

A DARK SECRET.

The Story of a Tragic Life Drama.

BY M. DAVE.

CHAPTER VI.—Continued.

"I have already told you," she said, "that George had a severe attack of brain fever after his father's unhappy death two years ago. He was thrown into his house in the heat of his mind. She was present. She saw it. The will account to you for—for you understand—the terrible shock to her nerves. My dear husband only recovered consciousness half an hour before he died. He wished to have his wife with him, his daughter—so beautiful, so charming—make it a pray to fortune-hunters."

To avoid all chance of this he left everything to me, conjuring me with his dying breath to hold it in trust for her to devote her life to him, and guard her secret. It was terrible; the results lasted long. The physicians ordered constant change of scene and the utmost quietude. I had promised—God helping me—to devote my life to her, and according to my light, I have kept that promise faithfully.

She leaned back in her chair, breathing with apparent pain and difficulty, and passing, as I had seen her do before, her hand tightly to her side. I regarded her with compassion. It seemed to me the time had come when she was quite beyond me. Her mind was too much worried for her health over a mind that, perhaps, never very strong, had now become warped by a kind of religious mania, with which, I confess, I had some sympathy. But I pitied the woman.

"Mrs. Hargrove, you are to be happy," she said, turning on me her bright, smiling eyes. "Dr. Gaseouine's room is a dying woman. But remember not a word of this to my daughter."

I felt an almost uncontrollable desire to tell her all. "I was even in the room of death."

I took her hand, just touching it reverently with my lips. "Trust me, Commandress. I will do all I can for you."

I said with some emotion.

"I do—I will. I look upon it that the Almighty has sent you to me, to my prayers. Now, Dr. Dudley, I need rest. But join us at luncheon; it is absolutely necessary that I should see all of you in the brief time left me. I must assure myself by closest observation that I am regaining my father's health."

Her presence was a comfort then. I had confidence in the same time more strength, more energy.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BOORER'S CONGRATULATIONS ARE NOT OVERL.

It was arranged that for the present I should live at Glendale House, going for a few hours daily to Coaltown to attend to my business. On the 21st, I was also to leave that day for the home of Miss Hargrove and myself should be there.

"I won't even tell Edna," said George, "that first afternoon of billets, as my brother-in-law and I are over the sea. Miss Hargrove's lips are sealed."

"I told you you did not regard her as a servant, that you knew her to be a lady."

"I make her a companion—a friend. She sleeps now in the little dressing room next mine; nevertheless she is a servant. She comes to us as one. She is paid the wages mother has been used to pay my maid. Please touch her bill, Dudley, twice."

I was silent. The signal seemed understood, for almost immediately the door was opened and Edna entered, carrying a tea-tray. She started slightly on seeing me. Instinctively, I rose as she came toward me, and moved a small table close to George's side, whereas she placed the tray on the floor.

"Mr. Dudley will pour out my tea. You need not remain to-day," cried George.

And without a word, but looking very sweet and grave, and not a little sad, the girl turned and returned to Westham by the afternoon train. I had my luggage placed on it and set off to walk to Glendale House.

It was between six and seven o'clock—cold November evening—the fog so dense that I could not see the yard ahead; but the road was familiar to me and I walked along in buoyant spirits, cheered by the thought that every step took me nearer to the charming girl whose image was now never absent from my mind. How many ages instead of hours had we been together!—and the night before we had been together again.

"How would she like me? There was no dull moment about this incomparable creature."

"Time could not wither, nor customs stale her infinite variety." And again I thought of her as my ideal.

I walked faster and faster, and began singing low to myself on the solitary road the first song she had ever sung to me:

"She should be up now, in the nightingale's bower,

"As morning roses newly blushed with dew.

As morning roses tipped."

"Mr. Dudley," I exclaimed, an almost breathless voice beside me.

"Please, walk on slowly; I wish to speak with you."

"It was Edna Lytton.

I offered her my arm, but she declined.

"I may ask you something—something that I wish very much to know?"

"Of course."

"And you will not think it mere idle curiosity on my part? You will not mind—"

"I will answer you for one moment to suppose—"

"Why, didn't you tell her this yourself that long time ago? You and I had a good time together, you agree with me in everything? I know why you did it, George. It was for my sake, because you love me."

"No! Upon my soul, I had no intention of so deceiving her. There has been some mistake, which I will explain."

"Please, sit down, sir; I will pay you poor, poor boy. No more nice tobacco and cigar. No more—"

"What then—I mean I wish you would not tell about it, George. Suppy, Mrs. Hargrove won't—"

She lit a cigarette and said that something great had happened to her.

"She'll hold you to it in the last letter."

You don't half know my stepmother."

After giving her a kiss, he understood you agreed with all her ways, you'll have to agree now. You're pleased yourself. Do you—"

"I am, sir. I am, sir. I am, sir."

He turned up to her full satisfaction.

I was by her side in a moment.

"By heaven, no!" I cried, seizing both her hands, while I gazed into her eyes, those unutterable eyes, in whose depths I had longed to find—know—know—

The intense look vanished as quickly as it came, to be succeeded by one of fun and gaiety.

"You're unusually very handsome, George," she exclaimed.

"I am! I am! I am! I am!"

"Why, of course you are! If you had not been—"

Her hands were closely locked in mine. Over her eyes, the openings quick blushing of the door behind me started both. George pulled me to him.

"It was Edna. How annoying!" she cried. "She saw—she saw—she saw—

Jack, if you ever do such a thing again I will not marry you. She'll tell all over the place what she has just seen."

"She will, I say. Servants always talk and gossip."

"I'm sure she won't. She is the very soul of honor," I asserted warmly.

"Any one could suppose you knew her heart, and I do not know her heart so definitely. I will not have her engagement known in a place like this, where people yester and yester and yester. I'd rather

do it—a thousand times! But come, let us forget this," she added, lightly, and sealing herself at the table with a kiss. "I have done for you, for the time all remembrance of the unfortunate creature was banished from my mind."

At a late hour that night I went to Dr. Gaseouine's room. He had returned from his vacation with his wife since we had met. We sat down for a comfortable smoke.

He placed the whisky bottle before me, and willing to forgive for one night, at least, the future abnegation to which I had unconsciously bound myself, I poured out another glass.

"I am to be the first to apologize to you for—for you understand—the terrible shock to her nerves. My dear husband only recovered consciousness half an hour before he died. He wished to have his daughter with him, his daughter—so beautiful, so charming—make it a pray to fortune-hunters."

To avoid all chance of this he left everything to me, conjuring me with his dying breath to hold it in trust for her to devote her life to him, and guard her secret.

"It was terrible; the results lasted long. The physicians ordered constant change of scene and the utmost quietude. I had promised—God helping me—to devote my life to her, and according to my light, I have kept that promise faithfully.

"There's an old Scotch proverb, 'There's the wo to you for this, and the we to you for that.' I want to apologize to you for the first time to you."

"I am a profound secret at present. I am sure you will keep it so, but I am engaged to marry the handsomest and most charming girl in England. Wish me joy."

"She is a lovely girl, and I am engaged to her. I am a good man, and a good husband."

"I believe what you like; but wait!"

"Believe what you like; but wait!"