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The Battle for the Cedars.

BY PRESSLY W. MORRIS.

CONTINUED.

BARBARA'S heart did not beat quite so rapidly. After all, the dog would probably not harm her. She took hold of the chain, and pulled the boat to the shore. But just as she was on the point of stepping out, the creature on the shore sprang to his feet with a fierce growl, his bristles erect, his tongue out, his white fangs gleaming.

With a cry of terror Barbara sprang toward the back part of the boat, and fell prostrate in it. The dog leaped toward her. By some means he missed the object for which he sprang. His huge body came in contact with the boat, forcing it out in the stream, while he tumbled into the water. Barbara regained her feet, and the beast swam to the shore. There he stood baying in baffled rage, while the girl, seizing the oar, held the boat out from the bank, her face white with terror.

"Help! help!" she screamed. The brute came closer. He seemed to be preparing for another leap. If he should leap, not reaching the boat, he would, in all possibility, overturn it.

"Help! help!" Barbara screamed. Suddenly a man appeared behind the dog, in answer to Barbara's cries. He grasped in his hands a huge club. With one glance he took in the danger, and then approached closer with swift but stealthy tread. He struck a terrific blow and Barbara's peril was ended, for by that blow the dog was knocked into the stream, giving as he went a wild howl of pain. The man drew the boat to the shore, and springing in it lifted Barbara out. She was very pale, and he placed her on the grassy bank.

"Oh, it was terrible!" she cried. Shortly she rose to her feet. "I will escort you to your home," the stranger said; "that is, if you permit me."

Barbara murmured her thanks. The man offered his arm, which she took gratefully, for she felt that she needed aid.

"I am sorry to trouble you so much," she said, as they started off. "It is a mile and a half to where I am staying."

"Do I look as though a walk of a mile and a half would fatigue me greatly?" said the man, with a pleasant smile.

Certainly he did not look so, for he was tall and powerfully built; a man with splendid athletic figure, noble in his proportions.

"I think, after I leave these grounds," Barbara said, "I can get along alone."

"I shall not leave you till you are safe at your destination," was the reply. "You are pale and weak."

The man's voice thrilled Barbara, it was so rich and musical. Involuntarily she raised her eyes, and beheld his eyes beaming down upon her. They were beautiful eyes, magnetic in their power, telling of a brave and generous heart. Even in this moment Barbara thought that this stranger would be strikingly handsome if it were not for one thing; and that was, that he wore a huge red beard, which entirely concealed the lower part of his face.

Barbara grew silent for a time. She shuddered as she thought of the danger from which she had escaped. Was this adventure ominous? Did any monster stand between her and her inheritance?

"I have not told you my name," she suddenly said to the stranger. "Excuse me. It is Barbara Lindsley?" "Thank you," he returned. He seemed to hesitate for a moment.

"Mine is Victor," he said presently. "A very suitable name," Barbara murmured, with a smile. Mr. Victor's face flushed; but he ignored the remark. Barbara was beginning to feel much better.

"That estate over which I was rambling belongs to a man by the name of Cashel, I believe," Victor said. "Yes," was the rather constrained answer; "Mr. Lionel Cashel is the gentleman who possesses the property."

"How long has he been in possession? I understand that he inherited it from a somewhat distant relative."

"I believe that Mr. Cashel has held the estate for some two or three years," Barbara said. "I heard in Fairmount, from which place I rode down this afternoon, that there is another claimant," said Mr. Victor in a careless tone; "and I was told that there is to be a great lawsuit. Have you heard anything about it?"

"Yes," said Barbara. "Yonder is my destination, just in view."

Mr. Victor lifted his eyes in the direction of the De Vere residence. No more was said about the Cashel estate. Ten minutes later, the two stood by an iron gate close behind the house.

"Will you enter?" Barbara said to Mr. Victor. "Thank you, no," he replied. "I left a horse standing a few hundred yards away from the scene of your adventure; and I must hasten back, Miss Lindsley."

"At any rate, Mr. Victor," said Barbara, "you must call soon, so that I can suitably express my thanks for the great service you rendered me."

"No thanks are necessary," said the man. "I could not have done less. I was wandering through those grounds when I heard your cries, was near to you, and knocked that ugly brute into the stream. That was all."

"Yet you saved my life," said Barbara, smiling up into his face. Mr. Victor yet lingered. "Miss Lindsley," he said abruptly, pulling a glove from his pocket,—her glove—"you dropped this by the banks of that stream, and I picked it up."

He paused. His eyes were shining down upon the girl. She waited for him to continue. "Will it be too much of a favor to bestow this upon me?" he said presently.

"Certainly not," murmured Barbara. "If you wish it, you may keep the glove, Mr. Victor."

Victor turned, and was gone, the glove still in his hand. She went to the house, and up to her room, the stranger's rich, musical voice ringing in her ears, his eyes flashing before her vision.

"Her face is forever fixed upon my heart," Mr. Victor said to himself as he hastened on. "If we never meet again, I shall not forget her. And her glove shall be to me what his lady's guerdon was to knight of old."

Victor soon reached the place where his horse was fastened. After he was mounted, he did one thing that seemed strange. He lifted his hand, and shook it in the direction of the great gray stone mansion.

"Beware of retribution, false villain!" he muttered.

The De Veres possessed a gentle horse which Miss Lindsley rode frequently. Occasionally she mounted him, and galloped over the country alone. A couple of evenings after her adventure, she had Sultan brought out, and, mounting him, rode away unaccompanied. Along the road, through lanes, for four five miles she went. Finally she turned Sultan's head toward home, with the intention of riding thither.

A couple of miles from De Vere's residence she was letting Sultan trot leisurely along when she heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs behind her. She did not turn her head, but very soon the horse and rider overtook her. It was the master of The Cedars.

"Good-evening, Miss Lindsley," he exclaimed. Barbara returned his salutation, and he slackened the pace of his horse, riding along beside her.

"You are much improved," she said. "I am very much so," said the master of The Cedars; "in fact, as well as ever. However, I have not yet driven

that animal which ran away with me." Other remarks followed. The man rode with Barbara to De Vere's. He assisted her to dismount. Politeness demanded that she should ask him to enter; and she did so.

"Thank you," he replied, accepting her invitation. Entering, Barbara ushered him into the parlor. As it chanced, Victoria De Vere was there; so Barbara excused herself for a time. In her own room the thought presented itself to stay away.

"But I will go down," she murmured firmly. "This man may hate me some day. I am sure I will not take the first step toward raising a feud between us.—No; my treatment of him shall be as civil as I can make it."

Then she went down, the added color that her ride had given her still in her cheeks. The gaze of the master of The Cedars rested upon her admiringly.—However, she did not notice this, for she was not looking at him.

An hour or two passed pleasantly enough, and then Mr. Lionel Cashel took his leave.

But that was not the end. It became apparent very shortly that the master of The Cedars had come to the determination of being on as friendly terms as possible with the De Veres and their guest. There came a formal invitation for them all to dine with him, the day being set.

"I think we had better accept," Robert De Vere said, when the question of accepting the invitation was being discussed. "We shall probably be neighbors for years; and we may as well cultivate friendly relations with him as not."

Then he turned to Barbara Lindsley. "Miss Lindsley, will you accept?" he asked.

"I believe I would prefer to be excused," Barbara returned. Then Victoria pointedly declared that unless Barbara would go, neither would she. Barbara was finally induced to give her consent.

And so, on the appointed day, they all went to The Cedars.

Barbara's emotions when she first entered the gray stone mansion were similar to what they had been when she first looked upon it. The apartments were spacious, the furniture luxurious, but rather quaint and old-fashioned.—However, this only added to the fascination the place had for Barbara.

The dinner was magnificent and was served by colored servants. This latter item was a matter of course in a Virginia mansion.

Nothing of particular importance occurred previous to or during dinner. In spite of herself, Barbara rather enjoyed the occasion.

After the meal was finished, the master of The Cedars showed his guests over a portion of the grounds. Barbara said nothing about her adventure with the dog.

The visit ended at last. The guests, accompanied by the host, were going down a walk in front of the mansion to their carriage, when a huge dog, fierce and vicious-looking, ran across their path. Barbara beheld him, and, though there was no present danger, her heart sank in terror, and all the sensations of that time of great peril returned to her.—for this was the brute that had attacked her. The sight of him brought back the horror of that terrible scene.—She had thought that he was dead; and the thought had been a comfort to her. Was every association of The Cedars to be connected with this monster? Could his always crossing her path be an omen of doom? Barbara was not given to superstitious thoughts, but the idea made her shudder.

"What a terribly vicious-looking creature that dog of yours is," said Robert De Vere to the master of The Cedars.

"Yes, he is," was the careless reply. "I keep him chained generally; but here lately I allow him to run loose occasionally. After all, I have a kind of affection for the brute."

At that moment Barbara glanced at the man. Something in his expression reminded her of the tigerish-dog; and she shuddered again.

Only a few days after that, the master of The Cedars called at the De Vere mansion once more. As formerly, a few hours were spent agreeably enough. But

deeper and deeper was the impression growing in Barbara Lindsley's heart that she could never like this man.—When his calls began to be repeated frequently, a fear came to her that made her sick in soul. Did he intend to make love to her sweet friend Victoria? Could there be a possibility that Victoria might learn to love him? The very thought filled her soul with a strange dread. Yet why should it?

She had no tangible reason for her opinion of the master of The Cedars, she knew. Nothing but the consciousness, confessed to no one but herself, that there was something fierce, vicious, tiger-like, about the man; a consciousness that would cause her to withhold from him any one that she loved, even as she would withhold that one from a beast of prey.

Then came the question, what could she do? What indeed? Should she state to Victoria her impressions? What would that avail? She had no foundation for any such statement save her own vague fears of evil. If Victoria had aught of regard for the man, what could it avail for her to say simply that she believed him to be a bad man? Love had never been uprooted in any such manner. Victoria was gentle and affectionate, it was true; but if she loved a man would she cling to him any the less firmly for her gentleness? No.

Barbara was compelled to acknowledge to herself that she was powerless in this matter—that she could only let affairs take their course. It was highly probable that Victoria would care nothing for the master of The Cedars; but Barbara believed that it was not so with him in regard to Victoria.

Yet, after all, she was utterly mistaken. Her fears for her friend were as baseless as castle of air. Victoria filled scarcely a thought of the master of The Cedars.

Some invited guests came to De Vere's. Among them was a young man by the name of Vincent Sherwood. He had met Victoria before; and she had impressed him strongly. Now he was evidently very much attracted by her, and his attentions were rather marked.

Barbara expected to see the master of The Cedars angry with jealousy. She was disappointed. She saw that the advances Vincent Sherwood was making did not affect him, and were not regarded. He came to De Vere's as often as ever, and seemed to rather like Vincent.

Barbara began to understand that she had been mistaken, and for Victoria's sake she rejoiced greatly; at last she was made fully aware that the master of The Cedars cared naught for Victoria.

One afternoon he came, and, as it happened, found her alone in the parlor. He seated himself, and began to converse; but he grew abstracted in manner, and seemed unable to keep up his share of the conversation.

"Excuse me," said Barbara presently, "and I will summon some of the family."

She rose to her feet; but the master of The Cedars sprang before her. "Wait, Miss Lindsley," he exclaimed; "it is you I wish."

Barbara's gaze sought his face questioningly. His eyes were gleaming upon her, and in an instant she read the truth. How terribly she had been mistaken! Her strength seemed to leave her, and she sank into her seat with a kind of sob. She lifted her hand with a deprecatory gesture; but the man heeded her not.

"Miss Lindsley, I love you!" he cried. "Will you be my wife?" Suddenly strength and calmness came to her.

"Mr. Cashel, you surprise me," she said. "I did not dream of this."

"Tell me: do you love me?" exclaimed the man.

Barbara saw that it was best to end it all as soon as possible. "I am sorry for you, Mr. Cashel," she said firmly; "but I do not love you. I cannot be your wife."

"You love some one else," he exclaimed angrily. His white teeth showed; his eyes blazed upon her with a wicked light.—Barbara Lindsley could not but remember the beast that had tried to take her life.

"No," she returned; "I love no one else."

But a rich, musical voice echoed in

her ears, and a pair of eyes magnetic in their power came before her for an instant. She had spoken truly; yet a possibility flashed through her mind.—Her hero, her knight, might win her could he but have a chance.

"If you love no one else, then you shall learn to love me," said the master of The Cedars.

"I encourage no false hopes," said the girl coldly. "I never can, Mr. Cashel."

"Why not?" he questioned, more angrily than before. "I have no marks upon me to make you hate me, have I? You speak strongly when you say that in all the future there is no hope,—more strongly than the case demands."

Barbara sprang to her feet, anger in her eyes. "If you have finished, Mr. Cashel, you will excuse me," she said haughtily. "I do not choose to be insulted."

The man's anger cooled. "I beg your pardon," he said, humbly enough. "I will go myself."

And he left Barbara's presence. She ran to her room.

"Oh, why does he love me?" she cried, bursting into a passion of tears.—"Between us there is nothing in common. I hate him! I hate him! and I cannot help it. I have been blind, utterly blind; for the possibility of this never came to me. It fills my soul with dismay. Oh, why does he love me?"

The master of The Cedars ceased to come to the De Vere residence. Once when Barbara was out riding he passed her. As he did so, he gave her merely a cold glance.

The first of August approached. Barbara made an announcement to the De Veres.

"I am going to Baltimore," she said. "You don't mean that," Victoria said. "I thought you were going to remain with us till winter."

"I positively must go in a week," Barbara replied seriously; "but, Victoria, I will try to return by the middle of August."

"You will try!" exclaimed Victoria. "One would suppose that it might be impossible. Barbara, I will never forgive you if you not come back and remain until Christmas. Unless you promise me that, I will not let you go at all."

"I promise to return; 'but'—"

"I want no conditions," interrupted Victoria imperatively. "Promise in full."

"I will return; but after that we will decide how long I am to remain," persisted Barbara.

One pleasant summer afternoon, late in July, Robert De Vere drove Barbara over to the station. The train rushed up, and she found herself on board.—Then she was away.

Several hours passed. Night came down on earth. The train plunged on through the darkness.

All of the incidents that had occurred while she was at the De Vere's passed before Barbara's memory, from the adventure with the vicious dog to the declaration of the master of The Cedars. The great gray stone mansion, to think of which always thrilled her, because she knew it should have been her home, rose up before her imagination. It pleased her to think of The Cedars, and caused her to shudder to remember the possessor of the estate.

Barbara became weary. Nature asserted herself, and the girl fell into a slight doze. She had a terrible dream.—She imagined that the master of The Cedars was pursuing her, face hideous and distorted, she fleeing before him in dread. Suddenly her flight was stopped by coming to a steep precipice. She glanced down into the yawning gulf before her feet, and beheld his fierce, vicious-looking dog, his red mouth open, his white, cruel fangs gleaming.

With a wild scream she threw herself from the precipice, thinking that the monster below could not be more cruel than the one above. There was an answering scream, and then Barbara awoke. She found herself standing erect, cold chills of terror running over her.—The shriek of the locomotive had awakened her. There was a fierce grating sound beneath her feet, and in an instant there came a terrific crash. Darkness seemed to envelop Barbara, and she became unconscious.—To be continued.