

# The North Platte Tribune.

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## A Transferred Identity.

By EDITH SESSONS TUPPER. Copyright, 1893, by American Press Association.

CHAPTER V. It is useless to attempt to analyze the emotions which possessed me during our return to the house. I was now confident that I was in the company of a madman and was deliberating upon ways and means for a speedy departure northward. And yet, when Portia's excitement had subsided, when we were back once more amid the flowers and fountains, she looked perfectly self-contained and sane. Her eyes had lost their unearthly glitter, and when she again touched my hand her flesh was warm.

Alone in my room I pondered upon the events of the day. Portia's fury when Daphne brought her the flowers and her evident dislike of her child; her alarm at something contained in her husband's letter; her intimation that danger threatened her through her husband's wrongs; she so evidently idolized, and her rage when I attempted to open the closed gate in that dreary out of the way corner of the grounds.

CHAPTER VI. IN THE ARBOR. The evening of Colonel Marchmont's return had given over to the hall of which mention has already been made. Portia was a picture in her white satin gown, the laces of which were caught here and there with clusters of scarlet roses. When she was dressed and stood intently regarding herself in the mirror, she sighed heavily.

"Why do you sigh, Portia?" I asked as I pinned the last knot of flowers in the folds of her gown. "These red blossoms," she answered dreamily. "I have a curious fancy about them. Prudence. Do you know that they look like drops of blood?" Then catching my reproving expression she laughed gaily, caught up her scarlet fan and hastened to join her husband in the drawing room.

I watched Colonel Marchmont curiously to see what effect his wife's beauty had upon him, but he regarded her as coldly as ever. I began to be furious with this calm, self-contained man, who showed so plainly his utter indifference to the beauty of the woman he possessed. He had taken her white cloak from her and thrown it over his arm as he stood waiting while she buttoned her gloves. Suddenly she spoke: "I want to see that man Maurice in Atlanta?" he asked.

"I was standing near Portia, indeed had just stretched out my hands to assist her with the troublesome glove. I saw her look at me, and she said: 'Maurice in Atlanta?' he asked. 'Yes,' she said in a low voice. 'And that he is coming here next week to stay a few days with us?' Colonel Marchmont said as if a cold shiver had run down his spine. 'Yes,' she breathed rather than spoke. Her husband looked intently at her through narrowing eyelids.

"Well, I must say that you do not show it as if you were in love with him. I wonder, my dear, if you have not seen him since you were boy and girl together. Now, Maurice could not end his catechism about you. How you look, dress, talk and act were questions he was continually asking. I told him his legal training had evidently become second nature, for he kept me on the witness stand constantly. You must know, Miss Mason, that Maurice Raymond is my wife's only living relative. He was born and brought up on her father's plantation, and the two were like brother and sister."

"Oh, yes," I said. "Used often, Portia, to hear you speak of your brother Maurice." But she turned a white, hunted face toward me. Her lips moved as if she were about to speak, but no sound issued from them. "Let me see," said her husband as he carefully brushed her hair, and as she took her shoulders, "it must be 15 years since you saw him. How much you will have to talk over."

The greenish light of excitement had died from Portia's face, and as she took her husband's arm she looked so wan, jagged and old I was tempted to beg her to stop at home. Really she appeared to die to go. But the carriage was at the steps. Colonel Marchmont handed her in, followed, shut the door, and they were driven rapidly away. For a long time I sat upon the piazza thinking over the little scene I had witnessed. From the terror and dismay which had so suddenly crept in Portia's face when her cousin's name was mentioned I did not doubt that the news of his coming had been the unwelcome announcement in her husband's letter which had occasioned so much alarm. And why? What possible danger could this relative bring her? On the contrary, why did she not welcome his advent as a relief to the monotony of her life? It was not possible she was in love with this cousin? No, no. If ever a woman loved her husband, it was Portia Marchmont.

My musings were interrupted by little Daphne, who had been allowed to sit up and watch her mother's toilet for the ball. She ran toward me, screaming in pretended fright, from her nurse Sophie, who wishes to put her to bed. I took her in my arms and kissed her. "Good night, darling." "Don't want to go to bed," she announced in shrill, childish treble; "I want to see my cousin Maurice." "Laws now, Miss Daphne, come on," urged Sophie.

"No, no," cried the child; "no, won't go to bed till Auntie Prudence takes me for a walk." "A walk now at 9 o'clock?" I said. "This is no time to take a walk." "Yes," cried Daphne, dancing and clapping her hands, "yes, you and Sophie and me—down to the arbor and back. Then I'll be good and go to bed." I could not resist the child's pleading and told Sophie we would go for a short turn in the garden. "Only as far as the arbor and back," I admitted. "Yes, yes," laughed the delighted child. "We threw on our light wraps and set out. The moon was full and sent down a flood of light, turning every leaf and twig and branch into shimmering silver. The fountains were splashing softly, and the birds faintly twittered in their nests. It was a scene of enchantment—a veritable

midsummer night's dream. "No wonder the child hated to go to bed," I said to Sophie as the little one went dancing down the walk before us. "Laws, yes, miss," responded Sophie, "dat pore child did tease pow'ful bad."

No came to the arbor, and entering it sat down for a moment. I can see it all now as I write. The arbor overhanging with dappled, perfume-laden honeysuckles; the little girl capering about, her black eyes flashing in the moonlight; Sophie's ebon face, white apron and snowy cap, and even the little wooden doll which Daphne had juggled along, stating that Dolly must walk.

Suddenly out of the moonlight came a face—a face which peered in through the honeysuckles at us with sinister eyes. Long white straggling hair fell around it, and the toothless gums mounted in a bloodcurdling and evil grin. I saw it first, then Sophie, then the child. A scream broke the stillness of the night. It was Sophie who shrieked in terror upon over her head and shrieked in terror. Daphne did not scream, but buried her head in my lap.

"Who are you?" I demanded. There was no answer. The hideous face disappeared. There was a rustle in the shrubbery and a sound of hastily withdrawing steps. The intruder had gone. I snatched Daphne up in my arms, and followed by the moonlight, gazing so helplessly at the moonlight came a face. It was the shrubbery and a sound of hastily withdrawing steps. The intruder had gone.

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ed his face sobered her. She stopped in confusion and began nervously twisting up her hair and arranging her draperies. "Really, Portia," Colonel Marchmont said disdainfully. "I cannot admire your method of entertaining Miss Prudence. Your dances are more suitable to the orgies of Dead Man's swamp than to a gentleman's house."

It was a brutal speech, and it told. Portia stared gloomily after her husband as he went out upon the piazza, and then, turning to me, said in an undertone: "You heard what he said? Well, since he sends me to the swamp, I'll go. I have work there. Prudence, I'll tell you, she fled up the stairs. But she made no answer. Only her taunting laughter floated down. I heard her slam the door of her anatomy. Silly girl, your terror of the woodcock is something I cannot comprehend. Did you ever hear anything so ridiculous, Miss Prudence? But it is always, can I mention this stamping repeat rumors of what is supposed to go on there but my wife straightaway falls to groaning and shivering. Portia, you used to have more sense."

Though Colonel Marchmont did not speak unkindly, his impatience with his frightened wife was scarcely veiled. He rose, put on his hat and stalked moodily out of the house. Later, when Daphne ran about the grounds, she was closely followed by Jake, one of the bravest overseers, and an enormous bloodhound. With Sophie they formed quite an imposing guard of honor.

Portia shut herself up in her rooms, and I did not see her again until evening. Colonel Marchmont spent the day going about the plantation examining the quarters and consulting with his overseers. It was just at sunset that, coming along one of the winding garden paths, I saw the colonel through a row of shrubbery on my right. He was walking slowly, his head bent in reflection, for under his nose he was muttering as he was talking aloud. I caught a snatch or two of his conversation with himself as he came on.

"How I hate her!" he was saying. "I wish I could see her! Good God! did I ever see a man suffer so? Then suddenly he raised his arms and cried out in tones of bitter anguish: "Oh, Portia! Oh, my wife—my wife!"

CHAPTER VIII. THE AUDITORIUM HALL. I drew back, startled and amazed. After his despairing outburst Colonel Marchmont hurried to the door, his head bent and hands clasped behind him. I watched him pass out of sight at a turn of the shrubbery.

"Well," I said aloud to myself, "that certainly is about the most astonishing feature yet of this remarkable business. In one instant the colonel declares with an emphasis which leaves little doubt of his earnestness that he hates and loathes Portia, and in the next cries out to her in accents imploring enough to melt a heart of stone. My private opinion is that the entire Marchmont family is woodcocked."

At dinner that evening I particularly remarked Portia's beauty. Never had she been so radiant. Her eyes glittered as if she had been drinking champagne, and her cheeks glowed like roses. I could not keep my eyes from her fascinating face and grew more and more interested at the cold, silent man who regarded her so indifferently.

After we had gone into the drawing room I thought me of a book in which I was greatly interested, and excusing myself went into the library to find it. Returning a few minutes later, I was the forced witness of a most painful scene. The door between the rooms was open, and as I approached I saw Portia seated upon her husband with a look of longing on her face. The colonel was intently upon his newspaper and did not perceive her until she put both white arms about his throat and tenderly laid her cheek upon his head.

He sprang from his chair as if a serpent had stung him. Turning, he confronted her with an awful face, white, stern, contemptuous. "How dare you?" he said in a low voice, vibrant with hatred. "Oh, Vermyan, forgive me! Love me after all, my own wife," begged Portia. "Yes, I have not forgotten that intolerable fact," replied Colonel Marchmont, with studied coldness. Then he hurried from the room.

Portia came flying toward me like a whirlwind. Her eyes were wild with a clinched hand she struck at her heart. "Prudence," she cried, "he will kill me. But first—"



Daphne flung herself into his arms.



Suddenly out of the moonlight came a face.



She only laughed mockingly and whisked faster than ever.



Portia stepped hurriedly through and stopped, looking about.



Portia's glass fell from her hand.