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A Dark Shadow;

Or, A Coming Vengeance

CHAPTER XIX.—(Continued).

But we are the slaves of circumstance; and presently he got interested—well, scarcely interested in the full sense of the word—but interested enough to concentrate his attention on the speech, and note the weak points in the speaker's armor. He had not intended to address the House, but he caught the Speaker's eye, and rose. His rising was greeted with cheers, and he started.

Clive spoke at first slowly, almost languidly; but presently he woke up, his voice grew louder, quicker, he made point after point, and tore the former speaker's speech to rags and tatters. The Opposition were in ecstacies of delight, the House rang with their cheers; and when Clive had finished and sat down, a shout of admiration and triumph broke from them. Mr. Devereux rose to reply—this again was flattering—but though the Leader of the House smilingly strove to stultify Clive's points, he succeeded only partially, and the success remained with Clive.

He got up immediately after Mr. Devereux's speech, and left the House. He knew that he had, as of old, made his mark, but the knowledge brought him no gratification. He strolled into Palace Yard, and looked about him aimlessly, after the manner of a man who has nothing to do, nowhere to go. Lord Chesterleigh came out, and laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"Splendid, my dear fellow, splendid!" he exclaimed. "That speech of yours routed them completely. If they pass the Bill at all, they will do so by only a narrow majority. Where are you going? Come home with me; I've heaps to talk about."

Clive thought, "As well there as anywhere else," and got into the carriage. All the way to Grosvenor Square, Chesterleigh talked politics, and expatiated on the prospects of their party; and Clive listened with his new indifference and listlessness again creeping over him; for now that he had made his speech, the reaction was setting in, the conviction that there was nothing worth living for returned.

"Edith is in her room, I suppose," said Lord Chesterleigh as he looked into the empty drawing-room. "We'll go up there. She will be glad to see you."

They went up the stairs to Lady Edith's room. She was sitting on a couch with a book in her hand; and she replied listlessly enough to her father; but as she saw Clive her manner changed, the book dropped from her hand, and she rose, her face flushing.

"Oh, you are back, Mr. Harvey!" she said, as she gave him her hand. "We thought you had disappeared for ever. Come and sit down and tell me about your wanderings."

Clive seated himself beside her, and looked at her. He could not be ignorant of the fact that she was glad to see him. He had been travelling for months, alone, solitary, roughing it as men like to rough it now and then—for a change. The beautiful room, with its atmosphere of luxury, wealth, refinement, had its effect upon him. He noted—how could he avoid doing so?—the coming and going of the color in her face, the sudden warmth in her eyes; and her evident pleasure in his presence moved him more than his reception by the House had done. Lord Chesterleigh wandered about the room, addressing a disjointed word or two to one or both of them, then went out, leaving them alone.

"Now you must tell me all your adventures," said Lady Edith. "I was going to say that we have missed you; but that would make you vain. We thought you were never coming back. Where have you been?"

Clive told her of some of the places he had visited; her eyes, while he was speaking, dwelling upon him as if she were absorbed in his narrative. Every now and then she put in a word which revealed her interest in the smallest particulars, and led him on to further detail. Presently, after a pause, she said:

"Oh, I wanted to tell you about your fiddler protege—that quaint little man, you know, for whom we got pupils. When they went out of town they gave him the money you arranged for to keep him going until their return; and he seemed very grateful, so they said; but, strangely enough, they had a letter from him a few days afterwards, returning the money and throwing up the lessons. I forget what excuse he made. He had gone into the country, I think; at any rate, we have heard no more of him." Clive's face grew hard; but he was standing by the window, and she did not notice it. "I suppose he got an engagement somewhere, something better than teaching," she remarked.

"Probably," assented Clive, in a tone that closed the subject.

While he had been with Lady Edith, if he had not forgotten Mina, the keenness of his loss was for the moment blunted by the proximity, the friendliness, the evident sympathy of this beautiful girl; but this reference to Elisha woke the old pain which was always so ready to start gnawing at his heart. Mina's face rose before him, he could hear her voice; Lady Edith ceased to interest him, and he knew that he was eager to get away, to be alone.

"I hope we shall see something of you now that you have come back," she said, as he took up his hat. "You will want to talk to father now that great things are once more looming ahead of us; and you could talk to him quietly here; besides, I shall feel as if I had some share in the big business, and as if I were assisting in the important occupation of Cabinet-making. Of course, you will be in it?" she said, with a nod and an entrancing smile.

"Oh, I dare say not," said Clive. "There are too many men to provide for, and most of them, if not all, have stronger claims than I have."

"I don't think so," she declared; "and I am sure father doesn't. But I must not intrude on the sancta sanctorum of politics. You know I wish you well."

She raised her beautiful eyes to his, and a faint blush stole over her face. Clive held her hand for a moment, then went out. On his way down the stairs he met Sara coming up. She stood aside to let him pass, and salaamed in Oriental fashion; and, for the first time, smiled graciously at him, her lips drawn back, her dark eyes flashing with a strange mixture of friendliness and defiance.

Clive, rather surprised by the pleasantness of her manner, nodded and went on. As he reached the hall he saw that the carriage was waiting at the door. Lord Chesterleigh heard him, and, coming out of the library, drew him into the room. They talked—politics, of course—for nearly half an hour; and at the end Clive accepted an invitation to dinner at an early date. He was going out of the house when Lady Edith and Sara, dressed for their drive, came down the stairs. Clive put them in the carriage, and stood for a minute or two talking to Lady Edith.

While he was doing so a woman crossed the road from the other side of the square, and, as if attracted by the sight of the carriage, stopped short; then she walked along by the railings, her eyes fixed on Lady Edith. Clive's attention was attracted by the woman's gaze, and he looked at her, a vague remembrance faintly stirring within his mind. He had seen her before—where? The carriage drove away, and Clive suddenly recollected: it was the woman he had seen threatening Lord Chesterleigh at the gate of Palace Yard. Moved by a sudden impulse, he went over to her, and, raising his hat, inquired:

"Are you looking for any one?"

She swung round on him with a distinctly foreign gesture, and her dark eyes swept him up and down. Clive saw that she had changed a great deal since he had last seen her; her face was thinner, and her eyes more sunken, her hair greyer.

"Who are you?" she demanded at last, with an accent as foreign as her gesture. "I don't know you."

Clive's sudden impulse had somewhat evaporated by this time; but he felt curious; he was, naturally, not a little impressed by the fact that he should come across the woman again, glaring at Lady Edith as she had glared at Lord Chesterleigh. He knew that he ought to apologize and go away; but he felt strangely reluctant to do so.

"No; we do not know each other," he said; "and yet we have met before."

"I do not remember," she said stiffly. "You have the advantage of me."

"Let me recall the occasion, madam," said Clive. "I met you outside Palace Yard one night when Lord Chesterleigh's carriage was passing."

Her face flamed, and she eyed him fiercely; but shook her head.

"I do not know you. You have no right to stop me. This is a free country; this is a public street. I can look at whom I please."

"Quite so," assented Clive, as quietly as before; "but there are so many ways of looking; and it seemed to me that you were desirous of speaking to the young lady from whom I have just parted. Do you know her? She is Lady Edith, Lord Chesterleigh's daughter."

"I know," she said swiftly; then she tossed her head scornfully and laughed; and it was so unpleasant a laugh, so full of scorn and contempt, that Clive eyed the woman in astonishment.

"You do not regard the lady with friendly feelings?" he said interrogatively. "Have you any cause of complaint against her?"

"Her? No: I've nothing against her. She is innocent enough, I dare say; but that man, her father—— Do you think a time of reckoning will ever come? Do you think that the cry of the injured will never be heard, that a great wrong will always go unpunished? No! A time will come when the wronged will be righted, when the mighty will be pulled down from their seat and hurled into the gutter, a time when the mask will be torn from the face of the hypocrite." She raised her clenched hand on high and struck her bosom, glaring wildly at the Chesterleigh's house. "I am waiting, waiting for the hour to strike."

Clive was, of course, much relieved by this burst of melodrama; for it now seemed to him quite evident that the woman was mad, a monomaniac possessed by the delusion, not uncommon, that she had suffered some great wrong at the hand of some one. That she had pitched upon Lord Chesterleigh was a mere accident. He pitied the poor woman, and wondered whether he could do anything for her. On both occasions he had seen her she had been alone: had she no one to look after her?

"I am sorry you are in such trouble," he said. "Is there anything I can do to help you?"

"I want no help," she replied scornfully. "I can stand alone. I can do what I have to do alone—when the time comes. I do not invite assistance from strangers; and I do not accept it when it is offered. You are a friend of the great Lord Chesterleigh's? Tell him—but no; I will tell him when the hour strikes."

With a passionate gesture she dragged her veil over her face and turned away.

Clive looked after her pityingly, and had half a mind to follow. But what could he do with a woman possessed by an hallucination?

CHAPTER XX.

Mina was ill for some days after her fainting fit; and the doctor declared that he would not answer for the consequences if she were not taken away into the country as soon as she was strong enough to travel. He said that she had been overworking herself, that she had something on her mind, and that a change was absolutely necessary.

Tibby knew what was on Mina's mind; but she did not enlighten Elisha, and ascribed the trouble to "too much practisin' and too many lessons." No one could have been more devoted than Tibby was to Mina; but she said nothing of the telegram and Clive's returned letter, and, indeed, ignored his existence. That Mina should be fascinated by this good-looking "swell" was to Tibby natural enough; but it seemed equally natural to her that Mina, if she saw and heard nothing more of him, would recover from her infatuation, forget him, and become the same Mina as of old.

As soon as Mina was strong enough she went to the seaside; but they did not go to Margate or Southend; for at the railway office Elisha had heard of a new watering-place which appeared to hold out all the attractions of the older ones, and to possess the advantage of being much cheaper. So they went down to Lea-on-Sands, as the new place was called. It was new, indeed, painfully new; but the sands were there right enough, and the rows of houses, which the landlord-proprietor, with the assistance of a speculating builder, had put up, looked straight over them. There was also a parade, with a bandstand and a Kursaal—which the inhabitants and most of the visitors to Lea-on-Sands pronounced, with unconscious irony, "Curse all."

The place was fairly full, and Elisha, who promenaded the parade and the infantile pier with a keen enjoyment and pride, derived much satisfaction from the fact that he was actually taking a holiday by the sea. But Mina did not appear to recover very quickly, and Tibby displayed—in Mina's absence—some anxiety about her.

"We shan't be able to go back to London for some time," she said. "She don't get much stronger."

Elisha shook his head gravely. "No," he said. "I laughed at what the doctor said about her having something on her mind; but I begin to believe that he was right. She seems to me to be frettin' about something; though what she could 'ave to fret about puzzles me."

Tibby was silent for a moment, then she said:

"I'll tell you, father, if you'll promise not to let out that I've done so. It's that Mr. Clive."

Elisha started, and looked at her incredulously and somewhat indignantly.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"What I say. I see it a long time ago, almost the first day he came to the Rents. He was fair struck with Mina; and she—well, it's only to be expected that she should be took with him. Oh, it weren't fancy on my part; I have proof—but never mind that. You take my word, there was something atween 'em; that's why I was so sharp with 'im and didn't want no pianners, or anything of the kind. For why? There couldn't be any good in it. He's a swell; and it isn't to be supposed that 'e'd marry a girl so far below 'im as one of us. Now, father, keep your 'air on, an' don't swell yourself out like a turkey cock. You leave 'er to me. If we can stay away from London—an' we must, d'yer understand?—she'll soon forget all about 'im, an' be 'er old self again."

"My lessons!" gasped Elisha.

"You must give 'em up," said Tibby firmly. "All the money in the world wouldn't be worth while if Mina was unhappy, if——" She choked back a furious sob and slammed down her tea-cup. "Send that money back they gave you. Something else will turn up; anyhow we can't keep it."

"I wouldn't have thought it of 'im, of Mr. Clive," murmured Elisha sorrowfully. "He was always so good and kind."

"So he was," admitted Tibby; "but so's most men when they're in love. Oh, I don't blame 'im. It's only natural. Look what a beautiful gel our Mina is; an' quite a lady in her ways and manner of speakin'. He couldn't help falling in love with her. So I meant to stop it. An' I 'ave," she wound up, with a nod of her head.

"What have you done, Tibby?" Elisha asked in a low voice.

"Never you mind," replied Tibby defiantly. "I've stopped it, an' that's enough. An' now if you don't want any more shrimps, father, you can go an' listen to the band. I'll take a cup of tea up to Mina, an' try an' coax 'er to come out. She'd stop an' moon in 'er room all by herself all day if I'd let her."

Strangely enough, something did turn up. Elisha went sadly down to the Kursaal, his heart aching for Mina and for his shaken trust in Clive. The band was playing, and Elisha, presently lifting his bowed head, saw that the conductor was his old friend, the old man who had given singing lessons to Mina. Elisha waited until the programme had been got through and the audience had dispersed, then he sought the conductor, whose name was Robinson; but who was known at Lea-on-Sands as Chevalier Sordelli. Robinson, alias Chevalier Sordelli, received him warmly.

"By Jingo!" he exclaimed; "the very man I want! Are you staying here, and are you disengaged? I want a first violin—mine's gone on the burst, and I should like to sack him. You're the very man! Thirty shillings a week and a benefit at the end of the season. What do you say?"

Elisha closed at once, hurried back to tell Tibby and Mina of the good fortune that had befallen him, and next morning took his place in the band, in which his presence was promptly welcomed and his talent promptly appreciated.

After a time Mina grew strong enough to go down to the Kursaal and hear the band—that is, Elisha—playing; and one day the Chevalier said to Elisha:

"Didn't I see you daughter, Miss Mina, amongst the audience? I thought so. Looked rather pale and lackadaisical. She's got a voice; and I've taught her to use it; why shouldn't she use it here? I'll give her a trial on the programme if she likes."

Elisha went home to their modest lodgings, an old-fashioned cottage away from the front, and informed Mina of the Chevalier's offer. Her pale face flushed, and a light stole into her eyes, of late so dim and listless, and she began to tremble; for though the heart may seem full of love, thwarted love, there is still room for art.

"I'll try," she said in a low voice; "if you think it is any good. Yes, I'll try."

She began to practice that same day, and a date was fixed for her appearance. The Chevalier attached so much importance to her debut that he "billed" her all over the place in huge letters; and on the night appointed Mina appeared—as Miss Veronica Vernon: the Chevalier chose this high-falutin name—before a fairly large and, fortunately, good-natured audience. Her heart throbbed as it had never throbbed when she was singing in the streets, as she looked down upon what, in her unsophistication, seemed like a sea of faces.

(To be continued.)

Put to the Test.

Little Willie's father found his youthful son holding up one of his rabbits by the ears, and saying to him, "How much is seven and seven, now?" "Bah!" the father heard the boy say, "I knew you couldn't. Here's another one—six and six is how much?" "Why, Willie, what in the world are you doing with your rabbit?" asked the father. Willie threw the rabbit down with disgust. "I knew our teacher was lying to us," was all he said. "Why, how?" asked the father. "Why, she told us this morning that rabbits were the greatest multipliers in the world, and this dummy can't even speak."

The Neighborly Spirit.

The neighborly spirit is an excellent thing to cultivate, although not, perhaps, as it is cultivated in the following story:

"How do you like your new home?" a friend asked a man who had recently moved into the village.

"Pretty well."

"Have you called on your neighbors yet?"

"No," the newcomer admitted, "I haven't. But I'm going to if any more of my wood is missing."

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