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BY S. J. JESSAMINE DICKSON AND MRS. M. F. DAVIS.

CHAPTER V.

A THREAT.

Being herself most strange of mind, And of disposition most dark, She nothing saw in those milk eyes; And nothing saw in that pure face To claim the love of her dark heart."

"I'll bet she'll make you see heart- o' dem sights 'fore long, aunt Dinah," said the chamber maid, as she entered the cook's quarters early on the morning following the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Marvins.

"Bet she do!" exclaimed the negress with a contemptuous movement of the head.

"Bet so to," returned Patty, as her mouth extended into a broad smile. "Has you seed her yit?"

"No, an' I don't want ter. What's she like?"

"What do you ax de question fur if you don't want ter see her?"

"Don't make a fool out'n yourself, Patty Marvins!"

"No, I won't, said Patty good humoredly, an' I'll tell you nigh as I kin what she's like. She ain't as tall as our Miss Violet wus--"

"Bless her sweet heart!" interjected aunt Dinah.

"Bless whose sweet heart?"

"Why our poor, dear Mis Violet's in course."

"Well, 'bout Miss Violet, she ain't as tall as our Miss Violet wus, nor her mother. Fact is, our Miss Violet's mos' most dark as our Fanny--de one dey call white Fanny. She got big black eyes, de strangest lookin' eyes you ever saw. It makes me creep all over to look at 'em. Den she's got no color in her face like Mis Violet."

"She's gone whar de wary course from troublin', an' de wicked be at rest," interrupted the cook.

"Who's gone thar?"

"Miss Violet."

"Thought of you meant tother un, coz I let her coz I let her dressin' her young un, an' a mean lookin' thing it is too. Dar she goes now!" cried Patty, breaking off and darting to the door, closely followed by aunt Dinah. Looking in the direction indicated, the cook saw her standing in front of a little cabin shaking hands with a very old negro man. Leaning on his arm was the new mistress of Sunny-side.

"'s gwine ter speak ter him!" aunt Dinah said, as he turned from the cabin and walked toward the house.

"Heard her sayin' her long apron and grey turban, she stepped out to meet him."

"Why how are you, aunt Dinah?" he said, as he gave her his hand with a clumsy smile.

"'s all right, Lor' bless you, sah!"

"Very well indeed," then turning to the silent figure at his side, he added, "aunt Dinah, this is my wife, and henceforth the mistress of Sunny-side."

Aunt Dinah made a low courtesy, but she turned her back towards him, and she muttered:

"Look like a serpent, she do! Poor, dear Miss Violet! Master Raadall's done fergot her. Strange creatures dese men is--it's out'n sight out'n mind wid most o' 'em."

"And does Sunny-side please you, little wife?" Mr. Marvins said, as he led her to the morning parlor.

"Please me! It is Paradise, Raadall! It is far too good for me," she returned, dropping her head upon his bosom.

"Nothing is too good for my wife," he said, kissing the red lips so near his own.

The portrait of the dead Violet, over the marble mantle, looked down upon the scene, and as Mr. Marvins lifted his head and glanced at it, the gentle eyes seemed full of reproach, and he fancied that the sensitive mouth had a grieved expression.

In a moment he grew silent and grave, and a shadow fell upon his brow. Mrs. Marvins had followed his glance, and she was not slow to observe the change. In a moment her heart was consumed with jealousy, and she walked away to conceal the expression of her face. A livid pallor had overspread it, and her eyes, now no longer veiled, flashed and gleamed with a baleful fire, while the cruel lips were set in a straight, curved line over the white, clenched teeth. No words in all the human vocabulary, save incarnate demon, could describe her appearance at that moment.

"'Though dead she still has his heart," she muttered.

"Hester, love!" called Mr. Marvins from the opposite window. Instantly the fierce eyes dropped, the dark face assumed its usual expression, and she glided to his side saying:

"What is it Raadall?"

"Look!" he answered, pointing through the open window.

She glanced in the direction indicated, and saw the two children, Violet and Claudine, coming toward the house, hand clasped in hand. They were followed by a laughing troop of juvenile negroes, headed by the little mulatto, Bera. One could not help observing the difference between the two children as they came bounding up the walk. The face of one was but a reproduction of the woman's at the window, while that of the other was fair and sweet as a morning sunbeam. Mrs. Marvins saw it, and frowned; Mr. Marvins saw it, and smiled.

"They seem to be getting on friendly terms," he said, as the band disappeared from view. "Violet is so sunny no one can long resist her."

"I can," she soliloquized, "and Claudine will, in time."

At that moment the children entered the room. Claudine instantly dropped Violet's hand and approached her mother, who bent down to kiss her.

"Will you please kiss me, mamma?"

"Very timidly was the question put, and there was a world of pleading in the little face, but a hard, bitter hatred for the child had come into the woman's heart, and she saw not the

meekness of the dusky eyes, nor the tender beauty of the innocent face.

"Will you please kiss me, mamma?"

was again repeated, in a sweet voice, and then fearing that the man at her side might suspect the evil passions warring in her heart, she bent and touched her lips to the rosy mouth of his child. In an instant Violet's white arms were around her neck, and she was pleading:

"Will you love me, mamma, like you do sister Claudine?"

"Stop Violet! You are crushing my collar," she said, and then added in a softer tone:

"Certainly I will love you if you will be good and not rumple my laces as you did just now."

Dispite the changed tone to one of assumed playfulness, Violet's sensitive heart had felt the coldness in her manner. So had Mr. Marvins, but he excused her by telling himself:

"I can not expect her to love Violet as she does Claudine. It will end all right, however, for she can not remain in the same house with my sunbeam without loving her."

Then observing a tear trembling on the child's dark lashes, he took her in his arms, saying:

"What have you been doing this morning, dear?"

"Showing Claudine, Sunnyside, and the black babies. O papa!"

The sentence was cut short by the ringing of the breakfast bell.

As the weeks passed, Violet and Claudine, though as different in disposition as they were in face, grew to be the best of friends. Mrs. Marvins changed her tactics. The iciness of her manner toward the gentle Violet was suddenly reversed and became all warmth and affection. Even the blacks began to fear that they had misjudged her. Mr. Marvins smiled and said to himself:

"I knew she could not long resist my darling."

Mrs. Marvins had been two months at Sunnyside, when late one evening as she was walking along through the grounds, she was startled by a whirring noise in the air, and then something dropped at her feet. Mechanically, she stooped and took it up, but in a moment her limbs were shaking as from cold, her eyes were wide with terror, and a white, sickly pallor had come over her face.

It was a small, perfectly shaped hand of steel holding a serpent in its grasp. A paper was neatly folded and wrapped about it.

"Merciful heavens!" sprang from her bloodless lips as the cold device fell from the paper into her hand, and she uttered a cry that rang through the house. "I thought I had escaped him. My God! what shall I do?"

A moment she stood pallid and breathless, then her eyes fell upon the note which had been folded about the hand, and she read:

"MY DEAR MAMMA,

Meet me to-night at ten o'clock, under the tree where you now stand. Refuse me the interview I ask, and before the setting of tomorrow's sun, you will find before your husband a convicted criminal. Remember that you are in the grasp of a hand of steel. M. M."

With a hurried glance about her, she gathered up her silken skirts, and darted away through the darkness in her frantic haste running into the arms of Mr. Marvins, who had just come out in quest of her.

CHAPTER VI.

UNDER THE TREE.

Dark and unearthly is the scowl That glares beneath his dusky cowl. The flash of that gliding eye behind Reveals too much of times gone by; Though varying indistinct his hue, Off will his glance the gaze he send. For in it flits that nameless speck, Which speaks, itself unspeakable, A spirit yet unquelled and high, That claims and keeps ascendancy; And like the bird whose pinions quake, But can not fly the gazing snake; Will others quail before his stare, Nor scarce the glance they can not break. --Byron.

For several moments Mrs. Marvins lay panting upon her husband's bosom, then she raised herself, saying with a low, hysterical laugh:

"Raadall how you frightened me!"

"And you have frightened me. Where have you been, dear?"

"I have been walking," she replied, still trembling violently.

Misunderstanding the cause of her agitation, he led her to a seat saying:

"I am sorry that I frightened you, dear. I had started in pursuit of you when you kindly saved me the trouble of a walk by running right into my arms."

She laughed a low, short laugh as she replied in a tone of assumed playfulness:

"I am discovering a new characteristic about you, sir--that of inertia. Either you always were inactive, or are just beginning to be so. Here you sit looking me in the face and talking about the trouble of a short walk! For shame, sir!"

She made a bewitching picture just then with the white moonlight falling in the dark bands of her hair, and her strangely fascinating features--so bewitching indeed, that the man at her side caught her to his bosom and laid a warm kiss on her red lips.

"Should any one see us they would say we were two silly lovers," she said.

"Are we not lovers?" he asked, "why should we not be lovers after marriage as well as before? If affection only budges during the days of courtship, and blossoms in a full-blown flower after the nuptial rites, the human family would be far happier, but it too often happens that the bud blooms before marriage and afterward nothing is left except the withered leaves."

"It has not been so with us, Raadall," she said, in her soft, purring voice.

"And will never be, my dear one."

"I am not worthy all the deep, true love of your grand and noble heart, Raadall," she said, and for one time in her life she spoke the truth.

"It is I, who am not worthy, Hester, but if the devotion of a life time

can make you happy, you shall be so."

"I am happy, far happier than I ever was before. Mine has been no sunny life, Raadall, and many times in the past have I wished that I had died in my infancy," she replied, holding her face on his bosom, while he, fully believing in her truth and sincerity drew her close to his heart, saying:

"My dear wife, no sorrow that I can ward off, shall approach you now."

Had he known all the dark and evil thoughts that were passing through her mind at that moment he would have recoiled from her touch, and put her from him with just horror and contempt, turning his back on her forever.

O woman! how you can deceive even the wisest and best, when you cloak yourself in the garb of innocence, and descend to falsehoods and deception!

A long silence fell upon the two, as they sat in the white moonlight under the leafy boughs of the great trees. Both seemed lost in thought. Mrs. Marvins was the first to speak:

"The dew is falling and the night air is so cool, with a grave, tender sadness in its voice, adding a moment later, "Come, let us go in, I have some letters to write to-night, that will keep me up until eleven o'clock."

"Eleven o'clock!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, but you need not sit up for me."

He paused at her parlor door, kissed her, and passed on to the library.

Left to herself, Mrs. Marvins sank upon a chair, and burying her face in her hands, rocked herself to and fro. Suddenly springing up like an excited animal, she unlocked the door rapidly, grinding her white teeth and muttering:

"Yes--yes, I must see him! I must see him, and send him away from here--would I could house him into eternity!"

Startled, harsh laughter accompanied the words and her eyes flashed and glared with an evil light, while the hands were so tightly clenched that the sharp, pink nails were driven into the tender flesh.

"Yes," she continued, "I would watch with infinite joy his life blood ebb and flow, for then I would be safe--safe!"

She paused abruptly in her walk and bent her slender neck forward, strangely reminding one of a serpent when about to bury its deadly fangs into the flesh of its victim. Although her lips, now colorless as were her cheeks, her breath came and went in short quick gasps, while if possible, her eyes grew darker and more lustrous. For full ten minutes she remained in this position, motionless as a marble statue, then with a heavy, long-drawn breath, she exclaimed with the triumphant exclamation:

"Aha! I have it! I will try it!"

She glided from the parlor, and a little later knocked at the house-keeper's door.

"Come!" said a voice from within.

Softly she pushed the door open, entered, closed and locked it behind her. Mrs. Waldron was engaged with some needle-work, but it dropped from her hands and she arose with a startled air when she saw who the intruder was, and caught the expression of her white, set face.

"What's that?" she cried, what has happened?"

"Enough! Look at this, if you please," and drawing the note and odd device from her pocket she threw them into the house-keeper's lap.

A sharp cry of terror burst from Mrs. Waldron at sight of the hand and the hideous serpent.

"Do not alarm the household, Mrs. Waldron," said the other, as her thin red lips reathed themselves into a cynical smile.

"Without heeding the words, the housekeeper looked up, saying hoarsely:

"How came you by this accursed thing?"

"I fell at my feet as I was walking through the grounds, near dusk. Read the note accompany it."

"I have it," said Mrs. Waldron unfolding the crumpled paper, and as she read, a dead-white pallor crept over her face, her lips grew purple, and her eyes glared wildly.

"What will you do?" she faltered, looking up in the white face of the woman at her side.

"Meet him of course."

"And if you should be discovered?"

"I have the risk to run."

"Where is your husband?"

"He will be in the library writing letters until eleven o'clock."

"Then it will never do to meet this man."

"I will never do to meet him. If I ignore him, exposure is inevitable."

"Then! Ah, heavens! what can be done?"

"Only one thing--face the music, and have done with it."

"But if you should be discovered, we are lost--worse than lost! Waiter, rather than spoke the woman."

"We are lost in either case," returned the other, "for if I refuse the interview he seeks, you are well enough acquainted with him to know what will follow."

"Be quiet and let me think," said Mrs. Waldron, and burying her face in her hands, she sat motionless for several minutes.

"I have it! I will manage it now!" she said, rising abruptly.

The other watched her curiously, as she crossed the floor and drew

from a drawer a small wine flask half the contents of which she emptied into a glass, then producing a vial, containing a colorless liquid, she poured it into the wine and brought it to Mrs. Marvins, saying:

"Induce your husband to drink this, and so far as discovery is concerned, you will be safe for to-night."

"Is it deadly?" she asked, looking the woman fixedly in the eyes.

"No. It is only a narcotic. If you give it now, at ten o'clock he will be sleeping."

"You are sure there is nothing wrong about it?"

"I would sooner put hand to my own life, than Raadall Marvins's she said emphatically.

"I believe you," she answered, and with noiseless tread, glided away.

Entering the library, she found Mr. Marvins busily engaged with his pen. As you go, my pen remain up so late, Raadall, I thought I would bring you a glass of wine before retiring, and she placed it before him.

"Thank you, dear. What a thoughtful little wife!" he said, as he drained off the wine.

"Good night, Raadall."

"Good night, dear," he answered back, as she glided away.

Just as the clock struck ten, the library door was again softly opened, and Mrs. Marvins looked in, a smile of satisfaction lighting up her features when she saw her husband sitting back in his easy chair, sleeping profoundly. A little later, she was stealing rapidly through the grounds. As she neared a large tree which stood in a remote spot, a man came out from the shadows to meet her.

"Aha!" he exclaimed, you thought to escape me, my prettiest bird, but I have found you at last!"

At that moment the moon sailed out from under a cloud, revealing a tall, dark man enveloped in a long, black cloak, although it was a summer night. His face was one calculated to make any honest person shudder. There was a sneering devil in the smile upon his bloodless lips, while the eyes, large, black and burning looked out from under the shaggy brows like two glittering stiletos.

"I had the pleasure of witnessing your marriage," he went on sneeringly, "then I lost sight of you, and have had considerable trouble finding you again. I must say, my dear, you have made a pretty high leap this time, casting a rapid glance over the broad acres that lay off their smiling beauty under the shimmering light of the moon."

"I am not here to discuss my marriage. You will confer a favor by naming your business, and relieving me of your presence as early as possible," she said, haughtily.

"The man's eyes flashed, but he only answered:

"You know my business well enough, Claudine."

He did not finish the sentence, for she sprang toward him, and the next instant a bright steel blade glittered in the moonlight, and would have sheathed in his heart, had he not caught the hand that aimed the blow.

"Ah!" he breathed, "you would dip your hand in my blood?"

She looked at him a moment with a baffled light in her luminous eyes, she hesitated between her set teeth.

"Yes! I would not hesitate a moment, Mark Merrick, to take your wicked life, if I could!"

"That if I could is a good addenda, madam, you have the will but not the power. I could easily snuff the breath of your existence, but you have that of which I am greatly in need just at this time--money--therefore I suffer you to live."

"You are mistaken, it is all my husband's."

"It makes no difference, I am compelled to have money to-night."

"I have none to give you."