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JAS. C. HASSON, Editor and Publisher.

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A GILDED SIN.

BY MERTHA M. CLAY.

How she thanked Heaven in her heart that she had done as she had—that she had sacrificed herself! If she had kept her inheritance, then Katherine could not have been married. Lord Wynleigh wondered at the light that came into the girl's beautiful face. How little Veronica dreamed at that moment of all that would come to pass before Christmas time!

There had not been the least difficulty in the settlement of Sir Jasper's affairs; the will that he had made when Katherine Brandon was an infant was still in the hands of the family solicitor—every thing was perfectly straightforward. Lord Wynleigh explained that she understood Miss di Cynthia's affairs and should continue to act as her guardian. She had joyfully kept her word, and had settled one thousand a year upon Veronica.

One beautiful August evening, when the red glow of the western sunset filled the sky, Veronica stood under the shade of the tall lime-tree, watching the evening light. A happiness had come to her, so great, so sudden, so entrancing, that she was dazed by it, bewildered. For Sir Jasper had asked her to become his wife. She did not know until then all that kept in her heart—the love, the affection, the tenderness—and the waking she started her. She was lost in wonder at herself. The crown and the glory of her womanhood had come to her. She rejoiced in the new and perfect happiness; she opened her whole heart to it. It was such chivalrous wooing, and he loved her so dearly. No one could ever have been so dearly loved before. She stood there thinking of it, with a smile of perfect content on her face, and as she did so Sir Jasper came to her.

"I have been watching you, Veronica," he said, "until I have grown jealous of the sky and the foliage, and everything else that your beautiful eyes have rested on. What have you been thinking of?"

"Of nothing in the wide world but you," she replied.

"Oh me, sweetheart!" he exclaimed, "I have never told her what he had come to ask—when would she be his wife?"

"You are too kind ever to be cruel, darling," he said, looking at the beautiful, dusky face. "I told you long ago how lonely my home is. I want the sugar in your life, and I want you there. You cannot tell how dreary it all seems to me, Veronica, when will you come to me?"

"Your father has explained," he replied. "Your father was a great friend of Sir Jasper's, she tells me."

Veronica made no reply. She could not tell him the truth, but she would speak no false word to him—never one. "I care nothing about your fortune, sweetheart. I am a rich man—so rich that I am troubled at times to know how to spend my money. Lay it all at your feet. You are mistress of everything that belongs to me. When will you come to me, my Veronica? You have nothing to fear. Do not be unkind and send me away!"

She had lost all power of speech. The girl continued:

"I can form no idea why you do it—that does not concern me—perhaps it is for your own interest. They said in the servants' hall that Sir Jasper had left you money; perhaps the will you destroyed took from you. There was a flash as of fire from the dark eyes.

"I do not wish to do you any harm, miss. I have not mentioned what I saw to anyone, and I never will; but you must give me five hundred pounds for keeping your secret. Give me that, and I will promise, I will swear that no abolitionist to what I have seen shall ever pass my lips. Give me that and I will bring the charred fragment to you. I do not wish to harm you, but Providence has given me this chance and I must make the most of it. From that moment I will keep your secret. Give me five hundred pounds, and I will be as faithful as death to you."

Then the power of speech came to Veronica. "Even if I would consent to bribe you," she said, "I could not; I have not five hundred pounds of my own in the world."

"You have a rich lover," returned the girl, with a significant smile. "Sir Jasper would give you anything in the world—his heart's blood if you needed it."

"I will not allow you to say such words," she said. "I will not let you say such words. I shall keep to my word. If you give me five hundred pounds, I will never reveal your secret; if not, I will betray it."

"You must listen to me, Miss di Cynthia," she said. "I hold a secret of yours, and I must be paid for it."

"You can have no secret of mine," returned Veronica. "But I have," said the girl. "Listen to me. I am engaged to marry John Panning, who once lived here as head groom. We have been engaged to be married for eight years, and fortune has never once smiled on us. He saved three hundred pounds and put it into a bank. The bank broke, and the money was lost. I saved fifty pounds, and invested it in a life insurance policy, which became bankrupt. Fortune has never once smiled on us until now. Now John Panning has an offer to go to Australia. If he can go there and take five hundred pounds with him, we shall have our fortune."

"I do not see what this has to do with me," interposed Veronica. "I do, Miss di Cynthia. I hold a secret of yours, and I want five hundred pounds as the price of my silence."

"You are taking nonsense, Morton," she said. "I can only imagine that you have lost your senses."

"You will find, on the contrary, Miss di Cynthia, that I was never more sensible in my life. Let me tell you what I have to say."

She had lost all power of speech. The girl continued:

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