

The Planter's Daughter OR FATE'S REVENGE

By MRS. ALICE P. CARRISTON

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"Wayward Winifred," etc.

CHAPTER XVII.

At her wife's end for a reassuring reply, poor Claire hung her arms about the old man's neck, and pillowed her head upon his breast, while he, made unresponsive by the horror which had taken possession of him, stood cold and rigid as a statue, offering her no support.

"You must know, dear father," she began, "that I loved my husband, and I told myself that he would never love me. The thought unseated my reason until I fancied that cruel fate was pursuing me, ever crying in my ears, 'you have agreed to die, and yet you still live!' Goaded to desperation, I forgot you and mother, and I planned the fatal draught."

"And this man was so blind as to be unable to read the direful secret in your soul!" he cried unappeased. "It was his indifference that has driven you to despair! He has no heart! Had he himself poured out the poison, he could not seem more culpable in my eyes!"

"Oh, father, father!" she trembled now with such dire apprehension that she was forced to cling to him for support. Her agitation seemed to exasperate Philip Burgess the more.

"Heaven be praised," he ejaculated, "that I am neither so old nor infirm that I cannot hold a weapon! I will kill him, kill the rogue or fool, whichever he may be, who has so misused the angel whom I intrusted to his keeping!"

"Father," she said, fixing her magnetic eyes upon his face, "since I still live, since I have agreed to live, believe me, it is only because a fresh hope has found its way to my heart, a hope imparted by him."

"By him?" muttered Philip Burgess, incredulously. "What has he done that should deserve pardon at our hands?"

"During the terrible crisis of yesterday and last night he never deserted my bedside, even for a minute. He sent every one away, and watched by me alone. When I lapsed into slumber, I felt my hand moistened by his burning tears. When I awoke he was there by my side, and I asked myself whether this meant remorse. In the early gray of the morning he left me, thinking that I slept, left me with the imprint of his burning lips upon my brow, and I asked myself whether this could be love!"

She had spoken the truth, and her plaintive words carried conviction with them. The old man was touched, and the ready tears welled from their founts, and plashed upon her bowed head.

"It may be so, my darling," he murmured, "heaven grant that it is so! Come, let us go to him together and see."

As he cast his arm about her waist, and laid her head gently upon his shoulder as they entered the shadowy hall, out in the garish sunlight, unseen hands parted the hedge that fringed the lawn, and the face of Nemesis glared through livid, haggard, vengeful—the face of Sylphide Courmont!

"Alive!" she panted in dismayed surprise. "That creature lives! So all in vain has heaven removed the first obstacle which separates me from Lucian. I am free—yet she lives!"

It would have been an appalling study to have looked into her soul then, as she let the shubs snap back into place, gathered the rich draperies of her sable attire about her, and with a rapid step took her way up to the villa.

As fate would have it, she crossed the sheltered nook where Camille had taken refuge after his alarm caused by the vision of innocent Claire at the uncurtained window. At Sylphide's approach Camille sprang about, and faced her, as though she, too, were another haunting specter.

"Camille!" she said, herself surprised. "Mrs. Hastings!"

"Hush! You must not know me, must never have seen me!"

Her words were cut short by the joyous cries of little Leon, who, in hot pursuit of a sportive terrier, came bounding in among the trees. Instantly Sylphide's eyes shot fire.

"Leave me with this child," she breathed, imperatively. "Go into the avenue and wait for me. I have much of importance to say to you. Go, go quick!"

As the man only too readily obeyed the command, she knelt with outstretched arms, and accented the boy, who had abandoned his pursuit, and drawn himself up in military array before the veiled intruder.

"Leon—my son!" she cried, beseechingly, her voice softening to a yearning tenderness.

"No," he answered, proudly. "I am not your son; I am mamma's son."

"But I am your mamma, my darling."

"Oh, no, you're not! My mamma is mamma Claire, my white mamma!"

"That woman again," groaned Sylphide. "They have robbed me even of my child. But I will repay them! He shall go with me. We shall see, Lucian, whether you will not follow me then!"

She caught at the boy, who struggled to free himself.

"Leon, come to me, come!" she pleaded.

"No, no!" he screamed, in terror. "Let me go! Let me go! I do not know you!"

His frantic cries, mingled with the barking of the little dog, attracted Claire herself in haste to the spot. As she suddenly appeared, Leon broke from Sylphide's grasp, and flew to meet her, clinging in childish terror to her robe.

"Leon!" exclaimed Claire, pausing in the shadow of the trees, "what is the matter?" while Sylphide regained her feet, as her pallid lips framed the words: "At last!"

"Who are you, madam?" demanded Claire. "Where were you going with my son?"

"Your son!" hissed Sylphide, throwing back her veil, whose thick folds stifled her.

"She says she is my mamma," wailed Leon. "Tell her she is not! Oh, say so, mamma!"

Claire wavered an instant, stricken with a sudden conviction.

"His mother!" she faltered. "I know you now. Madam, you are Sylphide Courmont."

"Yes," came the defiant reply. "I am Sylphide Courmont, and his mother. But he repulses my caresses; he does not even recognize me."

"I understand your grief, madam, and I pity you."

"Indeed? I am worthy of pity, am I not? I am wretched indeed since heaven and earth have conspired to betray me. I have been robbed of my name and fortune, and of the man I loved. I have been robbed even of the child for whose sake I descended into the valley of the shadow of death."

"What brings you here, madam?" murmured Claire, terrified by her vehemence; "why do you seek to enter my home?"

"Your home!" sneered Sylphide; "are you going to summon your people to eject me? It is true that I have ventured to intrude upon your home, but what single thing have you which does not come from me? You lay dying upon a miserable pallet in New York; three months only you had to live, your father and mother were famishing; father, mother, husband, child, and life itself, I gave you all! And you dare to tell me to my face that I am in your home! Verily, madam, you are ungrateful."

Trembling with alarm, poor Claire replied:

"It is true that without your interference I should now perhaps have been in my grave; but if you have saved my life, confess that you did not intend to; if you have married me to Lucian Courmont, you chose me, as you have just admitted, because you considered me condemned to death. Now, what can I do to repay you? I am prepared for anything—but death."

"I demand nothing, wish nothing, expect nothing from you."

"Then why are you here? Oh, I dread to understand! You came expecting to find me dead. Well, your hope has proved delusive. You need remain no longer."

Those final words appeared to contain the venom of a deadly serpent for Sylphide.

"I shall not depart until I have seen Lucian," she said, firmly.

"Lucian!" gasped Claire in dismay; "you shall not see him; I do not choose that he shall see you. I am still very weak, madam, but I think I can summon the strength of a lioness to my aid in defense of my happiness! Besides, you know that he no longer loves you."

"No longer loves me!" hissed the enemy; "pray, how do you know that? How can you judge of the empire which I have exerted over him? Ah, I do not come unarmed; I bring with me the memory of three years of passionate love!"

"I tell you, you shall not see Lucian! I am his wife before the law!"

"At all events you shall give me my child!"

"No, not stand back!"

"Stay! What are you doing here?"

The few but imperative words cut short the terrific struggle of a moment, and as the two women recoiled, little Leon flew into his father's arms.

"Embrace your child, if you will," Lucian Courmont said to Sylphide, "but bear in mind that he is also my son, and he shall never leave me. Now, you need delay your departure no longer."

She returned his stern look with lances of fire.

"Have you not heard the news?" she asked, with swift intensity; "slavery has been abolished; I am free!"

"But I am not free," he answered steadily; "you remember our compact—while Claire lives we are to remain strangers. You have violated your oath. Farewell—forever!"

She faced her doom as the great oak breasts the storm; she paused an instant irresolute, then lowered her veil and turned away. Presently she stopped and looked back to find Claire nestling in her husband's arms.

"Farewell," she breathed, "but not forever. We shall meet once again, Lucian Courmont, once again—on the day of reckoning!"

(To be continued.)

Blissful Voyage.

Mrs. Noah was very happy.

"Just think," she mused, as she emptied the suds out in the sea, "we have two of everything, even fatigues, and no neighbors to borrow them."

Hardly Fair Exchange.

"Yes, he went up to Dora's to present his suit."

"What did he get?"

"A mitten from Dora and a boot from her father."

HOSPITAL PETS.

Of army, navy and other semipublic pets much that is entertaining has been written. Hospital pets are not so well known, but it is easy to imagine the pleasure they give to a ward full of little patients, and no one could doubt the statement of a nurse, in the Hospital, that they brighten many a weary hour of convalescence and materially help toward a cure.

The first pet of which the nurse tells is Jumbo, a wise old tortoise, which lived, moved and had his happy being in a children's ward in a New York hospital. His curious wanderings about the ward, his clumsy gait, his air of antiquity and wisdom caused many a child to forget pain; and to have Jumbo on the bed was the highest reward the staff nurse could promise to a little patient for good behavior during the surgeon's visit.

"Nurse Judy" was a fox-terrier which for fifteen years, was a close and lovingly compassionate friend to every little inmate of a children's ward in a London hospital. None knew better than Nurse Judy that a dog that lives in a hospital must not bark, for there were little sick ones whose sleep must be disturbed. Barking was the only canine privilege denied her, and she was always cheerful under this ordeal of silence, and more than most of her kind, she learned to express her joy by wagging her stumpy tail.

"Gypsy," another terrier, has taken Nurse Judy's place, and is already so wise a probationer that some of the nurses say they "could almost trust her to take a temperature!" Gypsy plays ball with the convalescents, and always has a Santa Claus pocket of her own at Christmas. The only liberty she will not tolerate from the children is the attempt to "commandeer" any of her own special property from the top drawer, where it is kept.

A monkey named Giovanni was once a ward pet in a little hospital in Leghorn, Italy. Originally he had belonged to an Italian, whose dying wish was that his monkey might stay with him to the last. The good Sisters who acted as nurses did not quite know what to do with the awkward legacy bequeathed them by the friendless sick man, but Giovanni's big eyes said as plainly as possible, "Don't send me out to face a friendless world! Isn't it enough for a monkey to lose his loving master without losing the home he has found here?"

His mute simian eloquence prevailed. Giovanni was adopted, and became known as the "Count." The Sisters grew very fond of him. He amused the children, and at length became as much a fixture as one of the pillars of the hospital gate.

Two chameleons lived and died in a children's ward in a London hospital. They did not live long,—chameleons in captivity never do,—but they were a great source of interest and wonder while they lived, and their changing color under the children's very eyes was a constant mystery and delight. A wise little boy patient once informed the ward that it was "only conjuring, like that chap did at our school treat." But it was never quite clear to the others whether the conjuring was done by the chameleons or was a trick of the nurse who owned them.

SUPERSTITIONS OF THE STAGE.

Opals Tempt Fate, but Emeralds Always Lucky.

"About the pet superstitions of individuals in the profession there is almost no end," says Clara Morris. "One man has a horror of barrels, especially empty ones, and if he sees a wagon load of them in the street he is confident of coming misfortune. But he has a counter-balancing comfort in the possession of a caul, which he always carries with him, believing that it shields him from violent death. The late John McCullough always went to the theater by the same road he took the first time. If he got as far as the door of the theater and suddenly remembered that he had been tempted out of the accustomed way, he would go clear back to his hotel and take a fresh start and always follow the accustomed road. I remember when Sarah Bernhardt was here for the first time she manifested a positive dread and horror of the color yellow, and, indeed, that is shared, to some extent at least, by a good many people. A very prominent actress of our day has an abiding faith that disaster is certain if ever the curtain, having started on its ascent, is allowed to return to the floor instead of going up, and will insist, whether all is ready to ring up or not, that once moved it shall rise, even if the empty stage has to wait. Emeralds are regarded as very lucky jewels, but very few professionals will tempt fate by wearing that most beautiful and most unlucky of stones, the opal. I'm not at all superstitious myself, yet I'd regard that man an enemy of mine who would offer to give me an opal."—Woman's Home Companion.

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For Thick Hair

Dr. J. C. Ayer & Co., Lowell, Mass.

Difficult Horseback Feat.

There are no better horsemen in the world than the cavalry officers of the Italian army, yet even among them there are very few who could perform the feat recently achieved by one of them.

To run an ordinary foot race is easy enough, but to run at full speed for several hundred yards holding in one hand a spoon on which rests an egg and to reach the goal without dropping the egg is a feat which must be practiced carefully a long time before it can be performed successfully, and as a result there are not many who can be sure of accomplishing it whenever they try. Great, therefore, was the surprise when an Italian officer mounted on horseback performed this difficult feat. Moreover, he selected a course in which there were two or three high fences, and these he cleared at full gallop without losing the egg.

A Sure Protection.

Barton, N. Dak., May 9.—Many cases are being published of how diseases have been cured and lives saved by Dodd's Kidney Pills, but there is a family in this place who use this remedy as a protection against the coming on of diseases and with excellent results.

Mr. W. A. Moffet says: "We have no very serious illness or complaint for we always use Dodd's Kidney Pills the very moment we feel the least symptom of sickness and they soon put us right. If we have a touch of lame back or think the kidneys are not right, we take a few Dodd's Kidney Pills and the symptoms are soon all gone."

"My brother had diabetes and the doctor told him he could not live until spring. I got some Dodd's Kidney Pills for him and although that was several years ago, he has lived through all the winters and springs since and is still living. Dodd's Kidney Pills are a wonderful medicine."

Not Making a Good Start.

In the New Zealand Medical Journal appears this story: On walking to the scaffold in solemn procession a criminal once called to the governor of the prison: "Just oblige me, gov-nor, by telling me the day o' the week." "Monday," answered the surprised governor. "Monday," exclaimed the prisoner in disgusted tones. "Well, this 'ere's a fine way of beginning a week, ain't it?" And he marched on with dissatisfaction imprinted on every line of his face.

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No Room. Oldwed—Do you and your wife quarrel? Newwed—No, we live in a flat and there is no room for argument.—Manitoba Free Press.

Right in His Line. Mother—I don't know what in the world to do with my son. He is a born rover. Neighbor—Why not make a Methodist minister of him?

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The Czar a Tyrant. Mrs. Lakeside—The atrocities of Russian tyranny are perfectly awful. Friend—What have you learned? Mrs. Lakeside—I saw in a paper this morning that in Russia no one is permitted to marry more than five times.