they had attired her in her snowy robes of costly satin, with the veil and orange blossoms in her hair, her appearance was so absolutely ghastly that, but for the nervous flashing of her restless eyes, she might well have been mistaken for a lifeless bride wrapped in the coverments of the grave.

The moment his experienced eye rested

upon her livid face, Dr. Gresham whispered to the clergyman in attendance: "Be as expeditious as possible; I have my doubts whether she lasts until the benediction!"

But in that he was mistaken. With remarkable nerve Claire kept her feet at Courtlandt's side. When, however, the last "amen" was pronounced, she awayed blindly, and had not ready hands placed her gently in a chair, she would have fallen.

And yet not a word had been exchanged between the bride and groom, and though Lucian Courtlandt would have been glad to have spoken some reassuring words to the sufferer, Gresham hurried him out of the room with the murmured words:

"Leave her alone for the present; she needs rest."

Later in the afternoon, when the sun sent his blood-red lance through the closed blinds of that stately flower-scented drawing room, the widow Courtlandt found herself alone with the bride. Approaching the chair where Claire lay apparently lost in a day dream, the lady said with tender solicitude:

"Will you not retire to your room and rest you, my dear?"

Claire raised her heavy eyes with a total absence of expression as she replied:

"Thank you, madam, I am resting here."

"Are you suffering?"

"No; I am only weary. I may say so now, I suppose," with a faint smile, "since the comedy is over."

Bending over her, Mrs. Courtlandt pressed her lips lightly upon the pallid brow.

"I admire your bravery," she said.

"I have need of considerable yet," murmured Claire, "in order to face the enemy."

"The enemy! Whom do you mean?"

"Those who wish me dead."

"My dear child, my fondest hope and dearest wish are to win you back to life and health. I would give the last drop of blood in my veins to see you well and happy!"

"You have a kind heart, madam!"

There entered at that moment a little child, with a marvelously beautiful face, great, wondering eyes and ringlets of jet black hair that touched his waist. With a glad cry he opened his tiny, dimpled arms and ran to the elder Mrs. Courtlandt.

"Grandma!" he cried, affectionately, nestling in that lady's arms.

"Who is this child?" demanded Claire.

"Can you not guess? He calls me grandmother."

Attracted by her voice, little Leon walked shyly to Claire, exclaiming:

"Oh, what a pretty, white lady! Won't you take me in your lap?"

Claire stooped and cast her arms about him.

"I cannot lift you, my darling," she faltered, after a valiant effort; "I am not strong enough."

With glad alacrity Mrs. Courtlandt raised the boy and placed him on Claire's lap, while the latter murmured, kissing the sweet lips:

"Yes, these are his features, his eyes—his son!" and with a sudden access of affection, gathering the child to her bosom, "and my son!"

"My mamma," faltered the child, with a puzzled expression.

"Yes, Leon," said Claire; "are you not willing? Will you not be my boy?"

"Yes, yes," cried the boy; "I love you, white lady!"

With the child nestling in her bosom, Claire suddenly raised her eyes to find Lucian Courtlandt standing upon the threshold of the room, silently regarding the lovely picture. Quickly putting the child from her, she exclaimed:

"Mr. Courtlandt, I suppose you have come to receive some tidings of me; make your mind easy on that score; I am suffering horribly."

"Claire, retract those cruel words," he cried.

As she did not speak, and in the awkward pause that ensued, Mrs. Courtlandt took little Leon's hand and led him towards the door.

"Good-by, little white mamma," bled the child, and then went tripping away.

"Good-by, good-by," sighed Claire; then, turning to Lucian, she added:

"Pardon the irritability of an invalid. I beg you not to be offended if sometimes I am lacking in a due sense of my obligations."

"Obligations!" cried Lucian contritely; "the obligation is entirely upon my side. Do you fancy that I fail to appreciate the immense sacrifices you have made for me to-day?"

Claire shook her head sadly, as she answered:

"No, no; my part of the contract will not be fulfilled until I am gone. Would you have chosen me, had you been told that I could be cured?" she demanded.

"Is not the mother of your son alive?"

"Yes," came the reluctant reply, "she is alive."

"Do you love her, or not? Answer me, upon your word of honor, as a gentleman."

He turned away from her and wiped the beads of perspiration from his brow.

"How much you will have to say to each other the day after my death!"

It is probable that his patience would not have stood this last hard test had not

a servant suddenly entered the room.

"Mr. Courtlandt," he said, "there is a lady at the door asking for you."

"A lady!" he gasped; "what is her name?"

"Mrs. Hastings."

"Sylphide here? How dared she come?"

Ere he could command himself sufficiently to articulate a word, Claire rose from her chair.

"You see," she said, with cutting disdain, "the poor woman has been neglected for two weeks, and she has come to find you." Then, as she staggered towards an inner door, she cried:

"She will not even wait until I am dead!"

As she passed out of sight he came to his senses with a start. He turned to find himself face to face with Sylphide.

"What are you thinking of?" he said.

"Why are you here—here in my wife's very apartment?"

The rigidity of her features relaxed, the spell was broken, and in a low, tense tone that thrilled with indignant reproach she replied:

"Your wife, do you say! Ah, you use that word as though you had been married as many years as you have known her days. But, my good sir, you have but one wife, as your child has but one mother—and I am she!"

"Sylphide," he faltered, advancing a step, but pausing abruptly as though her accusing eyes distilled some baleful influence; "Sylphide, why are you here? What have you come to do?"

"Why am I here?" came the sharp retort; "are you aware that it is two mortal weeks since I have seen either you or my son? I am here to satisfy myself that I have not been forgotten. Since I have been separated from you," she continued piteously, "I have become as one mad; the strangest fancies have taken possession of me. I imagine that you have abandoned me forever, that I shall never see you again; a fiend keeps whispering in my ear that they have stolen your heart and my child's heart from me. Heaven help me, I doubt the very sunshine which is all the warmth I have left in life!"

She pressed her hands upon her eyes for an instant, as though striving to blot out some hideous prospect; then, renouncing them, she concluded in low-toned desperation:

"There must be an end to this! Whenever these horrible vagaries overpowered me, I must be so placed that I can see you, speak to you."

"Impossible!" he interposed, firmly.

"While Claire lives I must not—I will not, see you!"

"It is true, then," she panted; "my suspicions are correct. Your paternal solicitude is all a farce; you have cleverly disembarrassed yourself of me in order to marry a woman who, in all probability, is no more an invalid than I am!"

In the very desperation of despair, Courtlandt glanced from right to left, impotently hoping to find some proof of a convincing nature that would satisfy this most obdurate of doubters; as luck would have it, Fate stepped in at the eleventh hour, and discovered to his wandering eye a web-like bit of lace which Claire had repeatedly pressed to her lips, while she occupied the chair beside which it had fallen unnoticed. Daring upon it, Courtlandt held it aloft by the two corners before Sylphide's eyes.

"Take back those words!" he cried; "ah, do not turn your eyes away! Look at that stain. Her blood, her life blood! Let the sight of it dissipate your fears; she will not last long. But I conjure you—have pity upon her; let her die in peace."

She crept a step or two towards him and laid her hand upon his wrist.

"So, Lucian," she faltered humbly, "your house is closed to me? And you will not come to me? And I may not see my child?"

"No, Sylphide. You ought to know by this time that the word of a Courtlandt is inviolable; I had rather die than break it. So long as Claire shall live, I will fulfill the sacred duty that the title of husband imposes—while Claire lives, you shall remain an utter stranger to me. But when God in his mercy has called the poor sufferer home to him, then we will return to you, Leon and I, and we will never more leave you. I swear it."

"It is well," she rejoined, pressing her lips for one instant upon his hand, and then relinquishing it as one replaces a dead hand upon the pulseless breast. "It is well. I know what your pledged word means. I will wait."

She slowly gathered her dark wraps about her and prepared to depart; but, as though the place exerted an irresistible spell, she turned to one of the windows and adjusting the slats of the blind, looked out upon the sun-lit garden with the lawn beyond.

"I am somewhat more at peace with myself," she murmured. "She is really very ill, and Lucian feels more pity than love for her in her sufferings. Still it is of paramount importance that I should know everything that takes place in the house! I stand alone, forlorn; with every man's hand against me. I must have a friend at court, here on this very spot! I will know from hour to hour how fares this highway robber who has deprived me of name and love, and trampled my motherhood beneath her feet. Should she betray the slightest symptoms of improvement, I must know it before others suspect it, so that I may take her fate into my own hands. But whom shall I secure?"

The words expired in a startled whisper. A quick step smote the piazza, and a pair of eyes, set close to the blind, gleamed through the open slats into her own. Had fate sent her an accomplice? (To be continued.)

### A Price to Be Paid.

"I thought," said the shopper, "that this was a bargain; that I could get it for a song."

"Well, you can have it," replied the dealer, "if you can reach a few high notes."—Philadelphia Press.

A ton of sugar beets yields 210 pounds of refined sugar.



Bell Boy (outside of room 55)—Say, the gas is escaping in there. Countryman (inside of room 55)—No, it ain't; I locked the door.—Ex.

Mother—Johnny Jones, did you get that awful cold out skating? Son—Mother, I think I caught it washing my face yesterday morning.—Judge.

Chumpy—I don't know whether I ought to take your daughter from her father's roof. Her Father—She doesn't live on the roof.—Philadelphia Bulletin.

"I say, Broom!" "Call me by my whole name, if you please. It has a handle to it, and it was meant to be used, sir." "That's so. Well, Broom-handle, how are you?"

Curioso—Your name is Ephraim, is it? How'd your parents come to give you that name? Modestus—I don't know for certain, but I suspect it was because I was a boy.—Boston Transcript.

"Women claim that the way to get on with a man is to give him plenty of nicely cooked food." "Well," answered Sirius Barker, irritably, "why don't some of them try it?"—Washington Star.

A Great Debt: Bragg—I owe nothing to any man. Newitt—Oh, yes, you do. Bragg—No, sir! Newitt—Oh, yes. You owe an apology to every man who has to listen to you blow.—Philadelphia Press.

Improvement at the Gas Office: "Did you have any luck when you went to complain about the gas bill?" "Better luck than last month," answered Mr. Meekton; "the man didn't laugh this time."—Ex.

"Funny about Ralston wanting his former wife to get a divorce from her second husband so that they might get married again." "Not very. He's always been falling in love with other men's wives."—Ex.

Daily Guide to Flattery: If there is something on the table that the hostess knows is so badly cooked that she feels bored about it, ask for more and eat it with the greatest apparent relish.—Baltimore American.

"Have you any taste for Thackeray?" asked Mrs. Oldcastle. "No, I can't say that I have," replied her hostess; "is that anything like this paprika they're puttin' in everything now?"—Chicago Record Herald.

What he Would Rather Have Expressed Differently: Gushing Lady—Oh, but Mr. Jones, I should love to be beautiful—even if for only half an hour! Jones—Yes; but you wouldn't like the coming back again!—Punch.

Conductor—All aboard! Please get aboard quickly, Miss; the train is about to start. Young Lady—But I wish to kiss my sister good-by. Conductor—Get aboard, get aboard; I'll attend to that for you.—Yale Record.

How to Hold Actors: "It always makes me mad to talk to an actor. He pretends to listen politely, but his attention is wandering all the time. Ever notice it?" "No. I always talk to them about themselves."—Philadelphia Ledger.

Owner of Fishpond (to man who is trespassing)—Don't you see that sign. "No fishing here? Angler—Yes, and I dispute it. Why, there's good fishing here. Look at this basketful. The man must have been mad who put that board up."

Cholly—A fellow told me to-day that I didn't know enough to go in when it rained. Miss Sharp—And what did you say? Cholly—I assumed him it was quite unnecessary, doncher know, because I never go out when it rains. Philadelphia Ledger.

"It was only five years ago that I started in with our firm at five dollars a week," said Bragg, "and now I earn fifty a week without any trouble." "That's so; it's easy to earn that," replied Newitt, "but how much do you get?"—Philadelphia Press.

Ida—I don't believe Mr. Smart believes my handkerchiefs are linen. May—Why not? Ida—I told him I had my pin money wrapped in my handkerchief and lost it. He said there was a great deal of money lost in cotton these days.—Chicago News.

Fond Mother—I don't know what to do. I want to send my daughter to college, and yet I don't want to send her into the world unprotected. Wise visitor, who has observed the daughter's disposition—You mean that it would be unkind to send her out into the unprotected world!

Never say again that a newspaper writer is not a master of diplomacy. One of the fraternity was to write up the history of an old lady of 98. He was told she had never so much as learned her letters. Did he blurt it out in print? Not a bit of it. He merely stated on his finely written article that "she can read the fine print as well as she ever could."

# Ayer's

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Sometimes we may learn more from a man's errors than from his virtues.—Longfellow.

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