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A Story of Old Virginia

O UR young here slept during most of

and uneasy, and when at length the day-

beams began to peep through his window

he arose from his hard couch and com-

menced pacing the floor of his dungeon.

A dozen turns, perhaps, had he taken, when

the thought of the rats he had left at work

on his bread entered his mind, and he turn-

ed to observe the result of their operations.

The loaf had been nearly all eaten up, and

Orlando was upon the point of resuming

his walk, when something at the foot of his

couch attracted his attention, which, upon

a closer observation, he found to be a dead

rat, and at a short distance from it, nearer

to a small hole in the corner of the cell

through which the animals had evidently

made their way, he found another of the

At first this circumstance created but

little thought in the mind of the young

hunter, but gradually a strange idea began

to work its way through his brain, and

bodies up. Small particles of bread were

still upon the rat's nose ; and an examin-

ation of the other body gave the same re-

sult. Orlaudo knew that these must be

the same that he had left eating his bread

on the night previous, and with one of

them in his hand he sat down upon the side

of his couch. Hardly had he assumed this

position, however, when the bolts of his

door were withdrawn, and on looking up,

he beheld the gigantic form of Chiron en-

ter the cell. In an instant our hero cast

little quadrupeds, which was also dead.

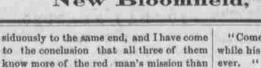
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the night, but that sleep was dreamy

THE

For the Bloomfold Times

MYSTERIOUS FRIEND.



becomes honest men." "Berkley !" uttered Chiron, with a start

of surprise. "Has he been here ?" "Yes, and he threatened me, too, because I would not tell him what Lolowah

said to me. Are you acquainted with this Berkley ?" "I have seen him often, and I know somewhat of his history," replied Chiron,

in a sort of thoughtful mood. "And who is he ?" asked Orlando,

"He became rich by the death of a brother, and his riches have made him proud. Sir Wallace Berkley and Roswell Berkley came to Virginia many years ago, and the former amassed a large fortune, but his health seemed to be on the decline, and he resolved to return to England, partly on business, and partly for his health ; but before he went he made his will, bequeathing all his property to his brother, and then he went to England and died. Thus Roswell came into possession of one of the most valuable estates in the colony, together with a vast amount of money ; but with all his wealth he has been of but little service to the colony, for he is avaricious and niggardly in the extreme, revengeful in his disposition, and capable of stooping to the lowest means to accomplish his ends."

"And is it he, then, who is prosecuting me?" asked Orlando, in an earnest tone. "I think it is."

"And what, can he have against me? How have I ever come in conflict with his interests, or how offended him ?'!

For several moments Chiron remained in a silent, thoughtful mood, but at length he said :

"That Roswell Berkley is your enemy is surely true, and I have reason to believe that he is at the bottom of this attempt upon your life; but why he is thus-why he seeks your removal from this world of care-I may not now tell you. But while, you are here you have nothing to fear from him; and when you go out from here, we will take measures to secure you against with a trembling band he picked one of the danger."

"And think you I have nothing to fear while here in prison ?"

"Most assuredly not; for you shall not be convicted of this crime."

"Chiron," said the young man, while a peculiar shade passed over his countenance, last night the jaller brought to mea small loaf of bread and a mug of water. The bread I could not eat, for I had no appetite ; so I laid it carelessly upon the floor, and shortly afterwards I laid down on my couch. Presently I was startled by the sound of something near me, and on looking over upon the floor I saw two rats gnawing my bread. I watched them till the gathering darkness hid them from my sight, and then I went to sleep. This morning they had eaten my bread most all up."

"Come here, Orlando," he exclaimed, he found him pacing the floor in anything while his eyes sparkled more intensely than but an easy or unconcerned manner. ever. "There, look in there !" "Well, and what is it ?"

"Do you not see that fine, white sediment ?!!

"Yes, I see it."

"And that is arsenic. There must have been enough in that loaf to have killed a dozen men !" "And 'twas meant for me," said Orlan-

do, with a shudder. "Of course 'twas meant for you, for the

loaf could not have been long made." "No, for 'twas warm when the jailer

placed it in here." "Then is this villiany hard upon you

even here," exclaimed Chiron, as he gazed once more into the mug, and then dashed it in pieces against the wall. "But you shall not be long thus, for I will tear the old jail down about their ears ere its walls shall hold you in contact with such danger. Here is bread of mine-'twill last you till you can get some more safe to eat than that. By my faith, but those poor rats have done humanity a good service, at all events. 'Tiş a pity, though, that the fatal experiment could not have been tried upon him who compounded the infernal dose !"

As Chiron spoke he took from his pouch several slices of bread and venison, and Orlando was just upon the point of making some remark, when the jailer put his head in at the door and informed the visitor that the time allowed for his visit to the prisoner had expired.

"Here sir ! Look you here !" exclaimed Chiron, in an authoritative tone, as the jailer stood waiting for him to come out.

There was that about the towering form. and the imperative look of the old hunter that made the jailer almost forget his own right to command on the premises, and without hesitation he entered the cell.

"Was it you, sir, that brought this prisoner his food last night ?" asked Chiron. "Yes," returned the jailer.

"And was that loaf of bread prepared in the jail ?"

The jailer trembled as he heard this question, and he silently gazed into the face of his interlocutor.

"Was that bread prepared in the jail ?" again asked Chiron.

"No sir, it was not," answered the jailr, with considerable perturbation ; "but I trust you will not expose me for thus overstepping the bounds of my duty. All the bread in the jail was hard and mouldy, and as the gentleman kindly offered to send the unfortunate young man a warm loaf, I

"Who was the gentleman that sent it ?"

"Ha! Who are you, sir, that comes thus unbidden upon my privacy?" exclaimed Berkley, starting back, as his eyes rested upon the huge proportions of the new comer.

"I think you have seen me before," coolly returned Chiron, as he set his ponderous rifle against the panelling of the wall.

"Seen you, sir," uttered the agent, still trembling before the powerful hunter. "I have met you in the street, but wherefore do you thus intrude upon me unannouced ? Do you take my residence for a common inn ?"

"O, no, one of the servants in the yard told me that you were in this room, and he also had the kindness to offer to call you out, but as my business was somewhat of a private nature I dispensed with his services."

"Then, sir, I trust you will get through with your business as soon as possible,' said Mr. Berkley, in a more confident tone, for his presence of mind had begun to return to him.

The old hunter bent a searching glance upon the man before him, and in a meaning tone he asked :

" Have you heard that the young man, whom you had confined in the jail yesterday, was dead ?"

"Young Chester, do you mean ?" returned Berkley, while a sparkling light shot through his eyes.

"Yes, I mean Orlando Chester."

"No, I had not heard of it. At what time did he die ?" "O, he is not dead yet."

" And is he sick ?" asked Berkley, with an carnestness and nervous impatience

which he could not hide. "No, he was never better in his life,"

returned Chiron.

A single instant Roswell Berkley gazed into the calm features of his gigantic visitor, and then, while a sudden tremor shook his frame, he grasped the back of his chair for support.

" You scoundrel !" uttered the agent at length, " what mean you by this taunting?" "It seems to affect you wonderfully, sir," said Chiron, in a sarcastic tone, still keeping his eyes bent upon the man before him.

"I had thought the poor youth might be in reality dead, and it is no wonder that such a result should have moved me," returned Mr. Berkley, suddenly changing his manner to one of the utmost solicitude.

"There was a death in the jail last night," said Chiron, " and I knew not but could not find it in my heart to refuse him, you might have heard of it. Two rats died in young Chester's cell."

which until the present moment had escaped him-entered his mind, he asked, with a sudden start :

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No. 4.

" Who told you of this affair ?"

"About the rats, do you mean ?"

"Yes. Was it the jaller ?" "No, I saw it myself."

"Yourself? And do you mean to say that you have been admitted to the jail?"

"Certainly, I have. I had business with young Chester, and received admission to visit him. Is there anything strange in that?"

"O, no," returned Berkley, with considerable embarrassment. "Then you are acquainted with the young man."

"Yes, I have seen him," said Chiron, "and I feel some interest in his welfare."

For a few moments Mr. Berkley gazed vacantly into the face of his visitor, and then he cast his eyes upon the floor. The old hunter smiled as he noticed the manner of his host, and he thought he could guess what was passing in his mind. Twice had he been peremptorily requested to leave the room, and yet the agent kept him now in waiting. At length Berkley raised has head, and while a look of anxiety rested upon his features, he said :

"Young Chester has a mother living, I am told."

" He has," returned Chiron.

" And do you know her ?"

"Yes. I have seen her at her house in the woods."

"They tell me she is crazy."

"Then they told you part truly and partfalsely. The poor woman's mind is shattered, but she is far from being crazy."

"Since I have been the means of having this poor woman's son arrested, and as he may never protect her more, I believe I must take some measures to provide for her welfare. It is hardly right that she should suffer for the sins of her son."

There was something so mean, so serpent-like in the tone and manner of Berkley, and then his desire to get the poor mother within his power was so evident, that the soul of Chiron could no longer contain its indignation, and, while his eyes flashed, he exclaimed :

"Roswell Berkley, you have managed to get young Chester within the walls of the prison-house, and you have managed, too, to fasten upon him the imputation of a dark crime ; but you need not waste your sycophantic fears upon his fate, for he will not remain long in your clutches. He is innocent of all crime, and you yourself know it well. The red man who fell beneath his rifle was the unfortunate victim of the base villain who set him upon his bloody work. Tell me, if you think such diabolical plot as has been hatched up against young Chester can escape the revealing light of day-and tell me, too, if you think its perpetrators can escape the retribution of an incensed and outraged God ! And now, not content with what has already been done, you would fasten your poisonous grasp upon poor Morgiana Chester ! Roswell Berkley, if you dare to lay a finger upon that woman, you shall sorely rue it. The lives of two thousand like yourself were not worth one moment of that mother's peace ! Now, beware ! I know that for some cause you seek young Chester's ruin, but I'll yet show you that you have counted without your host, for I'll blow your flimsy fabric to the wind, and yourself I'll give to the justice that demands you !"

the rat upon the floor, and with a bout heart he sprang forward to meet the man whom he sincerely believed to be his friend.

"So, so," uttered Chiron, as he shook the youth warmly by the hand, "they've begun the work sooner than I expected."

"They've begun it, at all events," returned Orlando, in a tone of carelessness that actually surprised himself; but the presence of Chiron had served to dispel the gloom of his heart, and instinctively the feeling of safety came to his relief.

"Yes, and they came near accomplishing their purpose, too," said Chiron. "I little thought that the game was to commence so soon, or I should have been on the watch. But how was it that you escaped the Indian's bullet? Lolowah was a cunning fellow, and he had the reputation of being a fatal markaman."

"He may have been a good marksman, but his eye was not quick enough," returned Orlando, and then he went on to relate the particulars of the recontre.

Chiron's eye sparkled as the youth told his story ; and when it was closed, he exelaimed :

"Your eye must be a quick one. I had thought myself next to invulnerable, but I hardly think I should have escaped as you did, "Twas indeed a narrow chance. But tell me, did not the Indian speak to you ere he died ?"

"Yes, he told me he never had aught against the white man, but that one of them gave him money and rum to kill me, They plied him with the fire-water before they sent him on the mission, and I really believe the poor fellow was sorry for the part he had taken against me."

you told any one else of the Indian's avowal ?"

"No. You are the first one to whom I have communicated it, though the two restorday Mr. Berkley, plied me most as side.

"Well," uttered Chiron, "and what of that? There is enough more bread."

"Perhaps there is. But look," said Orlando, "as he pointed to the two dead rats, there lie the poor fellows, as I found them this morning, stiff and dead !"

"Dead !" iterated Chiron, starting from his position, and gazing first upon the rats, and then upon his companion, "Dead! a rat, even, could not have died without a cause. Is the bread all gone ?"

"No, here is a portion of it," returned Orlando, as he picked up what remained of the loaf.

"Is there any water in your mug?" asked Chiron, after he had gazed for some time upon the bread.

"There is a little," answered the youth, and as he spoke he took the mug from his stool and brought it forward.

Chiron took the mug, and carefully crumbled the bread into it as finely as he could between his thumb and finger, and having accomplished this he stirred the whole quite briskly for a moment or two,

then he let it stand till the bread had mostly settled. He spoke not a word told that he was deeply interested in his lot. experiment. As soon as the mug had stood long enough for the saturated bread to settle, Chiron took his knife and began " No doubt he was," said Chizon, "but slowly to stir the mess up again, and this he was the tool of a subtle enemy. Have he carefully continued until the bread and water had become mixed into a sort of pulp, and then he cautiously turned it off ed to poison Orlando he had not the least on to the floor."

As soon as the bread and water was all

asked Chiron.

"I promised him that I would not tell," returned the jailer, with a simplicity scarcely to have been expected from one in his situation. "He was very kind to the prisoner, and wished him well out of the scrape."

"Yes, he was very kind," returned Chiron ; "but tell me who he was, and you may rest assured that no harm shall come to you through the affair. I have particular reason for asking, for to one in the prisoner's situation a knowledge of his friends may be of much service."

"Well, sir," said the jailer, with some hesitancy, "it was Mr. Berkley." " Mr. Roswell Berkley ?"

"Yes."

"Now, Orlando, you are pretty sure of one friend, at least," said Chiron, casting upon the youth a look of deep meaning, "and," continued the old hunter, in a low tone that could not reach the ears of the jailer, "this is no place for you. Keep up a good heart, for there is no danger."

This last remark was delivered in a loud tone ; and giving the youth a hearty shake of the hand; the old hunter turned and followed the jailer from the cell, and as his footsteps died away in the distance, Orlando turned his gaze upon the fragments of the mug that lay scatte 3d upon the floor, and

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH A VILLAIN IS CORNERED.

When .Chiron left the jail he stood for some moments in the road engaged in deep meditation. That Mr. Berkley had intenddoubt, but yet he resolved to make "assurance doubly sure," and with this view nen, Gihman and Colton, who dogged me out of the mug, Chiron took the vessel to he took his way at once towards Roswell

"What mean you by this flummery?" exclaimed Berkley, again shrinking before the gaze of his visitor.

"But is it not strange, sir, that those rats should have died in Chester's cell ?" asked Chiron, seeming not to heed his companion's manner.

"Sir !" cried Berkley, bursting into a rage, "have done with your impudent fooling; and if you have anything to say, say it quickly for I would be alone.'

" Those rats, sir," resumed Chiron, with the most imperturbable coolness, "ate most of the bread which was left for young Chester last night, and I should not wonder if that caused their death. At any rate, I think the matter had better be inquired into."

"And was the bread all eaten? Was there any part of it left ?" asked Berkley, with a sudden energy.

"There was a small piece left, but it was destroyed and thrown away," answered Chiron.

Roswell Berkley breathed more freely as he heard this, and after collecting his seemingly scattered senses, he said :

"This was some mere accident-some strange freak of nature-this death of the rats. They were probably half-famished, and thus overate themselves."

"Very likely. Indeed, I think they must have overeaten themselves," returned his heart beat with a wild emotion as he the old hunter, and as he spoke, all signs while he was engaged in this work, but the shought how narrow an escape from a hor- of the searching gaze that had dwelt upon eager look that dwelt upon his countenance rible death hud fallen so strangely to his his features passed away, for he had seen

enough to convince him that the man before him was the projector of the poisoned bread. Chiron now knew with whom and with young Chester had to deal, and he could not repress the look of contempt that worked up from his soul as he looked upon the miserable villain before him.

"Now, sir," said Berkley, assuming his usual haughty tone and manner, " if you have nothing more to communicate, 1 in the woods, tried to get it from me, and the window and carefully examined its in- Berkley's house. That gentleman was in there is anything wrong at the jail, I will repeat it on earth !" Continued next would thank you for your abaence, and if angels of the other world ! "You'll never his sitting room, and when Chiron entered attend to it." Then, as though an idea, week.

Like a whipped cur did Roswell Berkley quail before the towering form of the old hunter. His face was pale, and his lips trembled with a slavish fear. Twice he attempted to speak, but the words stuck in his throat, and he sunk into his chair, utterly helpless.

"Villain," uttered the hunter between his set teeth, "I know you for what you are, and I know where to meet you. You asked if the bread was all gone that was given to the young prisoner last night. I found a piece of it, and analyzed it, and I found it to contain a most deadly poison, and, sir, I know that you prepared it, and that you sent it in there !'

Those last words seemed to call Berkley to his senses, for with the balls almost starting from their eye-sockets, he sprang from his chair. His face was livid with rage, and his frame trembled beneath the most intense excitement. With a nervous movement, he placed his hand in his bosom, and his oygs sparkled with a cat-like gleam, he suddenly drew forth a pistol.

" Now, dog, go tell your story to the