



BY HOMER P. RINCH

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CHAPTER IX.—Continued.

With this the two forms dissolved back into invisibility. The young man could have been none other than old Ben's master, and if that venerable black had been on hand he could have had the pleasure of embracing his real "massa" instead of a person who resembled him.

I went up stairs, and seeing the door of one of the forbidden rooms ajar, I entered. Upon the floor in the corner of this room stood a small iron safe with its door partly open. Pulling this door wide upon its hinges, I saw within a bunch of papers. Drawing this forth, a glance satisfied me that it was the last will and testament and other papers of the late Montini. Securing these, I turned to withdraw from the room when I was startled by the sight of the gaze curtain around the couch, for the curtains had been bunched. I stood looking at it for a moment, and was turning away again, when the curtain was drawn aside by invisible means. There, stretched upon the couch, prone and rigid, the body of Ben, bier, lay the body of Senor Montini, in as perfect a state of preservation as if it had been embalmed that morning. The curtain fell back to its natural rest and I walked out of the room. When I reached the hall the door closed, seemingly of its own accord, and I heard the key turn in the rusty old lock.

CHAPTER X.

AT THE SICK MAN'S BEDSIDE.

I went downstairs, after the adventure described in the previous chapter, and stepped into the sick man's room to give a few words of cheer. He put out his hand feebly to me, and taking it in mine I sat down by his side. His deep-sunken eyes and wan, sallow look; the damp upon his lips, scalding and parching the tender skin, and the hot steam that came forth as breath, indicated a dread disease of the South, yellow fever.

Friend Burton, thought I, thou art near to the sleep that knows no waking, but which gives to such as thee the everlasting dream of paradise. Thy spirit will break its earthly bounds to wander unrestrained in those celestial regions which it has heretofore seen but in imagination. Thy fair Zeyna and thyself will end thy unhappy mundane career with the alters of the Supreme. Thy wedded happiness will be down the vista of the Happy Land, where thou needst not seek sorrows of sorrow, for death and joy is there.

"Hal," said Burton, "I have been telling mother that you would be a son to her when I am gone. You will cherish her for my sake, won't you, Hal?" I assured him, that so far as I was able, I would help and be a friend to his mother.

Then his mind began to wander in delirium, a peculiarity of his disease, and in a rambling way he told how disappointed he was when he came to the spiritual festival, where all the people who have been connected with the proprietorship of the estate were to be, and found that his Zeyna was not of the throng; how he had many and many times come and dwelt for weeks in the old house, alone in its awful dullness, the five graves were ready. Down into them the caskets were lowered, and the starting, hollow sound of the falling dirt as the faithful old negro plied the shovel, looking around dashed and scared upon the phantom crowd, awoke the coffin dead, wended its way to the solemn echoes of the night.

Old Ben had performed his work well; the five graves were ready. Down into them the caskets were lowered, and the starting, hollow sound of the falling dirt as the faithful old negro plied the shovel, looking around dashed and scared upon the phantom crowd, awoke the coffin dead, wended its way to the solemn echoes of the night.

When all was done, the Senor Montini stepped forward and warmly thanked us for our help, assuring us that we would not lack in reward; then bade us good night, and disappeared with all the rest.

Had been dark and cloudy, but as Burton and I turned to go from the spot the clouds in the zenith broke away as if cut in twain, and the full round moon and twinkling stars illuminated the whole landscape round, and revealed to us that the new-made graves gave no sign of fresh earth, but were covered with moss and grass growing flowers. Old Ben looked curiously at me when he had noticed this, and said: "Massa, dis am queah." I answered: "I like it; it's well."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MYSTIC MARRIAGE.

The Villa Montini was a haunted house no more. Every door and window was open, and the pleasant air and sunshine wandered through the house as if searching out the gloomy corners to brighten and cheer them up. There was one sad shadow though that air and sunshine couldn't brighten up. The shadow of death was resting on the brow of the widow's son. Not that he saw it, for he looked beyond to a scene brighter than poor earthly sunshine. But the mother, she saw and felt that cloud.

It was in the fore part of the day and I had sat at the head of his couch for some hours keeping the cool, damp cloths upon his brow, that they might fill as much as possible the grateful mission of soothing the fever in the brain. His mother sat upon the couch by his side holding both his hands in hers and watching every movement of his pale thin lips as each breath went forth upon its last mission. He had not spoken for some time, and we were almost startled when his feeble voice gently broke silence with the exclamation: "Mother, Hal see!" He had raised his head from the pillow and was pointing toward the large folded doors at the end of the hall. We followed his direction, and as we gazed the door was open, a vision floated in, then a breath of flowers floated in, then gentle music, such as we hear in dreams, came whispering along the air as if it were too holy glad to speak its happiness aloud.

A haze of perfumed atmosphere filled the room, lighting it with a phosphorescent glow that rendered delicately throughout the rainbow's almost imitable tints. "She comes, mother," whispered Burton, as he raised still higher, and stepping upon opposite sides of the couch we held the pillows to his head.

"Senora," said I, "the hour is here, the spirit and the bride say come." A bright and happy light came to his eyes as he heard me say this, and he stretched out one hand to me. He turned his face toward his mother that she might take the farewell kiss, and as he did so the fair vision floated in that was to bear his soul away, upon its upward flight. We saw not the death gasp, we heard no moan, for the perfumed, rainbow-tinted vapor settled dense about the couch, and the music of an angel's swell, swelled sweetly in, to charm away the anguish of that last moment. We knew the soul had left its earthly house, the body, for there under an archway festooned with roses and hung with dreamy drapery we saw standing, smiling happily upon each other, the spirit forms of the lovely

WHAT A MAN CAN NOT BELIEVE CAN NEVER AT BOTTOM BE OF TRUE INTEREST TO HIM—Carlyle.

Zeyna and noble Burton Arold, surrounded by the host of angels and spirits fair that had glided so beautifully through every room on the night of mystic revelry.

Seemingly in obedience to a motion from Burton, the fair Zeyna bent forward and kissed the brow of the mother, whose saintlike beauty as she gazed upon the happiness of her son was a true representation of her kindness of heart, inexpressible in its holy significance. This fond salutation done, the lovers joined in spiritual marriage floated out with their angel escorts, and up to the realms that knew no death or shadow.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONCLUSION.

It is fit to end this story now, as I have followed the two chief characters to the end of my knowledge of them; but there are a few things left in connection with the history of the estate which the reader may demand to know as to the conclusion of affairs concerning my mission there. They can be told in a few words. The legal papers of the estate were in a bad plight. I employed an honorable and competent attorney to help me straighten them out and get them in order. At the end of my stipulated time I opened the roll of parchments which had been placed in my charge by the phantom lady, and found that it contained a will bequeathing to El Muza or his heirs the disposal of one-eighth portion of an estate near Madrid, Spain. The Senora had been disinherited by her father, but the attorney, who was a good Spanish scholar, upon looking the matter up found that in Spain a man cannot without the aid of a Government disinherit the last heir in his legitimate family line in a matter where any considerable real estate is concerned. We complicated this with our minister plenipotentiary at Madrid, concerning whom I have fully established the Senora's identity. We received an answer that the property along with the whole estate to which it belonged, was held by the crown in default of many years taxes due, but if the Senora would throw off forty percent of her claim she could at any time demand and get the balance, which would yield her an ample competency for life. A settlement was soon effected and the Senora given her portion.

The Don Juan landed in New Orleans near the time expected, and Montini's heir came up to see his property. He was a gentleman and a business man, and we soon settled everything satisfactorily. The young man had not been there a week before he had lumber upon the grounds, and carpenters, masons, and painters fixing over the old house. Some workmen or laborers picked up an energetic farmer and installed him as overseer, and the Senora's house was soon established.

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