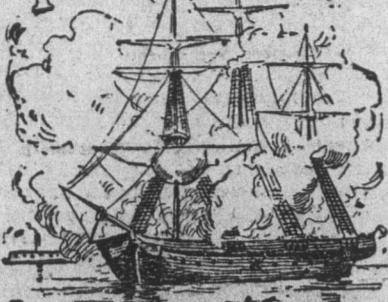


In Sheep's Clothing.



By Capt. Ormond Steele

CHAPTER XXII.—Continued.

The people of Sag Harbor were never surprised at seeing Dinah. She was in the habit of appearing suddenly on the one street that then constituted the town, and disappearing as mysteriously as she came.

The citizens who claimed to be above superstition were very sure that "Dinah was not herself," meaning thereby not that she was some else, but that her mind was affected. In those days every one supposed to be out of mental balance was said to be mad; but the word has, fortunately, become much more limited in its significance, and how it is applied only to dogs and people who are short-tempered.

But the majority of the people in and about Sag Harbor were superstitious, like the people of every other little town, and in this respect the world has not changed much, and they were sure that Dinah possessed supernatural powers. Had she been white they would have called her "a witch," and it might have gone hard with her; but being black, she was looked upon as a sort of weird, pagan priestess, gifted with a wonderful power of looking into the future.

She derived no little income from telling fortunes; as she knew every one, and was a remarkable shrewd reader of character, her success as a seeress was not to be wondered at.

Untila, so graceful, beautiful, and consistent, was a favorite with every one. In the cabins of the fisherman, as well as in the more pretentious dwellings of the rich, she had a home, and was always received as an honored guest.

Like Dinah, whom, of course, she in no way resembled, her coming and going, though always a matter of interest, was never one of surprise.

So, now, as they hastened, side by side, to the town, they had no fear that their coming would create a sensation. They had been to many places where they could get information about Lieutenant Hedges and Valentine Dayton, one, and the most certain, was Doctor Hedges' house, and the other was Squire Condit's. But Dinah did not like Doctor Hedges; he had sneered at her skill as a dispenser of medicine, and she retorted by saying that she never liked to undertake the cure of a case till it had baffled her white brother's skill.

Squire Condit's was the nearer of the two houses, and seeing a light burning there when they had reached the gate, it decided them to go in.

Before entering the house they heard Squire Condit talking in loud, excited tones, while his daughter Ellen and his wife tried to soothe him with milder accents.

"It's an outrage, a high-handed outrage!" shouted the Squire. "Think of it, wife; think of it, Ellen; this man Fox, without any writ or order, but with the high hand that we should expect to see only in a pirate, dares to send his subordinates ashore, and to seize the Governor's post-ride and carry him a prisoner on board their ship."

"But, father," said Ellen, "did not Mr. Frenaud say that this post-ride was an impostor, and that he had the authority to arrest him?"

"Yes, Ellen, he did say so; but the fellow's mistake for authority. Martial law has not been declared in this province, and so no man can be arrested without due process of law, and on a complaint made by one or more respectable citizens. The post-ride should have been brought before me for examination and committed, if suspicious, to await further examination. If her majesty's ships are to be transformed into prisons, and her officers into lawless tyrants, then the sooner they get out of these waters the better it will—"

The knocking of Untila at the door drew the Squire in the midst of a speech that promised to be treasonable if he continued.

Great was the surprise of the Squire and his amiable family at seeing Untila and her dusky companion. They were always made welcome, but their presence at this particular time caused the sturdy host additional uneasiness.

Like all the very old people of her race, Dinah was inclined to be garrulous, but to-night she fully appreciated the importance of coming directly to the point.

After getting the Squire to examine the room in which they were, and the room adjoining, and the outside of the house, she said that when she was about to communicate could not a bit be overheard by ears for which it was not intended, she made them gather about her, and then told Ralph Denham's story, or rather, the story of his extraordinary adventure.

During the narrative, the Squire now and then stopped her to offer an objection or to express incredulity; and at such times Untila assured him of the perfect accuracy of everything the old woman was saying.

Ralph Denham was as dead to the Squire as he was his own son; and it can be said that Mrs. Condit and Ellen felt towards him as if he did sustain that relation to the family. Naturally enough they could hardly credit Dinah's remarkable story, even though Untila indorsed it.

But when Dinah told where Ralph then was, and spoke of his anxiety to get in communication with his officers, all the Squire's doubts vanished.

"The wildest excitement fills the town, and extends to the adjoining islands," said Squire Condit, raising his hands and feeling, as he let them fall heavily by his side, that his exclamation did not exactly express what was on his mind.

It did not take him long to get cooled down, and on occasions the Squire could be as cool as an iceberg.

"Something must be done, and that at once; let us see what it shall be."

This looked like an invitation for the others to take part in the consultation that was then going on, but Squire Condit made all the motions, and declared them carried, without waiting for the others to give an opinion.

In this conference it was decided that Dinah and Untila should at once go back to the Captain, carrying with them the additional gun and a complete disguise, and, after securing this disguise, he was to make his way with all the possession of his own old room, where he must await further developments.

In the meantime the Squire would find either Lieutenant Hedges or Valentine Dayton, and bring them to the house.

The instant this scheme was decided on, all who were to take an active part in its execution started off.

Untila and Dinah went back to where

they had left Ralph Denham, and the Squire made straight for Dr. Hedges' house, where he expected to find either the Lieutenant or Valentine Dayton.

He was about to enter through the gate that opened on a garden path leading up to the house, when his attention was arrested by hearing voices inside, where there was dense silence.

While in the Sag Harbor at this time in a state of war, and impressed with the belief that it was fair to take every advantage, looking to one's safety and the safety of one's friends, the Squire drew near on tip-toe and stopped to listen.

One of the speakers was Doctor Hedges; of that there could be no mistake, and the other was, the Squire thought, Captain Fox; on the latter point he was soon decided.

"And so she refused the jewels," said Fox; "well, there is no accounting for women's ways."

"I'll account for her ways. Hereto-far she has been the kindest and most indulgent parent in Long Island, and I fondly believed that Long Island in every way worthy of my confidence."

"Beautiful girls are apt to have whims," interrupted Fox, with a low laugh that impressed the Squire as having something fiendish about it. "I am only sorry that you told her who the unfortunate donor was."

"But I insist that I did not tell her. Why, the moment she saw them—and she didn't stop to give them a second glance—she turned away her head and said, 'Captain Fox sent them.' I tried to impress her with their value and beauty; but bless you, she paid no more heed to them than if they were so many of those silly Indian make-up wigs. Oh, she is stiff-necked, but I am determined, and I'll warrant we shall be glad to do as I say."

"But the majority of the people in and about Sag Harbor were superstitious, like the people of every other little town, and in this respect the world has not changed much, and they were sure that Dinah possessed supernatural powers. Had she been white they would have called her 'a witch,' and it might have gone hard with her; but being black, she was looked upon as a sort of weird, pagan priestess, gifted with a wonderful power of looking into the future."

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