

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 XXII.

THE WIFE'S DISCOVERY AND FLIGHT.

After the nurse had left the room Governor Murriatte stood for a few moments looking down upon the unconscious woman. Then a spasm of pain convulsed his high-bred features, and sinking down upon his knees this dignified statesman, who in the eyes of his fellowmen had ever been the embodiment of proud reserve, cried out in a voice of agony:

"Oh my God! my God! was ever man punished for his sins as I have been?"

He buried his face in his hands, and rocked his body to and fro in anguish of mind; then uncovering his face he addressed the apparently dying woman thus: "My darling, my poor wronged one! Must I see you die before I hear your sweet lips say that you have forgiven the awful wrong I have wrought against your innocent life. If God would only will it so, how gladly would I give my life to save yours. Oh wretched man that I am. Oh sweet one speak one word to me before I lose you forever!"

Attracted by slight noise he lifted his head and looked toward the parted portiers and the figure of his wife stood before him.

Never to his dying day did Governor Murriatte forget the picture she presented. She was dressed in a pale blue silk dressing gown which opened upon an underskirt of exquisite lace and embroidery. Her hair was caught up and twisted into a soft knot at the back of her head. She had grasped the portier with her right hand, as though to keep herself from falling, and her wide sleeve falling back revealed an arm of exquisite fairness. Scorn and contempt blazed in her eyes, while her features resembled those of an angry and avenging goddess.

"My wife!" he cried, springing toward her.

"Back!" she cried with an angry stamp of her slippered foot.

"Do not come near me less God strikes you dead. Villian, perjurer, hypocrite that you are!"

He cowed back for a minute before this assault of burning words as though a deadly missile had exploded at his feet. Then his self position reasserting itself he started toward her again crying: "Oh! my wife! do not condemn me unheard, but listen patiently to the confession I have to make."

"How dare you call me by the sacred name of wife? I whom you have hood-winked into aiding you in your vile schemes of seduction! Coward! traitor, and vile seducer of female virtue! I need no confession from you, your own false lips have already informed me of all that I need to know. Depart from my presence, and I pray God I may never look upon your face again."

She turned majestically away and he heard her close the hall door of the dressing room behind her. Starting up as if awakening with difficulty from some horrible night mare, he fled after her. He caught a glimmer of her silken robe as she flew along the wide hall, and opening a door to the right disappeared from his view. He marched up to the door and knocked, boldly, but no voice bade him enter. He tried the door, it was locked and bolted.

"Alva!" he cried, "For God's sake, open the door and hear what I have to say."

He listened for an answer but the silence was unbroken. He knocked and called again, and receiving no response, went to his wife's rooms and finding them empty went to her boudoir but it was closed and locked. He came down stairs searched through the parlor, drawingroom, and sitting-room and even went into the breakfast and dining rooms, but his search was in vain. He went back into the front hall and taking down

his hat and light top coat donned them and went out into the starlit night.

He took the path leading to his stables; saddled his own horse and leading him out of the avenue gate threw himself into the saddle galloped away through the dark woods.

Governor Murriatte did not observe a female figure wrapped in a long cloak from head to foot, which had stolen down the path behind him, which from its vantage ground behind a large tree growing near the avenue gate, watched him as he led his horse out and rode away. When the clatter of the horses hoofs died away in the distance this figure left its hiding place and going with hasty foot steps toward the coachman's house which was situated some distance from the stable knocked sharply at the door. When it was opened the voice of Mrs. Murriatte from without said:

"James, what time does the north bound train on the Seaboard Air Line railroad pass here?"

"At 3:30 in de mornin', mam", James answered promptly.

"Well, I want you to get the carriage ready and be at the front door by three o'clock sharp. Do you understand me?" she commanded.

"Yes'm. Ise to hab de horses and kerige at de front doah at 3 o'clock, sharp. All right, mam; any other orders, mam?"

"No, only the ones given you and be sure you are at the door on time" the lady answered, as she walked hastily away.

"De Lawd knows! Dat sure am a kurius caper, de mistress comin out in de dark night to order her kerige and horses. Wonder why she did'n seen some of dem lazy niggers from de house," soliquized James as he turned away to get ready to fulfill his mistress orders.

The clock was striking the midnight hour as Mrs. Murriatte entered the house. She went immediately to her daughter's room. Imogen was still in a deep sleep and the lady rang the bell which was used at night to summons her maid. It was answered in a few moments by a tall fine looking mulatto woman.

"Diana," the lady said, as the woman entered your young mistress and myself will leave home on the three o'clock train this morning and you are to go with us. Will it take you long to get your clothing ready to go?"

"No, mam", the woman replied, looking the wonder she dare not express at this sudden announcement. "My clothin' is already dun sent to de depot when your baggage was sent, mam."

"Very well, get Miss Imogen's travelling suit and my own and make all other preparations for our departure. Be as quick and as quiet as you can do not mention to any one that we are going. If Miss Imogen wakes come to my boudoir and tell me," Mrs. Murriatte said in a low tone.

"Yas'm," answered the well trained servant.

Mrs. Murriatte stopped at the bedside and looked at the sleeping girl, and Diana looking earnestly at her mistress, said:

"Is you sick, Miss Alva?"

"I do not feel well," the lady answered.

"You sho' don't honey, foh your face is as white as a pillow case, an' dere's big black lines under your eyes. I specks its cause you got so skeered yestidy eben' in when dey toted Miss Bennett home. How is de young lady? Polly told me she gwine ter die sho," the maid said.

"She is still unconscious", the lady answered as she turned away.

"Miss Alva,—scuse me mam,—but is you going ter take Miss Bennett wid you when you goes away this

mornin'?" Diana said.

"No one is going Diana, except your young mistress myself and two servants. Don't ask any more questions, but make the preparations I spoke of. I am going to my room and shall return in an hour," the lady said as she left the room and closed the door softly behind her.

She went into her boudoir and opening her writing desk wrote for almost an hour. She then returned to her daughter's room where Diana was watching; Imogen still slept. Mrs. Murriatte took up the bottle containing the opiate the physician had ordered for Imogen and studied the directions on the label carefully. "Diana, raised Miss Imogen's head I wish to give her some medicine", she said at length.

She poured out a tablespoon full of the mixture and gave it to the sleeping girl who partly awoke from the disturbance.

"Is Miss Bennett better, mama?" Imogen asked sleepily.

"Yes darling," her mother answered as she laid the young head back on the pillows, and in a few moments the girl was wrapped in an almost death like slumber.

"Diana" Mrs. Murriatte said, "go and call the butler; tell him to come here to me at once, but be sure you do not awaken any one else."

In a few moments the butler was bowing before his mistress.

"Johnston, I am going away on the next train and I want you to go with me. Make your preparations and return to this room five minutes before three o'clock."

"Yas'm."

"Be careful not to make any noise, and very careful not to let any body know that we are going. Do you understand me?" she said.

"Yas'm you may 'pend on me mam," and Johnston bowed himself out of the room.

Then Mrs. Murriatte ordered Diana to dress the sleeping girl in loose garments over which was put a long cloak, and Imogen did not wake

during the process of dressing.

"My Lawd, honey! de chile do look like she am daid!" Diana said in alarm, as she laid the still sleeping girl on the bed. "Is de Guv'ner gwine wid us mam?"

"Diana, didn't I tell you not to ask questions?" Mrs. Murriatte said sternly, "go now and get ready to start and be here five minutes before three o'clock. Be careful now not to arouse any one or speak to any one."

"Yas'm." And the woman left the room with the most puzzled look on her countenance.

At the appointed time both the servants were in the room. Mrs. Murriatte who was fully dressed and equipped for travelling, said with an unnatural calmness.

"Johnston, take the young lady in your arms and carry her to the carriage."

The man without a word took the slender figure in his strong arms and with noiseless foot-steps the trio descended the strain and entering the awaiting carriage were driven to the depot.

They arrived there a few minutes before the express train was due and Mrs. Murriatte said as she put a roll of bills in the man's hands.

"Diana, take Johnstons place and support your young mistress, Johnston take this money and purchase four tickets to St. Louis, Mo., and have my baggage which is in the baggage room checked to the same place and secure me a section in the sleeping car, and return to the carriage as soon as possible."

The servant hastened to obey the orders and by the time the man returned the whistle of the incoming train was heard in the distance.

He gave the lady the tickets he had purchased and the money that was left and Mrs. Murriatte said:

"Take Miss Imogen in your arms and carry her to the platform."

The dawn was trembling faintly in the eastern sky as the train with a puff and snort came to a standstill.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 9)

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