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IT FLOATS



BIG TREMAINE

By MARIE VAN VORST

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CHAPTER IV.—(Continued)

HE WATCHED her hopefully, eagerly. This was the first time in his life that he had laid his plans before a woman. Had Mrs. Tremaine realized this, she might have appreciated the moment more keenly. He bent forward in his chair and continued:

"I don't do this for myself. I've more than I need, more than I can use. I don't do it for Leavitt—or even for the pleasure of the game. I came back from Africa to redeem this property for you. I want it to be your home."

His voice and manner were compelling, he was magnetizing her in spite of herself. But at his last sentence she started, put up her slender hand in defense, and exclaimed in a low tone:

"Oh, no, no! I cannot accept!"

Manlike, he took her words as final, slightly raised his eyebrows, and then said:

"I shall purchase the property for

honey. Dey sure do sing pretty music, Marse John."

Tremaine pushed her gently toward the door.

"I couldn't bear it tonight, Mammy. Send them away."

She went, disappointed, but at the door turned to ask him whimsically:

"Whar's de bag of gole, honey? You allus lowed you'd bring me back a bag of gole. When you was a little feller, you ust to come and say: 'Gimme a cooky, Mammy, an' I'll fotch you back a bag of gole from treasure ilan.'"

"I've kept my word."

When she had gone, he took from the table a portfolio, which he had noticed the day before, and wondered if his mother had left it there purposely. It contained a collection of photographs of David Tremaine. The last one showed the young judge dressed in an English wig and gown. John lifted it and mused upon it in the familiar room, where the brothers had often met as enemies, and where

"THE story, 'Big Tremaine', now being published in your paper is fine. The only objection I have is that it does not come often enough. I want it all at once. I surely think it fine and so does Grandma."

This is the way Miss Ruth Johnson feels about "Big Tremaine". She is just one of the many thousands now enjoying it. You will feel as they do if you are reading it. If you haven't started it yet, do so now. Look up the back issues. If you can't find them let the following review lead you into the events of this chapter:

Fifteen years before the story opens, young John Tremaine, a hot-headed, impetuous youth, was sent to Richmond to cash a check for \$10,000. He sends a letter of farewell to his mother and is heard of no more. His mother and brother make good his shortage with the bank, and through their influence only the family lawyer and the president of the bank know of his disgrace. Bad times come to Riverside, the Tremaine home, and just as it is about to be sold at auction, John Tremaine unexpectedly returns. Coldness from his mother and frigid politeness from his former friends greet him and his plans for restoring his home and developing its resources.

myself then." He got up and standing beside her said earnestly, his hand outstretched: "Stay in Virginia; make your home here!"

He saw her shrink as she rose; she wanted to escape from this bewilderment, and as she started toward the door, her control nearly gone, she murmured:

"I'm going to Julia—I'm going to David's wife and his children."

She passed John. He shrugged his shoulders and his face darkened.

"As you like." He opened the door for her, and as she went out he exclaimed in spite of himself: "You speak of indebtedness. I should think you would prefer to be at home in your own house rather than dependent on your daughter-in-law."

He found himself alone in the living room. Not even on the South African plains had he felt more homeless and cynical than tonight. What a fool he had been to let the attraction of home beckon him. Why should he stay an hour under a roof where he was unwelcome and despised? Sitting there before his mother, he had hoped for a moment that, despite all obstacles, he might live down his reputation in Virginia and at last create for himself a home.

Mammy came in.

"Scuse me, Marse John, honey, you ain't cryin'?"

He lifted up his head and smiled at her.

"Not quite crying, Mammy."

"De boys am hyar, an' dey 'lows dey's gwine to serenade yo'."

"Not tonight, Mammy; send them away."

"Dey'll be dreffle disappointed,

now they never could meet again.

CHAPTER V

THE deeds of Riverside were finally signed, and the property made over to Tremaine, who became a landowner in Virginia. His mother had insisted that he should take the title to the property, and it was bitter to find her unwilling to accept anything from him. He had come home early in June and spent the first days riding about the country examining his land and planning improvements. He had always believed that the district contained coal, and after securing the option on a large tract adjoining Blythe Mountain he sent for experts to examine the land and to make borings. He had come back like a pioneer to conquer a new country, and he was backed by unlimited resources and an indomitable will.

He was master of the place, and since the night when his mother had pointblank refused to create a home for him he never referred to the subject. He took up the reins of management and set his face toward his task. He realized that in a measure his presence was a trial to his mother, although he was the nearest being to her in the world he was as well the greatest stranger. With a delicacy of which a woman might have been proud, he tried to understand her prejudices, and he carefully avoided those subjects which might offend her.

Impersonal, possessed of wide experience and—as day by day she acknowledged—much wisdom, he began to interest her, to absorb her in spite of herself. She found it hard to believe that she was the mother