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For the Bloomfield Times.

THE MYSTERIOUS FRIEND.

A Story of Old Virginia

CHAPTER VIII.

A DARK PLOT BROUGHT TO LIGHT.

THOUGH the old hunter took a rapid pace on his return to the cottage in the woods, it was after sun-rise before he reached it.

As he approached, he cast a searching glance around to see if he could observe anything stirring; but nothing unusual met his gaze, and he had almost begun to think that Gilman's companions had also gone, when the piteous whinings and howlings of the hounds fell upon his ear, and upon hastening up to the spot he found that they had been shut up within their kennel. With a powerful pull at the door he tore it open, and the hounds, finding themselves thus released, sprang out with a bound, and seeming at once to recognize their deliverer, they crouched wistfully at

Chiron was just in the act of patting one of the dogs upon the head when a sharp, agonizing cry struck upon his ear, and, as though a knife had been driven to his heart, did he start around and spring towards the house. He darted for the front door, and throwing it quickly open he en tered the from room. The sight that met his gaze seemed for the instant to freeze him to the spot. Poor Morgiana Chester was upon her knees-the tears were streaming almost in torrents down her pale cheeks, and with clasped hands she was begging of the man who stood above her not to drag her from her home. There was no anger, no rage upon her features; gleamed a look of prayerful, imploring misery that might have melted the heart of a stone.

The man who was thus driving the poor woman to distraction was the villain Colton, and near him, but seeming to take no active part in the scene, stood a man whom Chiron had never before seen, but who, from his garb, appeared to be a physician.

"Come, up, I say," exclaimed Colton, as he grasped the woman's arm. "Give us no more of your prating. I don't know your husband, and I don't know as you ever had one; but we'll take you to a better place than this."

Chiron hesitated only a moment at the door, and then he stepped quickly forward, and struck a powerful blow, at the head of the rascal. Colton dodged as his eye caught the movement of the old hunter, and the blow which had been intended for his head fell upon his bare neck!

The unfeeling, villain sank upon the floof like a flimsy bag, and in another moment the crimson tide burst forth from his mouth and nostrils. He moved not, nor did he utter a groan, for the coward's spark of life had gone out !

Morgiana Chester started to her feet, and even her shattered mind seemed to comprehend that she was once more free. She gazed up into the face of Chiron, and as he instinctively opened his arms she fell forward upon his bosom. The atout man ment, except to take away this poor dropped a sileut tear upon her head, and, influenced by a power which he could not control, he imprinted upon her brow, a

"Look up, Morgiana," he murmured, as he placed his hand upon her head .-"Look up, for you are safe."

"Safe," repeated the poor woman, gazing up into Chiron's features with a vacant | this errand?" lock. "Burely no one would harm me; and yet, but even now, that bad man said he would take me hence—that he would

take me from my home ; but he did not mean it, for I have lived many years, and no one ever found it in his heart to harm me. Yet, methinks his voice sounded harsh, and he grasped me by the arm till my poor flesh was sorely pained. He must have had a bad heart. Where is he?"

The excitement of the scenes through which she had just passed had proved too much for the shattered mind of Morgiana Chester, and with a deep groan she sank heavily upon the arm of the hunter. Old Elpsey had been a silent, though deeply interested, spectator of the scene, and as she saw her mistress faint she sprang eagerly forward.

"Take her to her bed, Elpsey," said Chiron, as he resigned Morgiana's inanimate form into the hands of the faithful servant, "and bathe her brow with cool water. She will soon recover,"

The old woman lifted her mistress in her arms and easily deposited her burden upon the bed within the small sleeping-room, and as soon as Chiron had seen Morgiana thus cared for, he turned towards the stranger, who had been standing near the window.

"Now, sir," said the old hunter, looking with anything but a joy-inspiring countenance upon the object of his question, "wherefore are you here?"

The stranger quailed before the glance of Chiron, and an ashy pallor overspread his features.

"Don't kill me! For God's sake, don't !" he uttered in tones of fear.

"Answer my question, sir," thundered the giant hunter, advancing a step and raising his finger.

"Spare me, and I will," tremblingly returned the stranger.

"Then speak, and at once. Why come ye here ?"?

"I came to help remove a crazy woman." "And who are you? What are you?"

"A physician, sir." "And, after what you had seen of that poor woman's state of mind, did you still think of removing her? After you had seen her upon her bended knees, with her bands clasped in agony, her cheeks flowing with tears, did you then think of removing

her-of dragging her from her home?" The physician trembled in silence.

"Speak, sir, and answer me !"

" I-I-sir, was not the principal in this matter. He who lies there had the lead. I only came professionally."

"Professionally!" repeated Chiron, in a tone of the utmost irony. "And pray, sir, to what end was your Profession enlisted ?"

"I was sent, sir, to see if the woman was actually crazy."

"And what was your decision?"

The physician shrank from the question with a dread that was manifest in every feature of his countenance, but Elpsey, who was at that moment passing through the room with a pan of water, helped him.

"Massa Chiron," she said, "dat man say dat my missus was stark, starin' mad, ad' dey must take her off. Dat's what he Bay."

"Look you, thou creeping, lying, miserable Esculapian, do you see that form at my feet?" asked the hunter.

"Yes sir, replied the physician, quaking with fear, as he gazed upon the body of Colton.

"Then mark me," said Chiron, suddenly changing his tone to a low, deep whisper, which seemed like the premonitory rumbling of an earthquake, "if you do not answer such questions as I ask, and that, too, without prevariention, you shall sleep by the side of your villainous companion in guilt."

"Now sir ! Were you in the boat with" Gilman and Colton, when the shot was fired at me, while near Sir Oliver's residence ?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you knew that shot was intended for me?

"Yes, sir."

"And did you have any other instructions given you, when you left the settlewoman 217

"We-we-did."

"And now see that you answer me truly. What were those instructions?" "It was to-kill-you, sir !"

"So I thought," said the hunter, while a dark smile flitted scross his features .-"And now, sir, who sent you three on

The man hositated, Chiron pointed

significantly down to the corpse.

"It was Mr. Berkley."

"So I thought again. And he paid you crushed the power of Berkley, and that the well for your part of the job."

"Yes sir." "And made you pledge your honor that

you would keep the mission a secret." "Yes sir."

A scornful laugh broke from the lips of the old hunter, and the word "honor" dwelt upon his tongue.

"Well, well," uttered Chiron, after he had gazed upon the cowering physician for a moment or two, "though 'twere not safe honor would be put. But answer me one more question. What was to have been done with this woman, had you succeeded in dragging her hence?"

"I don't know, sir. Mr. Berkley said he would manage that if we would make

out to bring her to him." "O, the double-dyed villain," murmured Chiron, as he clinched his fists tightly together. "But never mind, his punishment is even now hanging over his head; and 'tis one too, of which he little dreams," turning to the physician, he asked: "What path did you take in coming here this morning ?"

"We came up from the Chickahominy." "And can you find your way back by the same path ?"

"Yes, I think I can."

"Then go. There is the door, sir; and if ever you cross its threshold again it will ed a single inch of vantage. be as the gate of your tomb. Begone, sir!" "But Gilman-where-"

"Begone, I say," thundered Chiron, but before you go let me advise you not to see Mr. Berkley for the present, for it might lead to something unpleasant."

The physician crept tremblingly to the door, turned to take one more look at the body of his fallen companion, and then, with a quick, nervous step, he started off. "He goes not by the river path, and so

he will not release Gilman. 'Tis well,' muttered Chiron to himself, as the form of the departing villain disappeared in the thick wood; and then turning to where lay the form of the fallen man, he murmured

"So, so, Master Colton, you've paid heavily for your sins, though I meant not that it should have been thus. However, the world is better off without you. I shall not waste grief for what I have done."

When Chiron returned to the house, after having disposed of Colton's body, he found that Mrs. Chester had recovered from her swoon, and that she seemed to have but little recollection of what had passed. She spoke of having been dragged from her home, and of the man she had seen dead on the floor, but her mind dwelt upon the scene rather as the memory of a dream than as reality, and Chiron felt glad that it was so, for otherwise she might have suffered exceedingly. Now, however, she was calm and tranquil, and while the fatal affair of the morning seemed to pass entirely from her mind she dwelt with a peculiar sadness upon the absence of her son; but the old hunter assured her he would soon bring Orlando back to her, and then taking one more long and earnest gaze upon Morgiana's beautiful features, he beckened for Elpsey to follow him and, quitted the apartment.

"Did you ever fire a rifle ?" naked from his prison." Chiron, as soon as he got into the kitchen. "O, yes, I fire Massa Rolando's."

Chiron went to the beckets above the fire-place, where one of the young man's rifles hung, and having found that it was loaded, he poured in fresh priming, and

handing it to Elpsey, he said : "There, keep that rifle handy, and if you are again assailed before I return do, not fail to use it. Call the hounds into the for I shall need your assistance." house, and keep them here, for they can help you much. "But," he continued, as he noticed the old woman's countenance was beginning to lengthen with new fear, you need not be under any apprehensions, for there is in all probability no one left to harm you. The villain who has set these minions on will dare not come himself, nor will he dare to trust many more with his dark secret; and besides, I think he will not learn of the failure of this attempt until I have him safely within the of anguish passed over his features. "You hands of justice. I go now to seek Orlande. and perhaps by to-morrow he will be here. You need not fear, but still 'tis safe enough to be prepared."

Elpsey seemed somewhat relieved by the assurance of Chiron, and she promised that bars of his window had been forced from she would be on her guard, and in a few their sockets."
moments more the old hunter passed "But he coul through the front door and started for the ed," said Chiron, in a tone that bore a slight river. His step was easy, and his countenace was molded in a cast of deep satis-

way was clear for the release of Orlando. The villain whom be had left leashed in the woods he intended to take with him to Jamestown, and through the influence of Sir Oliver have him at once lodged in jail.

With such thoughts passing through his his mind, and occasionally murmuring, in broken, hurried sentences, to himself, the hunter hurried on. As he approached the spot where he had left Gilman he stopped a moment to hear if the villain was yet cursto trust much upon the pledge of such a ing, but all was quiet, even to a deathly security, yet I wot that Roswell Berkley stillness, and with the sudden thought little dreamed of the test fire to which your | that his prisoner had escaped, Chiron darted quickly forward.

As the old hunter approached the tree the sight that met his gaze made him start. There lay the stiff, extended form of Gilman, his face all black and swollen, his eyes protruding from their sockets, and his head bent forward upon his breast. The villain had attempted to escape by working his body downward so as to clear the thong that bound him to the tree. He had settled his way down until the thong had Then slipped over his breast, but here his feet appeared to have slipped out from under him, thus bringing the whole of his weight, upon the relentless thong, directly across his neck! The ground was gently sloping from the tree, and though the green, mossy turf showed marks of a fierce struggle for the regaining of his former position, yet the doomed man appeared not to have gain-

For several minutes Chiron gazed in silence upon the fearful scene before him, for it seemed to be the work of a power higher than his own.

"Master Gilman," murmured the hunter to himself, "the hand of an outraged God has settled upon you. I meant not that you should have died yet, for I had use for you, and I was willing that your insulted country should have had the hanging of you. But it's done, for you've hung yourself, and my soul is washed from your blood."

As Chiron spoke he drew his kuife from its sheath and cut the thong. The body rolled heavily down the slope, and as it settled at the hunter's feet he grasped it by the collar of the frock and dragged it within the bushes, and having covered it over with leaves, he started once more on his way. The more Chiron thought of the strange manner in which Gilman and Colton had come to their deaths, the more he was satisfied with the result, and by the time he had reached the spot where his cance had been secured he thanked his fortune that he was thus rid of the two vil-

With powerful strokes the hunter propelled his frail bark down the river, and ipon reaching the residence of Sir Oliver he urged his canoe in shore and leaped upon the sand. He found the baronet in his study, together with his wife and daughter.

"Ah, Sir Oliver," exclaimed Chiron, as he had answered the compliments with which he was welcomed, "the work goes nobly on. I have the villain fast, and tomorrow I may need your assistance. This day sir, has been the scene of strange occurrences, and to-morrow, with your assistance, we will have young Chester released

"Released !--to-morrow !" uttered Sir Oliver.

"Yes, and why not ?" "Why not? Did you not release him

last night?"

" Who ?" " Orlando Chester."

"O, no; when I spoke about releasing him, I meant not to do it as soon as that,

"And do you mean to say that you have not released him?" said the baronet, in an carnest, meaning tone.

"Of course I have not," returned Chiron in surprise. "Since I saw you last I have not been below here. But what mean

"Orlando Chester has escaped from the jail, that is certain," answered Sir Oliver. "No, no! That were impossible!" ex-

claimed the old hunter, as a sudden shade.

must have been misinformed." "Tis true," iterated the baronet, with a troubled look, "for couriers have already. been dispatched in search of him. This morning his cell was found empty and the

"But he could not have escaped unaidshade of hope that he had done so.

"No. There were marks of a ladder faction, for he believed that he had now below his window, and also the footprints died, two days afterwards.

of two beside himself, so he must have had plenty of assistance.'

"Then," uttered Chiron, while a fearful convulsion shook his frame, "'tis the work of an enemy. Orlando has fallen into an adroitly laid snare. The black-hearted villain who has persecuted him knew that he could not sustain his charge, and he has adopted some new plan for the youth's ruin. Listen, sir, and I will tell you what has happened this morning, and then you may judge for yourself."

Thereupon Chiron related to the baronet all that had transpired; and as he closed his story, Sir Oliver seemed too deeply struck with indignation and wonder to make any reply; but Ada sprang forward and grasping the hunter by the arm, she cried, in a tone of touching agony:

"O, save him! save him! Bring him.

back to me, and I will bless you ever." Chiron gazed with mingled anguish and pity into the fair features that beamed upon him, and laying his hand on Ada's brow, he said :

"If the earth holds the youth I will find him, or I will lay down my life in thesearch. I love him too."

"O, bless you, bless you!" murmured. the grief-stricken girl, and then bursting into tears, she fell upon her knees and pillowed her head in her mother's lap. By this time Sir Oliver had recovered

his composure, and after gazing a moment upon the bending form of his child, he said: "Seek him out, Chiron, and if I can render assistance you may command me."

"I thank you, sir," returned Chiron. "But tell me-were there no traces to tell the way the prisoner took ?"

"They were traced only to the river," answered the baronet.

For sometime the hunter remained in deep thought, but at length he started himself from his reverie, and taking his cap in his hand, he said :

"When I came here I thought my work was almost done, but now, alas! I fear me that new obstacles are in the way. I'll surmount them, though, and you, Sir Oliver, shall be advised of my success." Then turning to Ada, he continued:

"Cheer up, lady, for all is not yet so dark but that some light gleams for you, you will yet be astonished. I must go now, but I will return to-morrow morning and give you the result of my investigation."

As the old hunter ceased speaking he took his leave and withdrew, and soon as he was once more in his canoe, he plied himself with all his might. He had not expressed in the presence of the baronet's family all the fears he felt. His own life had been openly and boldly aimed at, and why might not the same evil hand be aimed at the life of young Chester? It was the first time Chiron had given the thou home in his bosom, but now that he had conceived it, it grew stronger and stronger, until it became almost a belief.

The hunter landed at the jail, and ere long he had a full confirmation of the youth's abduction from his cell. He examined the footprints in the jail-yard, then traced them to the river; but from the officers of the prison he could learn nothing new, and with his heart tortured with a thousand fearful emotions, he started for the town. Could Chiron have been assured at that moment that Orlando lived. he would have been happy, and scarcely have held a fear; but in his heart he felt a sad forboding that such was not the case. Continued next week.

One of the counties of the State of Connecticut boasts of a judge, who, though poorly informed in regard to those little refinements usually met with in polished society, is an energetic, shrewd man, and a promising lawyer. A neighbor of his recently, was about to give away his daughter in marriage, and having a deep-rooted dislike to the clerical profession, and being determined as he said ' to have no infernal, parson in his house,' he sent for his friend, the judge, to perform the ceremony. The judge came, and the candidates for the connubial yoke taking their places before him, he thus addressed the bride ;

"You swear you will marry this man?"

"Yes, sir," was the reply. "And you," (to the bridegroom), 'swear you will marry this woman?"

"Well, I do," said the groom. "Then" said the judge, "I swear you're married P

13 At Abington, Mass., recently a young lady was making her tollet, preparatory to her wedding, which was to have taken place on the same evening, when she was taken suddenly ill, and remained in an unconscious state until she