

THE OCTOOROON

A STORY OF SLAVERY DAYS.

BY MISS M. E. BRADDOCK.

CHAPTER XVIII.



THE plantation of Silas Craig, at Iberville, was situated, as we have already said upon the borders of a wood; a luxuriant forest, stretching for miles upon the banks of the Mississippi, varied every here and there by undulating dells and pools of water, lying hidden beneath the shadow of giant trees, whose branches had waved for centuries above a solitude broken only by the fleet foot of the Indian.

It was in this forest that the unhappy and martyred quadroon Francisca laid in her quiet grave—a grassy mound, marked only by the rude wooden cross erected at its head by the faithful mulatto, Toby.

Here, at least, the lovely child of an accursed and trampled race was free. Here no master dared molest her tranquil slumber. Death sets the slave and the prisoner alike at liberty.

The red sun sank in crimson splendor beneath the purple waters of the mighty river; upon every forest-tree gleamed golden reflections of the dying light; upon the bosom of each quiet pool, the last sunbeams faded and flickered in the shadowy twilight, while, calmly beautiful, the moon arose in her tranquil glory, bathing forest and river in a flood of silvery radiance.

The last glimmer of crimson light was slowly fading as two men advanced through one of the pathways of the wood—a pathway so overarched by the rich spreading branches of the trees, that it seemed one verdant arcade.

Each of these men carried a carbine upon his shoulder, and a powder flask slung at his side.

The first was William Bowen, the second, who closely followed his companion, was Augustus Horton. They emerged from the arcade into an open piece of turf, around which the trunks of the giant trees formed a species of wall.

"Where, in the name of all that's diabolical, are you leading me, Bill?" said Augustus, looking about him.

"I guess you don't know your way in this here wood by moonlight, Mr. Horton," answered Bill Bowen, laughing; "but we're all right for all that. This is the spot where we appointed to meet."

protection of the British consuls to save you from the fury of the populace."

"When a man sees a woman he loves insulted by a coward, he does not stop to reason," answered Gilbert; "the only thing that distresses me in this matter, is the thought that, instead of protecting my adored Cora, I have only brought upon her new dangers. You are the only man in America whom I call my friend."

"I have already given me such powerful proofs of your friendship, that I think I may venture to demand of you one last service."

"Speak, Gilbert, speak. We have indeed been fast and faithful friends; to-night, above all other nights, I can refuse nothing."

"My first care on leaving the selma, was to engage a boat, which is to carry us back to Lake Pontchartrain this very night. Promise me, that if I fail, you will yourself protect Cora, and restore her to her father's arms?"

"But tell me, Gilbert," said Mortimer Percy, after a pause, "what was Miss Leslie's motive for coming to my village?"

"Her mother died here. She comes to pay her first visit to the lonely grave of Francisca, the quadroon."

"Ah! I understand. Poor girl, poor girl!"

"I left her with the mulatto, Toby, who was to conduct her to the spot. At ten o'clock she will return to the landing place on the river where the boat will wait for us."

"Enough," said Mortimer, in a voice broken by emotion, "whatever happens I will be there to protect her."

At this moment a loud shout resounded through the wilderness of the forest scene. "Take your weapon, Gilbert," said Mortimer, placing the carbine in Margaret's hand.

"Augustus Horton is my cousin—you are my friend. I dare not pray for the safety of either, at the cost of the other's death. The moonlight moons are shining down upon us, and the eyes of Providence watches the struggle."

ply and pardon my wretched father. I cannot curse him. Here on the grave of a wicked and cruel man, I pity and forgive him, for he needs all pity since he has sinned."

At this moment the report of a gun sounded in the dell near at hand. Cora roused suddenly from her knees, pale and terrified. "Toby," she cried, "Toby, did you hear?"

"Before the mulatto could reply, Mortimer Percy sprang through the parted branches that bordered the dell, and rushed toward where they stood. He recoiled upon seeing Cora."

"You here, Miss Leslie?" he exclaimed. "Yes, yes. Tell me what was that report?"

"That! Some—some hunter, no doubt."

He had scarcely spoken when a second gun was fired.

"No, no, Mr. Percy," cried Cora, wildly, "is no hunter's carbine. A woman's unfailing instinct tells me of danger to him I love. Gilbert Margrave has been fighting a duel with your cousin."

Augustus Horton appeared as she spoke, walking backward and gazing intently at the dell.

"I must have surely hit him," he muttered.

"See, see!" cried Cora, "his antagonist is safe. It is he who has fallen. Run, Toby, run to succeed him."

"Hark! fainting with terror and anguish, she would have fallen to the ground had not Mortimer's extended arm caught her in time. He carried her prostrate form to a rocky seat close at hand, on which she rested with her head still lying on his shoulder."

Augustus Horton advanced toward them, and recognized the Octoroon in the moonlight.

thought of more ambitious schemes; and he was still determined to win the hand and the fortune of Camilla Moraquito.

The planter was furious. This dreaded rival was, then, at liberty.

The trial, which was to have ended in his disgrace and condemnation, would, perhaps, never take place, and Camilla might still believe in the honor and honesty of her lover.

That which he sought was to render Paul utterly contemptible in the sight of the haughty Spanish girl, and he felt that he had, in a great measure, failed.

He dispatched a special messenger to Iberville with a letter for Silas Craig, informing him of the young Mexican's escape.

"Lose no time in returning to New Orleans," he wrote, "I need the help of your craft in this business. There must be some mystery in this Lisimon escape, and you are the man to unravel it."

This done, he ordered his horse, and attended by his groom, rode at once to Villa Moraquitos. He was determined to precipitate matters, and enlist the Spaniard in his behalf.

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Augustus Horton found the Spaniard alone in an apartment, which was called his study, though little trace of studious habits was to be found within its walls.

The paring of this chamber was adorned with weapons of every kind, arranged in symmetrical order upon the walls. Cutlasses, pistols, and carbines, of polished steel, inlaid with gold and enamel, hung in glittering array side by side with charts of the ocean upon which, if scandalous tongues were correct, Don Juan Moraquitos had for many years been a rover.

When Augustus Horton entered this room the Spaniard was standing near an open window, his arms folded, his head bent upon his breast, moodily puffing a cheroot.

He started as his visitor was announced, and, recovering himself as if by an effort, advanced to greet the guest.

whose unobtrusive hands will give a laborer upon the woman he weds."

"The Spanish girl's head dropped as Augustus said this, with chilling irony. She felt that he knew her secret, and the bitterness of the sneer wounded her to the heart."

"But this is not all," continued the planter; "not only do you love another, but you hate me. I ask you why this is so?"

"Shall I tell you?" she asked gravely, lifting her flashing eyes, and looking him full in the face.

"Heaven forgive me if I wrong you, Augustus Horton, but some secret instinct tells me that you were associated with that pitiful wretch, Silas Craig, in the plot which brought disgrace upon the name of one—"

"Who is very dear to you! Is it not so, Donna Camilla?"

"Yes," she answered, proudly, "I have never before confessed my love to a mortal. I confess it now to you. It will at least prove my belief in his innocence."

"Mr. Paul Lisimon is a very happy man to possess so fair a defender," said Augustus, with studied sarcasm. "No doubt the escaped felon, the runaway thief, will return to New Orleans ere long to claim his bride, though I fear that the very first hour he shows his face in this city, he will find himself handcuffed and carried back to jail. In the meantime, I withdraw all pretensions to your hand. I cannot hope for success against such a rival."

He bowed haughtily, and withdrew, laughing bitterly. In the ante-room without, he found the negro, Tristan, lying on an embroidered rug, close against the boudoir door.

"Do not be angry, massa, with the poor nigger. What if the dog can help you?"

"Help me?"

"Yes, dogs are sometimes useful. Have you ever seen a bloodhound hunt down a runaway slave, eh, massa? Ah! I have seen that. Many a time, I dare say. Many a time have set the dogs on yourself to capture your lost property. There are human bloodhounds, massa, who can hunt down an enemy as the dog hunts the poor slave. Your enemy is Tristan's enemy too. Say, massa, shall we work together?"

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