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THE ORCHID

By DANA BURNET.

CHAPTER VI.

When she saw her husband standing there upon the threshold she drew back with a little gasp.

"Philip!" she exclaimed. "What has happened? Why do you come to me?"

The colonel's head sank upon his breast. "I have lost everything," he said in a hollow voice.

"You have lost—I do not understand."

"Alvarez! I played with him—his fortune against mine. He won. I am a pauper, and you, Sophia—" he raised his eyes and looked at her in agony—"you are a pauper's wife."

She stood immobile, but her slim brown hands clutched the flowered shawl and drew it closer about her body, as though to shut out the chill that breathes from the very thought of poverty.

"You played with Alvarez!" she murmured. Then: "No, no! There must be some mistake! It is too monstrous!"

"It is true. He owns everything—house, land, slaves, money—"

She caught his arm. Her eyes, inscrutable as always ,searched his. "Surely you have saved something!"

Colonel Philip smiled bitterly. "Yes. I have saved something. I have saved the great oak and the Gardiner orchid. God knows why, since from the day it bloomed I have suffered only misfortune."

"Sophia!" cried the colonel at last. She turned her head and looked at him over her shoulder. "If you please, Philip," she said, "I would like to be alone. I should like to remain in my room for a while."

He drew himself up sharply. His face hardened and a pallor came over it, leaving it like stone. "Very well, madam," he answered, and with a bow he walked from the room.

That afternoon, at 3 o'clock, Ramon Alvarez came in his elegant barge, with somewhat the air of a conqueror. The colonel had not yet returned, but Sophia, adorned in her loveliest gown, and looking like an angel who knew how to smile, received him in the drawing room.

"Ah, welcome, senor," she said softly. "I have been expecting you."

He pressed her hand to his lips. "Senora!" he exclaimed. "You are not angry with me? You do not hate me?"

"Why should I hate my own countryman?"

"But I have ruined your husband. Has he not told you?"

"Yes, he has told me."

"And still you do not——— Ah, Sophia, can it be as I have dreamed? Are you perhaps burned a little by that same fire which consumes my bosom?"

"What fire is that, Ramon?"

"You call me Ramon! You look at me—I am mad for you! Yes, yes, I love you, Sophia, my beautiful one! I have loved you from the first. I would do anything to possess you!"

"Not so loud! My husband may return at any moment.

"Let him come. He is nothing. I have destroyed him. He is crushed and broken. He will blow his brains out in a week. Oh, Sophia, give me your hands——"

She placed her hands in his and swayed toward him. There were orange blossoms in her hair. The perfume of them filled his nostrils.

"You have made one little mistake, my Ramon. You have forgotten the flower that grows upon the oak tree."

"What is a flower?"

"In this case," she said, "it is more than a flower. It is the luck-piece of his family; one thing in which he has his faith. As long as it remains unpicked he will not be wholly crushed. He will not despair. He will not—die!" She lifted her face and looked long at her lover. "You must win the orchid," she said, with an ardor that thrilled him. "When you have done that you will have slain him as surely as though you had thrust a dagger into his heart!"

"Sophia!" cried Alvarez triumphantly, "you are mine!" And he tried to take her in his arms. She, however, glided away from him, and going to a cabinet at the side of the room, took from it a pack of cards which she held out to him. "When you have won the orchid," she said, smiling, "you have won—me."

He gazed at her with his passion smoldering in his eyes. "You are right," he muttered. "It takes a woman to know a man's true weakness. I will play him once more. I will offer to stake everything against the flower. I will rob him of his luck-piece——"

"Ah," cried Sophia suddenly, "but suppose that you should lose! I had not thought of that!" She put her hands to her breast and her eyes grew wide with apprehension.

Alvarez laughed, a cruel, malevolent laugh.

"[illegible] lose," he said; "I have [illegible] against losing."

"What is it, my Ramon?"

"I cannot tell you, but it is a very excellent little charm. I learned it long ago from a gambler of St. Augustine."

She came close to him, and once more he breathed that ineffable fragrance of orange blossoms.

"Tell me," she pleaded. "I shall be tortured with dread until I know."

He smiled recklessly. "Well, why not—since you love me!"

Taking the pack of cards from her hand, he ran the colored bits of pasteboard expertly through his fingers, finally selecting the ace of spades. Then from a table near by he picked up a paper knife and with this instrument slightly roughened the edges of the card.

"There is my little charm," he observed.

"I am so dull," said Sophia. "I do not yet see——"

"It is very simple. We sit down to play, the colonel and I. The pack of cards is on the table between us. In reaching my hand to cut I run my thumb—so, across the end of the pack. I draw it out. It is the ace of spades. There is none in the deck to equal it. Thanks to God, I have won everything!"

"Ah, but you are clever, my Ramon! It only remains, then, for you to induce my husband to play."

"That will not be difficult," said Alvarez, and added mercilessly. "It will be his death-stroke!"

Shortly afterward they heard the sound of hoofbeats on the drive, and Sophia, snatching up the cards, returned them hastily to the cabinet. Then she seated herself, and, opening the silver fan that she carried at her waist, moved it languorously to and fro. Alvarez sat down in a chair some distance away. They were thus decorously disposed when the colonel entered.

He was pale and gaunt, but apparently as composed as usual. He bowed to Alvarez with cold civility.

"I observe, sir," he remarked, "that you are as punctual as you are fortunate."

"I am in haste to dispatch a melancholy errand, senor; that is all."

"Pray do not let it grieve you, for it does not me. Indeed, sir, such preciousness as may be lost upon the hazard of a card is not worth the consideration of a gentleman."

"If you are ready, sir, we may as well proceed to the settlement of this tiresome affair. It will not take long, for by the terms of the wager you will assume possession of my entire estate."

Ramon's teeth gleamed beneath his dark mustache. "You forget the orchid, senor!"

"But that can mean nothing to you!"

"Ah, senor," replied the Spaniard, with a sigh, and glancing swiftly at Sophia, "how strange are the appetites and longings to which the human heart is subject! This very hour, as I passed beneath the branches of your great oak—still yours, senor, for all my good fortune—it seemed to me that the flower growing there was the most beautiful—the most desirable object in the world. In truth, I would rather possess it than all the rest of my winnings put together—"

Sophia rose from her chair and came forward with a rustle of silken cloth. "Why do you not play for it, then?"

"Madam!" exclaimed the colonel sternly. But Alvarez uttered a cry of satisfaction.

"An excellent suggestion, senora! Let us play for it by all means. Colonel Gardiner, I will stake your whole estate against the orchid! Will you play?"

The colonel's face flushed. "Sir," he burst out, "I'll see you damned—"

Sophia placed her hand on his sleeve.

"Why do you refuse, Philip?" she queried breathlessly. "What good is the orchid to us now? If it is truly your good omen you will win; if not, you will discover how false a thing was that to which you had intrusted your faith."

He turned to Alvarez and said, "Are you sure you wish to do this?"

"Quite sure, senor!"

"Then I will play."

Sophia, without a word, brought the packet of cards from the cabinet and laid it upon the table in the centre of the room. The two gentlemen stood upon either side of the table; Sophia remained standing at the end of it, mechanically waving her silver fan.

"Will you shuffle, sir?" said the colonel politely.

Alvarez picked up the cards and shuffled them with clever, nervous gestures. After which he replaced them evenly upon the table.

"Pray cut, senor," he said.

The colonel drew a deep breath, bowed and reached forward; but at that instant Sophia seized his arm.

"Let me draw for you, Philip," she pleaded, in her soft, musical voice. "It may bring us luck—and I'm sure that Senor Alvarez will not mind."

Alvarez could hardly repress a laugh. She was making it so very easy for him. "Not at all, senora."

The colonel stepped aside, folded his arms and bent a curious gaze upon his wife's enigmatical and slightly smiling countenance.

"Very well, madam," he said; draw for me!"

Sophia leaned over the table. Her small hand rested momentarily upon the pack; her dainty fingers seemed to be in quest of something; then very slowly she drew forth the card and turned it face up.

It was the ace of spades.

Alvarez sprang back with an exclamation of fury, but Sophia's steady dark eyes met his. He controlled himself by a tremendous effort; the muscles of his face trembled spasmodically for a second, then composed themselves into an expression of sickly equanimity. Gathering up the remains of his debonair manner, he made Sophia a bow.

"Senora," he said in a voice that shook slightly, "you have beaten me."

From the pocket of his coat he took a slip of paper and held it out to the colonel.

"I return to you, senor, the deed of gift of your estates. I assure you that it has been a weight upon my heart. And now with your permission, I will take my departure."

"Permit me to accompany you to your barge," said the colonel, whom good fortune had elated no more than ill fortune had dismayed. Nevertheless, as he and Sophia walked with Alvarez to the water's edge, he drew her arm through his and tightly clasped her hand.

The three came to the great oak, and as though by common impulse, all stopped and looked up at the golden flower about which had revolved the singular drama just concluded. Alvarez was the first to speak.

"After all," he said, "the only value of your orchid is its beauty, which would soon vanish if one picked it."

"To me," replied the colonel, "the true joy lies in possessing it!"

Sophia lifted her gaze to her husband's face, and it seemed to him as though the veil had fallen from her spirit at last. "There is one virtue of an orchid," she said proudly, "that neither of you has observed. One prizes it for its beauty and one for the delight of possessing it, but I senors, I see only one thing, and that is how closely it clings to the oak it loves!"

(The End.)

AN OVERSIGHT

The very interesting story "Explorers of the Dawn," which appeared in these pages recently, was reprinted from The Atlantic Monthly. The usual acknowledgment in such cases, which was inadvertantly omitted, is now gladly made.

Minard's Liniment for sale everywhere.

Examinations for Parents.

A certain amount of responsibility for the success or failure of a child in school rests upon the parents; but there is no tribunal before which they can be arraigned or by which their grading in efficiency can be determined. Might it not be well for them occasionally to take some means of finding out how nearly they come to deserving a passing mark on their obligations? No matter how efficient the schools may be, no matter how much responsibility they are willing to lift from the shoulders of the parents, there are certain duties that must always rest upon the heads of the household.

It might be profitable for the mother, especially, to make out a list of questions relating to her school duties to her children and, to the best of her judgment, give herself a mark upon each one. From those marks she could learn what her standing in per cent is, as her children learn what theirs is. Of course special conditions will affect the questions somewhat, but certain general questions will serve as a guide:

1. How often have I visited my child's school this year?
2. Is the school building well ventilated and well lighted?
3. Do I know the teacher personally?
4. What is my child studying?
5. Have I taken pains to see that his course of study is suited to his nature and will give the right foundation for a successful college or business career?
6. Do I make it my business to know every day how he has done his school work?
7. How does he rank as a student in comparison with others of his class and age?
8. Do I supervise his home study and protect him from all interruption during a regular time set apart for that study?
9. Do I see that he keeps regular hours, and do I insist that social matters do not interfere with his school work?
10. Am I taking my share of responsibility in the mental and moral growth of my child, or am I expecting the school to do it all?

The parent who has not visited school at all would get zero on the first question. On No. 2 she would get zero unless the general condition of the building were well known to her. In most cases she would get the same mark on No. 3. If she should deserve only zero on the first three questions, it is not probable that she would deserve a better rating on any of the others.

How many parents could honestly grade themselves high enough to feel satisfied in severely censuring a child that has failed to pass?

Home Queries.

Reader:—Can you tell me of any way of cleaning the edge of a comforter which has become soiled by face and hands, without washing the whole cover? What will clean oxidized lamp fixtures?

1. Clean it with gasoline.

2. The word "Oxidized" simply means a dull finish. I could not tell what to use unless I knew whether the fixtures were brass, iron or silver. Washing with warm soapy water will remove surface dirt, and a good silver or brass polish should do the rest. The common scouring powders, such as bon ami or sapolio will do for gun metal fixtures.

Mrs. H. B.:—I am asking for a recipe for making chowder with green tomatoes, cabbage, onions, sugar, spices and vinegar, and also one for making mince meat with meat.

The name of the relish is "French Pickle." Chop one peck of green tomatoes fine, sprinkle one cup of salt over them and let stand over night. In the morning drain, add two medium heads of cabbage, six large onions chopped fine, and boil one-half hour in two quarts cider vinegar, two pounds of brown sugar, and a half tablespoon each of cloves, allspice, cinnamon, mustard, ginger and black pepper.

Mince Meat.—The following recipe for mince meat is the best I have ever tasted. You can make as large a quantity as you like. Three pounds of lean beef, two pounds of suet, three quarts of apples and three pounds of raisins, all finely chopped. Two pounds of currants, three pounds citron, cut in small pieces, one-half cup each of lemon and orange peel chopped, one-half cup of lemon juice, one-fourth cup of orange juice, two tablespoons of salt, four cups of sugar—white or brown—one cup of coffee, two cups of cider, one teaspoon each of cloves and allspice, two teaspoons of cinnamon, one glass of currant jelly. Boil two hours, then add one quart of fruit juice of any desired flavor or a quart of cider. Let stand one week before using. If this seems too expensive you can omit the candied citron and peel and add an equal amount of raisins and apples. Any tart jelly can replace the currant jelly, if you haven't that, but if made like the recipe it is delicious.

The Half-Price Lady.

A girl who was anxious to earn the necessary money for a few little things that she needed or greatly desired, after thinking the matter over for a while, hung a modest sign in the window of her home. The sign read, in black lettering on plain white:

The Half-Price Lady.
Why pay ten cents for having your gloves cleaned, when you can have it done for five cents? Children's ribbons also made like new.

In renovating her own wardrobe she had discovered a simple mixture that cleaned perfectly. She used it in the chalk form for gloves and in the liquid form for ribbons.

Soon orders began to come in from people who had light gloves that soiled easily and from mothers who must make a few ribbons do long service for their little girls. They are still coming.

The average number of gloves received on week days, except Saturday is fifteen pairs, and on Saturday as many as sixty pairs. As the material used costs this girl only two cents for a pair, she clears more than four dollars a week on gloves alone. The ribbons come in at the average rate of ten yards a day, and sometimes as much as seventy-five yards on Saturday. The cost of cleaning a yard of ribbon is one and a half cents and the charge is five cents, so that that branch of the work brings in four dollars and thirty-five cents a week. She clears altogether about eight dollars and forty-two cents a week.

One advantage of that kind of work is that the worker can systematize her labors in such a way as to leave the afternoons and evenings free. The pressing and cleaning is not easy, but a girl who undertakes the work can stop for rest and recreation when she is tired.

Many other girls could turn the plan to account, for the number of ribbons and gloves that need cleaning and freshening is remarkable, and after all the venture requires no capital except industry and patience.

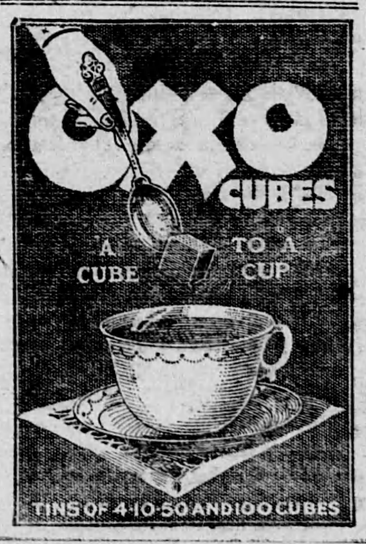
A Hint For a Savory Supper.

On cold winter evenings, after a day spent in the frosty out of doors, a supper party is always welcome. Here is the recipe for a delicious meal that can be cooked either on a stove or in a chafing dish, and that will satisfy appetites made keen by the icy air:

Flake one and one half cupfuls of salt codfish and soak it one hour. Boil one cupful of rice. Chop together two tablespoonfuls of green pepper—or more if the pepper is mild—and one small onion. Melt two tablespoonfuls of butter in a chafing dish or frying pan and add the chopped onion and pepper, the rice, the codfish and one half can of tomatoes. Let the mixture simmer, but stir it frequently, from fifteen minutes to half an hour. If you use a chafing dish, do away with the water pan; otherwise the fish will not be done.

Minard's Liniment Relieves Neuralgia.

Perhaps you ruined the flavor of the sauce by too rapid boiling. Any sauce must boil up once and then should be allowed to only simmer.



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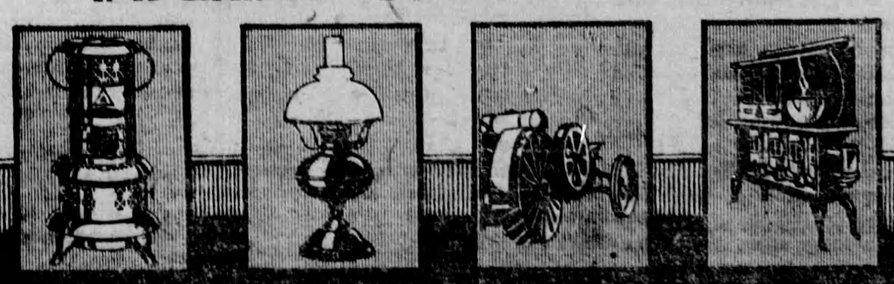

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