

# CAMILLA

BY BEATRICE MAREAN.

Author of "The Tragedies of Oakhurst," "Won At Last," "Her Shadowed Life," "The Fireman's Heart," "When A Woman Loves," Etc., Etc.

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Respectfully Dedicated to  
CAPT. AUGUSTUS OSWALD MACDONELL,  
SENIOR,  
of Jacksonville, Fla.  
By  
THE AUTHOR.

## CHAPTER XX.

### ON THE BORDERLAND OF ETERNITY

Miss Bennett breathing, but still unconscious, was carried tenderly by Governor Murriatte and Captain Haelton, into the house and placed upon the bed in her room. Then the latter gentleman leaving her in the care of the inmates of Beaumont, dashed down stairs to go in quest of physicians to attend the injured lady.

He almost ran over Mrs. Cameron and Ray who were coming in at the hall door, supporting the weeping Imogen between them.

"How is she?" the new arrivals asked simultaneously with an anxious gasp in their voices.

"She is alive, I am going for the doctors," he replied hurriedly and running down the piazza steps, and flinging himself into the saddle of his waiting horse he was off as if borne on the wings of the wind.

"You must sit down with Ray, dear, while I go and see your mother" Mrs. Cameron said leading Imogen into the dark drawingroom. "Ring for lights, son, and then come and then come and sit on the sofa with Imogen until I return."

"Please let me go with you," Imogen entreated.

"No, you must not," the lady said hurrying away.

Ray drew the girl to the sofa, and sitting down beside her put his arm around her waist and continued to comfort her as he had done on their way home. She leaned her head on his shoulder and sat mute and despairing.

The servant who came to light the gas, started back with a word of apology as her eye fell on this unusual spectacle, presented by the young couple.

"Miss Imogen is overcome with grief on account of Miss Bennett's accident," Ray explained and the colored woman who herself had been weeping, advanced and as she applied a match to the gas said in a sobbing voice:

"I 'clar foh de Lawd Mr. Ray, dis was an awful thing to happen ter de pore young lady. She looks zackly like she ware daid; but dey shore say she's still breathin'?"

"Oh Polly, have you seen her, and do you think she will die?" Imogen asked anxiously as she raised her head from Ray's shoulder.

"Yas honey, I holpe put her on de baid. I trus' she won't die, but Oh, my sufferin' Jesus hit do like she will."

Imogen laid her head down again despairingly, and Polly continued, "but you mussen cry and take on so, honey tank de good Lawd dat hit haint you dat is hurt for dat would hab killed your pore maw and paw. I heah de doctars a comin' so, you jes' hush yo' fuss, honey, an, I will go an heah what dey say an cum an tell yo' all;" and Polly glided out of the room to search for a few crumbs of comfort for her young mistress.

The sound of the foot-steps of several persons entering the hall and ascending the stairs was heard by the pale watchers in the drawingroom, and then all was still but the monotonous tick, tock; tick tock, of the great hall clock as it measured off the anxious moments.

Nearly an hour passed so, when Governor Murriatte looking more pale and worn than anyone had ever seen him look before, entered the drawingroom. Both Imogen and Ray started up and the girl sprang to meet her father with a cry of alarm upon her lips.

"Oh, papa, is Miss Bennett dead?" she cried.

He wound his arms about her and drew her upon his lap and held her to his breast for a moment in silence.

"She is not dead, he said at length. "The physicians have examined her critically, and report that there are no bones broken. They

give us very little encouragement, however, in regard to her recovery as she is suffering from concussion of the brain."

"Imogen burst into tempestuous weeping, while Ray turned aside to dash away to tear drops which hung on his long lashes.

Governor Murriatte patted his daughter's head in fond sympathy and pressed her form almost convulsively to his heart; but he attempted no words of consolation and in a few moments Mrs. Murriatte coming softly into the drawing room found them thus.

There was a deeply troubled look on the lady's face as Imogen raised her head from where it had been resting on her father's bosom and cried:

"Oh! poor Miss Bennett. Isn't it terrible mama? How I wish I had let her go to St. Augustine yesterday as she wished to do and then this terrible accident would not have happened. I shall never forgive myself if she dies, never mama never;" and the affectionate girl began to wring her hands and weep afresh.

"You must not grieve so my darling," cried Mrs. Murriatte in great alarm at her daughter's distress. "You are in no wise to blame for the accident which befell Miss Bennett, and to give away to your feelings in this manner will not help matters, but will only serve to make them worse for you will make your self ill. Come with me now to your room and try to be calm. For my own part I feel that Miss Bennett will recover."

She had approached her daughter's side and was holding her hand in her own as she uttered the last sentence which seemed fraught with hope for Miss Bennett's recovery. Governor Murriatte lifted his head and like a drowning man grasping at a straw, a beam of hope shot across his pale face, which did not fall unnoticed before his wife's eyes or those of Ray Cameron.

"Go with your mother, now my darling, and perhaps the morning light will see your fears dispelled and your governness convalescent," he said gently to Imogen.

The girl kissed him and arose to leave the room.

"Good night Ray," she said, taking both her friend's hands in her's, "I cannot express how grateful, I am to you for your goodness to me this terrible afternoon. If you had not been with us I fear I should have done something desperate."

"Thank the Lord that I was with you then, Imogen, although I was not able to do half as much as I wish I might have done. Good night dear. May your dear mother's prophecy be fulfilled," he said earnestly.

He walked with them to the foot of the stairs, and Mrs. Murriatte paused on the first step to say:

"Your mother told me to tell you, Ray, that she will be down in a few minutes to go home with you. Come in tomorrow and give me an opportunity to thank you for your kindness and manly courage this afternoon.

"Oh, please don't mention it," he said, You would not if you knew how little I was able to do for any one. Good night, Mrs. Murriatte. Please tell mother that I await her pleasure. Good night again, Imogen, I shall be over early in the morning to see how you are and trust I shall find your tears all dried, by your smiles over Miss Bennett's promised recovery."

## CHAPTER XXI.

### A VISIT TO THE SICKROOM.

"Mother do you think that Miss Bennett and Mr. Whitham are engaged?"

Mrs. Cameron and Ray were walking their horses slowly homeward through the summer starlight on the evening of Miss Bennett's accident, when Ray suddenly put the question to his mother.

"I do not know what to think

about it, Ray," she answered thoughtfully. "I had been expecting to hear the engagement announced because I am sure they are lovers, but since Mr. Whitham left home for his summer vacation without an announcement of his engagement to Miss Bennett I am inclined to think they are not engaged. Why do you ask my son?"

"I was thinking whether we ought to send him a telegram informing him of the accident. I have his New York address and if you think best I will go on down to the office," said Ray.

Mrs. Cameron studied the proposition in silence and then said: "I should not send it tonight, but wait and see how Miss Bennett is tomorrow. Perhaps she may then be rational, and if she is engaged to Mr. Whitham she may request someone to send him a telegram. On the other hand if she is not engaged to him it might be very mortifying to her pride should we wire him."

"Very well, mother, I will do as you think best, but I do hope Miss Bennett will be better in the morning. Ah! here is father coming to meet us," Ray broke off to say as a horseman approached them. "We staid so late he undoubtedly became uneasy about us."

They touched up their horses and were soon joined by Mr. Cameron, how, as Ray surmised was coming to see what had detained them so long.

The shadows of the gloom which hung heavily over Beaumont cast its shadow that evening over the usually happy family of Mr. Cameron and little was talked of between the trio except the accident and its probably fatal results.

Meanwhile the lights were turned low at Beaumont and the stillness which ever hovers over a household when the wings of the Angel of Death hang poised above it, reigned through the mansion.

Imogen, who had not been permitted to see Miss Bennett was put to bed and was sleeping under the gentle influence of an opiate, while her mother sat watching by her side. The physicians having given minute instructions in regard to the patient, had left the house for the night unless again summoned, and Polly, who was a natural born nurse was placed in the sickroom.

The clock struck ten and Mrs. Murriatte bent for a moment over her sleeping daughter whose regular breathing denoted that she had forgotten her sorrow in the sweet embrace of sleep, and then the mother stole softly from the room. The door to Miss Bennett's dressing room opened into the hall and Mrs. Murriatte noiselessly turned the knob and entered the room. The dressing room was separated from the one in which the injured girl lay by a portiere, one side of which was looped back, and with noiseless footsteps the lady crossed the room and paused by the sufferers bed, Polly, who was sitting by the bedside closely watching the patient, started in alarm when her eyes fell upon the form of her mistress.

"I 'clar for goodness' honey," she exclaimed, "how you done sker'd me; yo' cum floatin' in 'zactly lik' a sperit, an' I never nos' yo' is on de place 'til yo' 'peared to me by de baid. Yo' done gimme de creeps chile."

"How is Miss Bennett, Polly?" whispered Mrs. Murriatte.

"She's mighty bad off, mam. A while ago she dun open her eyes a minit, tinks I, she comin' outen hit, but she jes' stare a minit and den shet 'm up agin, an lay de same," and Polly shook her head doubtfully.

Are you certain you are following the physician's directions, Polly?" the lady inquired anxiously.

"Sartin, sho' honey, I keeps de ile silk filled with ice on her haid, an' I gibe her de draps every half hour, an' I watches her ebry bref," Polly declared confidentially.

"Very well, be sure and do not neglect her a moment, and if you need me ring the bell and I will come immediately. I shall be sitting with Miss Imogen," advised Mrs. Murriatte.

"How is my pore lam," asked Polly sympathetically. "I 'clar' to de Lawd, Miss Alva, I was so sorry foh dat chile, I did'nt know what to git about. She had dun' cride her self mite'n nigh into fits when she got home, an I'se skeered hits gwine ter make her sick, pore little baby."

"It was an awful shock to her, bu

she is sleeping quietly now and I hope she will be much better in the morning," Mrs. Murriatte answered.

Then the lady bent for moment above the unconscious girl's face which was as white as the pillow upon which the golden hair streamed, fine and soft as silken floss. A white bandage bound around the head hid the white forehead from view and Mrs. Murriatte pressed a kiss on the white cheek of the sufferer. Poor girl," she murmured, with a sob in her voice, "this was a terrible thing to befall you. "I am going now," she said to the watcher, as she turned away. "Don't forget my instructions, but if you do not call me I shall come in again in an hour or two to see how she is."

"Is you gwine ter stay up all night, honey?" Polly asked.

"Yes, I should not think of retiring while Miss Bennett's condition is so alarming," and the mistress of Beaumont glided away as noiselessly as she came.

About an hour latter Polly was startled by a low tapping upon the door leading into the hall. She tiptoed to the door and opening it saw Governor Murriatte standing on the threshold. His face was pale and haggard while anxiety was pictured on every feature.

"I came to inquire about Miss Bennett. How is she Polly?" he asked.

"Guvner, she jest de same, only a little weaker, if any thing," Aunt Polly answered solemnly.

"Are you alone," he asked.

"Yes, sah," she answered.

"May I come in a little while Polly?" he next asked.

"Sartinly, sah. Hit don't make no diff'rence, hans' Mis' Bennett haint got her sense, and she'll neber no you'se been heah, an' I haint gwine tell nobody," the nurse replied.

He crossed the room noiselessly and paused beside the bed and looked down on the pitiful sight and a smothered sob of anguish burst from his lips.

"She'll neber, cum outen dis, sah—neber," sighed Polly.

"Had n't we better send for the doctors again?" he asked.

"No, sah, hit ain't no use: 'cause dey's dum all dey can do. We'll jes' carry out de obstructions an' trus' de good Lawd to do the res'," was Polly's answer.

"Are you sure you are carrying out the instructions?" he asked anxiously.

"Sho as de stars shine, sah; I keeps de hot bottles to her feet, de ice on her haid, an' I gibs her dese draps eber thirty minits," and Polly enumerated each office she performed, on her fingers, to make sure that none were forgotten.

He made no reply, but stood watching the unconscious face on the pil-

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