

SWEET REVENGE

By
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Author of "Chattanooga," "Chickamauga," Etc.

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[CONTINUED.]
CHAPTER III.
A DEFINITE OBJECT.

"What did you want to kill him for?"
"I found it inconvenient to have him shooting at me."

"I'd like to shoot a man. I shot a rabbit once, but that's purty small game. Pop, he won't let me have a gun yet. He says I may have one when I'm 16."

"Buck!" called a voice from the hall. The boy dropped behind a sofa. An old negro woman entered and looked around.

"Yo, Buck! Yo' hidn' somewhar! Yo' maw'll spank yo' sho' if she catch yo' hyar troublin' the gemmen. Come out o' dar! I knows whar yo' air!"

"I was about to interfere, but a natural distaste at giving away a fellow creature caused me to desist."

"I thought I heard dat chile talkin'. The woman stood still a moment, but, hearing no sound, lumbered out of the room. The boy popped up from his hiding place as soon as she had gone.

"I like yo'!" were the first words he uttered. "Yo' wouldn't tell on a feller, would yo'?"

"How could I when you are glad I 'plunked' my enemy? Is that your mammy?"

"Yes; that's Lib."

"Nursed you on a baby?"

"Yes, an she reckons she's goin to nurse me all my life."

"Is your name Buckingham?"

"Buckingham! No! I ain't got any such doggone name as that! My name's Buckeye."

"How did you happen to get that name?"

"'Cause I was borned ther."

"Where?"

"In Buckeye."

"In Ohio?"

"Reckon 'tis the same."

I contemplated Buck for awhile without hearing any of the questions he continued to fire at me. Why not trust him with the message? There was every reason why I should not do so except that he was devoted to me and I had no one else to send. While I was deliberating Lib came in, surprised him, dragged him out of the room and shut the door.

I heard footsteps on the veranda, then in the hall, then ascending the staircase, as of people carrying a burden. The door had evidently been shut to prevent my seeing what was being done. For awhile there was a hurrying to and fro, and I knew that something unusual had occurred. After all had been quieted Buck, who had meanwhile escaped from his dusky captor, slipped back to forbidden ground.

It occurred to me that I could draw from Buck the solution of the recent commotion, but what passed under the roof of my friends was no concern of mine, and I scorned to get it from a mere boy. But I wished to test Buck's

"Why do you look at me in that way?" I asked.

She made no reply, casting down her eyes at my brown hand, which held her dimpled fingers.

"You mustn't dread me because I am obliged to fight," I continued. "These are war times. There are a great many soldiers in the land who think nothing of killing one another."

"Don't they?" She raised her eyes, wide open with surprise.

"Of course war is cruel, but—but it calls out much that is noble."

"When they kill each other?"



"Yo, Buck! Yo' hidn' somewhar!" said the old negro woman.

power of reticence. Ten to one he had been instructed not to talk to me about the mysterious occurrence.

"Buck," I asked, "who came to the house awhile ago?"

"Wasn't anybody came to the house awhile ago?"

"A sick man, wasn't it?"

"No, he wasn't sick."

"I thought you said no one came?"

"No one did."

"Of course no one came; he was carried."

"If yo' know so much about it, Mr. Brandystone, what's the use o' askin me?"

"You admit that whoever he was was sick?"

"Of course he wasn't sick. How could he be sick if he wasn't anybody?"

There was a sudden rustling in the hall, and Helen swept into the room, her eyes flashing fire.

"Buck, leave the room!" she commanded in no uncertain tone. Buck gave a glance at his sister, which told him he had better obey, and walked out reluctantly.

"You have been listening," I said curtly.

"I have not. I was coming through the hall and heard your last remark."

"And you infer that I was trying to get a secret which does not at all concern me?"

"I most assuredly do."

"You are mistaken. I care no more for what occurs in this house than for the color of the dress you happen to

wear. I had another object in questioning your brother."

"I dare say you had."

"I wished to discover if he could keep a secret."

"I dare say you did."

"I have intended nothing dishonorable."

"Fudge!" She snapped her fingers and her eyes at the same time.

"You don't believe me, Very well, I don't believe that you were not eavesdropping."

"I was not eavesdropping!" she cried hotly. "You have the word of a southern lady."

"And I was not trying to get your secret. You have the word of a"— I stopped short. I had run against a snag. She gave me a glance of contempt and triumph. Her head was up, a little to one side, her nostrils dilated, her breath slow and measured.

"Miss Stanforth," I said—I was near betraying what I demanded secrecy—"I will prove to you before night—no, not before night, but soon—that I had another object. I will no longer remain in a house the inmates of which—I made a step toward the door.

"Mr. Branderstane!"

"Miss Stanforth!"

"In addition to sailing under false colors you are now going to endanger your life by—"

"Fudge! What is my life to you?" I snapped my fingers.

"A good deal just now. It is unpleasant to have a person die on one's hands."

I was in no condition for this encounter. A buzzing was going on in my ears, a tingling sensation in my limbs. My knees were giving way, and I was obliged to sit down on the sofa. I looked longingly at a bottle of brandy that stood on the table, but was too proud to ask for it. In a moment Helen had poured some of the liquor into a tumbler and held it to my lips. I drank a reviving draft. She put her hands on my shoulders and gently forced me to lie down.

"This must not occur again," she said. "You have no strength to go, and I have no right to excite you while in your present condition. I believe what you told me." She put out her hand.

"Pardon," I said humbly. "When calm, I was as soon think of accusing you of eavesdropping as I would accuse Diana of unchastity. I have been ungallant, rude—rude to a woman."

"Eorget it. Lie still, and you will soon be yourself again." She sat down by a table and took up a book. "I will sit here and read while you recover your strength."

She read for perhaps half an hour. I supposed she was interested in the book, for she turned one page after another and seemed to have forgotten me. At last she put down the volume, and by her first words convinced me that instead of being interested in it she had been thinking of my puzzling identity.

"I want to ask you one question."

"Ask it."

"Where did you come from the day the shooting occurred?"

"Huntsville."

She had asked the one question and had received her reply. I knew by her expression that she wanted to ask another.

"I suppose you were there long enough to become acquainted with the city. It's a beautiful place."

"I was there a week."

The limit of one question having been overstepped in this indirect fashion, it was easier for her to proceed.

"What were you doing there?"

"Looking for some one."

"A man?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

I did not reply at once. I was thinking of some plan by which to put an end to her catechizing.

"If I tell you," I said presently, "will you promise to ask me no more questions?"

"If you prefer that I should not."

"You wish to know why I was seeking my man at Huntsville?"

"I do."

"You will keep what I tell you a secret?"

"Yes."

"To kill him."

CHAPTER IV.
WON OVER.

LITTLE BUCK had stood my test as to his reticence so well and I was at such desperate straits for a messenger that I resolved to use him. After breakfast I waited for awhile, hoping that he would come to my room, but as he did not I feared he was deterred by the autocratic Lib. I called Jackson and told him to tell the boy I wished to see him. I took a Confederate bill from my pocket and handed it to the dandy, but he went off grumbling that he didn't "want no Yankee money, and mas' wouldn't hab no nigger o' his'n takin' money from a stranger nohow." He sent Buck to me, who came in looking somewhat astonished that I should take sufficient interest in him to call for him.

"Buck," I said, "I have something important to say to you."

"What is it, Mr. Brandystone?"

"Branderstane. Please don't make that mistake agaln."

"I won't, sho."

"Buck, I'm thinking of sending you on an errand, but it's a great secret."

The boy's eyes grew as big as saucers. I looked at him for a few moments to observe the effect of my announcement and then went on:

"If you should tell any one, it might cost me my life. You wouldn't tell, would you?"

"Tell! Why, sooner 'n tell I'd—I'd—rather be a—a—a—dead rat out in the back yard."

"I believe I'll trust you. Do you know the road to Huntsville?"

"I reckon so. I've been over it more'n a dozen times."

"Get a pony?"

"Yes; Pete. He'll, she drives him in the buggy. She calls him hern, but he isn't. He's mine. I got a big dog too."

"Never mind the dog. Could you get out your pony and ride into Huntsville?"



"What are you thinking about?" I asked, without any one suspecting you were going on my account.

"Well, now, why don't yo' give me some'n hard?"

"Go and get me a newspaper or an almanac."

He was out of the room and back in a moment with a Huntsville paper of that morning's issue. I scanned its columns before looking at the date and noticed this item:

The main body of the Yankees are marching from Nashville to Columbia en route, it is supposed, to Pittsburg Landing, where they will doubtless join the Federal General Grant.

Looking at the heading, I saw that the date was the 1st of April.

"Now, Buck," I said, "get out your pony; then come to me for instructions."

"Look a-hyar, Mr. Brandy—Brandy—stone—"

"Branderstane."

"Well, Mr. Brandystone, if yo' got any 'structions I reckon yo' better give 'em to me now. Mebbe if I come back hyar that doggone ole Lib'll come in an yank me out."

"You're right. Reach me that sheet of note paper and a book to write on—that thin one; now a pencil. All right. Don't say a word till I have finished."

I wrote a message in an indistinct characters as I was able on a third of a sheet of paper:

Machine shops at Huntsville in good order. Fifty to 20 locomotives. Nearly a hundred cars. No force in the town. To the east road runs parallel with and near the pike for several miles and is handy to cut. To the west party to cut the road must pass round the city on the north. Enemy gathering all possible forces at Pittsburg Landing, but several thousand men at Chattanooga.

I put neither address nor signature to it, as none was necessary, and they would be conclusive evidence against me if the message should fall into the wrong hands.

"Buck," I said, "mount your pony and ride to Huntsville. A few minutes before 12 o'clock go into the Huntsville hotel; you know—the big brick house on the square. Go up stairs and out on the front gallery. At 12 o'clock a man with black eyes, long hair and a pointed beard will walk out on the gallery. Don't say anything to him. Wait, and after awhile he'll say something to you."

"Will he?" asked the boy, his eyes full of wonder. "What'll he say?"

"He'll say, 'It's a fine day.'"

"What if it rains?"

"Yes; rain or shine, if he's the man you want, he'll say, 'It's a fine day.' Then you must say, 'Reckon you're weather wise, stranger.' To that he'll reply by asking you what kind of weather it was the day of the massacre."

"What massacre? What's a massacre?"

"Never mind that. Stick to the lesson I'm teaching you. You must say 'Black as night.' Then he'll say 'What's the word?' and you can hand him this note. Now, suppose I'm the man with the pointed beard and you go through the dialogue with me."

I put him through his lesson till he had learned it perfectly. Then I sent him away with the injunction that, in case anything should go wrong with him, rather than part with the paper he was to swallow it. I rolled it into a ball and put it into the lining of his hat. Giving his little hand a squeeze, I bade him go, and he marched out as proudly as if he had been appointed military governor of Alabama. I had no doubt he would execute his mission to the best of his ability, but he was very young, and I feared he would make some blunder.

"What a fool I am!" I exclaimed as soon as he was gone. "I should have failed to communicate rather than trust so important a matter to a boy. However, I'll leave here tomorrow morning, and if my message miscarries, by the time it's discovered I'll be somewhere else."

Helen came in soon after Buck's departure and began to set the room to rights. She attended to her work silently and did not even look at me. I watched her as she moved about, arranging a curtain here, moving a chair there or piling books on the table more neatly. She was a true type of a southern woman—tall, willowy, a head set on her shoulders in a way to make an artist involuntarily reach for a brush. Her hair and eyes were as black as night, while on her cheeks was a bright color. There was something on her mind. I could see that plainly. I fancied if I gave her time it would come out. At last she dropped her work and stood looking out of the window.

"What are you thinking about?" I asked, going at the subject with brusque directness.

"The man you came to Alabama to kill."

"You would shield him?"

She kept her eyes on the road, watching a wagon that lumbered by. "I don't know whether I would or not."

"You want to know all about him?"

"I do."

"In the first place you would like his name?"

"It might be well to begin with that."

"Then I can't begin, for I don't know his name."

"Not know his name?"

"No."

"What is he like?"

"Tall, well built; square shoulders, which he throws back like an officer in the regular army of the United States."

I paused. She waited for me to continue.

"You would also like to know whether his death would bereave any one—a father, mother, sister, some woman who hangs upon every word he says when he is with her and dreams of him constantly when he is away?" I spoke the words bitterly. I had an inkling of my loss.

"Yes, I would like to know that too."

"I can't satisfy you. I have seen him only once and then at a distance."

"Does he wish to kill you?"

"No; I don't believe he is aware of my existence."

"Singular," she murmured thoughtfully. Then she turned and looked me in the face. "He has occasioned you some great sorrow—done you some mighty wrong?"

"You promised to ask me no more questions."

"True. I beg your pardon."

Another woman would have pouted, coaxed, done everything but asked openly to have her curiosity gratified. Helen Stanforth was made of sterner stuff. She stood looking out of the window without another word. I waited till I was satisfied that she was too proud to ask for favor, then started in again with the purpose of watching the development of some other mood.

"You are heart and soul a Confederate?"

"I am."

"And you will not excuse those southern men and women who differ with you?"

"Yes, if they do it openly."

"This was a cut at me which I did not care to notice. 'Have you ever seen,' I asked, 'men forced at the point of the bayonet to enter the Confederate army? Have you ever seen families trying to leave the south to join those with whom they affiliated shot down in their tracks?'"

"You are a Union man, or you would never talk that way," she interrupted.

"I was born and bred in Tennessee."

"Yes, in east Tennessee."

"May I not have seen great wrong done and yet given my heart and soul to the southern cause?"

"You may, but have not."

She was getting too near the truth. I must throw her off the trail.

"I will impart one more piece of information with regard to myself. You have promised to ask no more questions and have kept your promise. You deserve a reward."

I took from my pocket a letter and held it up to her. It was addressed to—

MAJOR JOHN BRANDERSTANE,
—th Tennessee Cavalry,
Murfreesboro, Tenn.

Her face lighted. She did not know there were Tennessee regiments in the Union service. "I knew you were a soldier, and now I know you are a Confederate." She put out her hand, but I did not take it.

"No, no," I said. "I will not take an unfair advantage of you. That evidence is not conclusive. I have shown it to you to prove that I may be what I will. I could offer as good proof that I am a Yankee."

"I don't care who you are, you are an honorable man."

"I see no reason for you to assume that."

"You have said it would be easy for you to prove to me that you are what I wish you to be?"

"Granted."

"But you will not. You have reason to remain unknown; you have a great purpose; you have been robbed of some one you love; you have suffered from some of those outrages in east Tennessee that papa has told us about. There has been a cowardly murder. You will be revenged. I know it; I feel it."

She was splendid in her indignation, her sympathy. I protested against this burst of confidence, but to no purpose. Were I the veriest demon in Moloch's train no one could convince her of it, but I had gained an insight into his life, but I had gained the ways of woman, but I had gained an insight into this girl's nature. Though it smoldered, it was emotional. No light killing could set it aflame. There must be some strong underlying impulse. The purpose that I had revealed to her had taken hold of her imagination.

But it troubled her that I should withhold my secret from her. She gave me an appealing look.

"Why do you not trust me?"

"I do trust you. Am I not at your mercy? Should you inform the authorities that you have an unaccounted for man under your roof I should be arrested at once."

"I would never do that."

"No, but will you aid me in remaining incognito?"

She was silent. There was evidently a question which she was trying to solve. "Would that be helping you to kill your man?" she asked.

"Suppose it would?"

There was a dangerous glitter in her eyes. Perhaps she experienced a fascination in being thus indirectly a party to my work of vengeance.

"You have not answered my question," I said.

Still she was silent. The blood was coming and going auroralike on her neck and cheek. Presently she drew her lips together tightly as if she were striking an enemy.

"I will."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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CONDENSED TIME TABLE
IN EFFECT JULY 1, 1901.

NORTH BOUND.	
EASTERN TIME.	4 6 10 14 2
Pittsburg Leave	A. M. 9:00 P. M. 4:10
Albion	9:15 4:25
Brooklyn	9:30 4:40
Buffalo	9:45 4:55
Gettysburg	10:00 5:10
Hamlet	10:15 5:25
Johnstown	10:30 5:40
Mayfield	10:45 5:55
Oran	11:00 6:10
Pittsburg Arrive	11:15 6:25
Albion	11:30 6:40
Brooklyn	11:45 6:55