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"ECHOES of the Past;

The Recompense of Love!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

"No, dearest," she said, and she spoke the sweet word unhesitatingly; for with death so near there was no longer any need to conceal their love, and heart to heart could speak freely. The police-boat had passed up the river; I heard the two men with Koshki say so; and if you called out loud enough to be heard, the men might come back. I think they have left us because they thought we were dead or in too deep a swoon to call for help. Oh, it is bitter to lie here, and to know you are losing your life for my sake! And such a life! So great so good, of such value to the whole country, people!"

Clive laughed almost mockingly, almost derisively. "Put that thought away from you, Mina," he said; "don't harbor it for a moment. My life! It is I who have fooled it away, I who have juggled with my happiness, and yours, yours! Lying here, like a helpless idiot, I see what a fool, what an imbecile I've been. 'But no more of that; self-reproach is useless. I can only ask you to forgive me, Mina, to tell you that I love you, have never ceased to love you since love sprang in my bosom for you. I had all unwittingly compromised Lady Edith. Thinking you did not care for me, I was in honor bound to ask her to be my wife; and then when the truth of her birth broke upon me, the chains which I would have sundered were bound more closely round me."

"I know, I know, Clive," she said. "Do not let us think of her, of anything but our love. Are you in pain, dearest? I fear, I fear they have treated you cruelly."

He heard the sobs she tried to stifle and he answered earnestly:

"I am in no pain whatever. If they got at me, I gave them as good as they gave. Why didn't I kill them when I had the chance? Fool again!"

"No; you would not do that, Clive," she said. "You could not." There was a pause, then she said: "Will it will be long?"

He answered her in the spirit worthy of her. "Not long, darling. It is a spring tide and rising quickly."

"Yes; I can feel it rising," she said very quietly. "We shall float out to the river, I suppose. Perhaps we shall be near each other, quite close!"

"Oh, Mina, Mina!" broke from his parched lips.

"Ah, don't!" she breathed. "Don't give way, Clive. I can bear anything but that. Let us face it together as you would face it if you were alone and were not grieving about me."

"There is no woman in the world like you, Mina," he said. "So brave, so noble, and yet so loving. Yes, you set me an example, and I'll try to follow it, dear. If I could only kiss you, if I could only touch your hand!"

She sighed deeply. "That would make death sweet, dearest," she said.

"Hush! Some one is coming!"

Clive listened, but the heavy throbbing of his heart for a time prevented his hearing the sound; then he said: "Mina, be calm! I hear it. It is a woman's step. Mina, we are saved!" He heard her gasp, then a sigh of disappointment, despair, followed.

"It is the woman—the Hindu woman! Lady Edith's servant. She came to me— Oh, I wish I had told you! She's threatened me and you. It is she who has planned this with Koshki and helped them. She is coming to finish her work."

Clive ground his teeth. "Keep quite still, let her think you are dead, still in a faint," he whispered.

He, himself, closed his eyes by an almost superhuman effort, and kept his limbs motionless. It was Sara. She came slowly, walking something like a cat or a leopard over the rotting timber and the slimy stones.

She lifted the lantern which, in their haste, the scoundrels had left behind them, and approaching Mina bent and examined her. Clive watched her with a turmoil of emotions which his poor pen cannot set down. He saw her take an Indian knife from under the folds of her long cloak, and raise it; and an actually physical sickness assailed him.

The knife was poised for a moment or two; then, as if satisfied that her victim was dead, and, probably reflecting that the stab would be not only unnecessary but risky, she replaced the knife in her girdle and went over to Clive. His pulse was so faint, his appearance so like that of death, that it was little wonder she was so deceived. To Clive's unspeakable relief—not on his own account, but on Mina's, for he knew that she was watching and that she would not have been able to see the knife uplifted over him without crying out—Sara did not take out the knife. She seated herself on a bank beside him, and folding her arms looked down at him with glittering eyes in which shone the vindictive malice, the cruel gloating triumph which one might picture in the eyes of a fiend from the nethermost pit.

"Lie there, my pretty fool-pig," she crooned. "Sara has come to see you, to see that you sleep soundly, to sing you a little lullaby, the little son we Hindu women sing to the badmash—the thief, the traitor, when the man with the big sword is waiting for him. Yes; you are a thief; you stole my mistress's heart, the heart of my sun-gueen, my lily-flower; and you betrayed her for that trash there. Poor little fool! Sara warned her; but she would not hearken, would not take heed. And so she lies there like dead carrion on the banks of the sacred Ganges. And in a little time the river will wash her away with all the other dirt. And you, too, will go with her, my pretty sahib. I wish you weren't dead!"

She kicked him with her foot, and laughed with an evil gret.

"I'd like you to hear, to see, how Sara has avenged the child of her bosom. The pigs have done their work too well; they should have kept just enough life in you to give Sara the joy of seeing you die! Never mind, fool-man; she can watch you—watch you drifting away down the dark river. And she will not have to wait long," she added, as she drew her robe away from the rising tide and shifted higher up.

Clive kept his teeth clenched, drove back the cry that threatened to burst from him; for he knew that Mina heard every word the woman uttered in her mad and savage hate, and the knowledge added to his anguish. If he could be free for only one moment—to save Mina first, and then to deal out the justice of an outraged Heaven to this pitiless fiend in woman form!

Sara was silent for a time—it seemed years to the two victims—and the water rose higher, rapidly now. Presently Sara, whose eyes had been wandering from the dark river to the two

bound figures, began to laugh, mockingly, triumphantly.

"It comes, it comes!" she crooned. "It comes to do Sara's bidding, to complete her vengeance. Welcome good river! Sara will help you!"

She picked her way to Mina and, placing her skinny hand on the girl's shoulder, pushed her into the tide. She would have heard the deep sob that broke from Mina's lips, but as her victim floated Sara uttered a shrill laugh. Then she went back to Clive. He would have spoken then, would have essayed prayers, entreaties—for Mina's life, but the counterfeit of a swoon had passed into reality and he was unconscious.

Five minutes—less—after Clive had dashed off, Tibby realized the mistake he had made, the awful mistake, in not giving her the address of the place to which he had gone. With a cry she rushed out of the room and down the stairs. But Clive had started, and the boys, who still hung about, could give her no information and only jeered at her distress. She ran out into the street in search of a policeman then; not finding one, and scarcely knowing what she was doing, she ran back to the house. She saw her hand back to the house. She heard some one coming up the stairs two at a time, the door was flung open and Quilton entered.

Though he had come so hurriedly, he was outwardly quite calm and he spoke even more slowly and impassively than usual.

"Am I in time, Tibby? Ah, apparently not!" As Tibby flung herself upon him crying:

"She's gone! Mina is lost—carried away! And he has followed her. And I don't know where they are. I'm wuss that a wretched idiot—let 'm go without askin' 'm! Oh, they'll be murdered!"

He took her by the shoulders and shook her none too gently; it was the best thing he could have done, for soothing words and phrases would have been lost on Tibby in her frantic condition.

"Hold up! Pull yourself together, Tibby," he said. "You've got a chance of redeeming your character for shrewdness, my child, girl—whatever you are. You and I have got to keep our heads straight. I guessed she had gone, I knew he'd followed her, when they told me at my place that you had been to his rooms yelling at him like a wildcat. You don't know where they've gone? That's bad! But there's just a chance for us. I saw Koshki early in the evening; he was in a little frowsy pub he and some gentlemen of his kidney. I watched him go out with two individuals it would be a gross flattery to call men. They went eastward. And that's where Mina is, and Clive Harvey, too. Now, we'll go round to that pub, Tibby, and see whether we can hear anything of the gentry. Go and put your head under that tap, while I load this revolver which I caught up out of a drawer as I was leaving."

Tibby set her teeth, tore off her grotesque hat, turned on the tap over the sink, and held her head under the cold stream of water.

"You've got some sense, Mr. Quilton," she said, as she came up gasping and began to scrub her face and head with a jack-towel. "That's put me strite. And now if you've got one of those barkers for me—" Quilton shook his head as he slipped the revolver in his pocket. "One's enough, Tibby," he said. "There's six chambers, and I've got an awkward knack of never missing. Come on! I demonstrate my sense of your cuteness, you observe, Tibby, by requesting your company; and I beg you will not disappoint me by screaming or squealing or otherwise giving way to that universal curse of woman—the nerves."

She looked up at him, with her eyes flashing, her lips drawn straight. "If there was time, I'd teach you to sauce me, you—you waxwork show,"

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she panted. "But you just save Mina and Mr. Clive and I'll let you off."

He nodded, and they went quickly down-stairs, but more slowly when they reached the street, quickening their pace again as they left the Rents behind them. Quilton led the way down a hideous alley, rich with the ripe fruit of the gallews, and threading their way through the groups of drunken men and frowsy women, they reached a low-browed, villainous public. As they did so, and Quilton peered through the half-open doorway, Tibby touched his arm. A dirty, disreputable-looking four-wheeler had drawn up a few yards away, and two men got out. One was Koshki, his battered face half-hidden by a blood-stained bandage.

They lifted out a third man, who appeared to dead or unconscious, and carried him as quickly as they could, for Koshki staggered as if he were too weak with the loss of blood, into the public house. Quilton, who had drawn Tibby aside into the dark and evil shadows, ran to the cab and giving the man a sovereign, told him to wait. Then he went back to Tibby. "There's some dangerous work before us, Tibby," he whispered impressively. "Will you go back?"

For answer she gave him a glance of furious scorn, and he nodded. The potman, a burly ruffian, whose nightly task it was to ring out the majority of the customers, came out of the vile public house to air himself, and Quilton went up to him and said, quite softly:

"Ask Mr. Koshki to step out to speak to one of the brotherhood, will you?"

The man glared at him ferociously, but Quilton made a sign; the man started and stared, muttered something, and went in. Koshki came out almost immediately. At sight of Quilton he drew back with an oath. Quilton, who had his right hand in his jacket pocket, smiled.

"I've got you covered, Koshki," he said, "and, by God, I'll shoot you like a dog if you offer to go back." He stepped up to him and whispered in his ear, and as Koshki started and swore again, Quilton said almost sweetly: "Oh, yes; I know all about that affair. It was murder; and I'll hang if you don't do what I want. Come this way; we are attracting too much attention for a modest man."

"As he spoke, he took his hand out of his pocket, as if he were sure of his man, and Koshki followed. When they reached the cab, Quilton said quite pleasantly:

"Tell the man to drive us where they are. The horse is quite fresh, I see— Who's this?" as Koshki stared at Tibby. "The sister. Yes; she is going with us. Sharp, now! I'm an impatient man, though you wouldn't think it, and I've an itch on me to shoot you, which is almost irresistible. See!"

To be continued.

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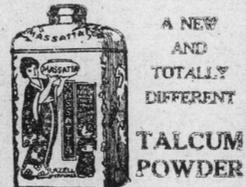
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