

# **THE REVENGE OF HER RACE**

MARY BEAUMONT



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The low hedge, where the creepers climbed, divided the lawn and its magnificent Wellingtonias from the meadow. There was little grass to be seen, for it was at this time one vast profusion of delicate ixias of every bright and tender shade.

The evening was still, and the air heavy with scent. In a room opening upon the veranda wreathed with white—and—scarlet passion—flowers, where she could see the garden and the meadow, and, beyond all, the Mountain Beautiful, lay a sick woman. Her dark face was lovely as an autumn leaf is lovely—hectic with the passing life. Her eyes wandered to the upper snows of the mountain, from time to time resting upon the brown—haired English girl who sat on a low stool by her side, holding the frail hand in her cool, firm clasp.

The invalid was speaking; her voice was curiously sweet, and there was a peculiarity about the "s," and an occasional turn of the sentence, which told the listener that her English was an acquired language.

"I am glad he is not here," she said slowly. "I do not want him to have pain."

"But perhaps, Mrs. Denison, you will be much better in a day or two, and able to welcome him when he comes back."

"No, I shall not be here when he comes back, and it is just as it should be. I asked him to turn round as he left the garden, and I could see him, oh, so well! He looked kind and so beautiful, and he waved to me his hand. Now he will come back, and he will be sad. He did not want to leave me, but the governor sent for him. He will be sad, and he will remember that I loved him, and some day he will be glad again." She smiled into the troubled face near her.

The girl stroked the thick dark hair lovingly.

"Don't," she implored; "it hurts me. You are better to—night, and the children are coming in." Mrs. Denison closed her eyes, and with her left hand she covered her face.

"No, not the children," she whispered, "not my darlings. I cannot bear it. I must see them no more." She pressed her companion's hand with a sudden close pressure. "But you will help them, Alice; you will make them English like you—like him. We will not pretend to—night; it is not long that I shall speak to you. I ask you to promise me to help them to be English."

"Dear," the girl urged, "they are such a delicious mixture of England and New Zealand—prettier, sweeter than any mere English child could ever be. They are enchanting."

But into the dying woman's eyes leaped an eager flame.

"They must all be English, no Maori!" she cried. A violent fit of coughing interrupted her, and when the paroxysm was over she was too exhausted to speak. The English nurse, Mrs. Bentley, an elderly Yorkshire woman, who had been with Mrs. Denison since her first baby came six years ago, and who had, in fact, been Horace Denison's own nurse—maid, came in and sent the agitated girl into the garden. "For you haven't had a breath of fresh air to—day," she said.

At the door Alice turned. The large eyes were resting upon her with an intent and solemn regard, in which lay a message. "What was it?" she thought, as she passed through the wide hall sweet with flowers. "She wanted to say something; I am sure she did. To—morrow I will ask her." But before the morrow came she knew. Mrs. Dennison had said good—bye.

The funeral was over. Mr. Denison, who had looked unaccountably ill and weary for months, had been sent home by Mr. Danby for at least a year's change and rest, and the doctor's young sister had yielded to various pressure, and promised to stay with the children until he returned. There was every reason for it. She had loved and been loved by the gentle Maori mother; she delighted in the dark beauty and sweetness of the children. And they, on their side, clung to her as to an adorable fairy relative, dowered with love and the fruits of love—tales and new games and tender ways. Best reason of all, in a sense, Mrs. Bentley, that kind autocrat, entreated her to

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stay, "as the happiest thing for the children, and to please that poor lamb we laid yonder, who fair longed that you should! She was mightily taken up with you, Miss Danby, and you've your brother and his wife near, so that you won't be lonesome, and if there's aught I can do to make you comfortable, you've only to speak, miss." As for Mr. Denison, he was pathetically grateful and relieved when Alice promised to remain.

After the evening romp and the last good-night, when the two elder children, Ben and Marie, called after her mother, Maritana, had given her their last injunctions to be sure and come for them "her very own self" on her way down to breakfast in the morning, she usually rode down between the cabbage-trees, down by the old rata, fired last autumn, away through the grasslands to the doctor's house, a few miles nearer Rochester; or he and his wife would ride out to chat with her. But there were many evenings when she preferred the quiet of the airy house and the garden. The colonial life was new to her, everything had its charm, and in the colonies there is always a letter to write to those at home—the mail-bag is never satisfied. On such evenings it was her custom to cross the meadow to the copse of feathery trees beyond, where, sung to by the brook and the Tui, the children's mother slept. And from the high presence of the Mountain Beautiful there fell a dew of peace.

She would often ask Mrs. Bentley to sit with her until bedtime, and revel in the shrewd north-country woman's experiences, and her impressions of the new land to which love had brought her. Both women grew to have a sincere and trustful affection for each other, and one night, seven or eight months after Mrs. Denison's death, Mrs. Bentley told a story which explained what had frequently puzzled Alice—the patient sorrow in Mrs. Denison's eyes, and Mr. Denison's harassed and dejected manner. "But for your goodness to the children," said the old woman, "and the way that precious baby takes to you, I don't think I should be willing to say what I am going to do, miss. Though my dear mistress wished it, and said, the very last night, 'You must tell her all about it, some day, Nana,'—and I promised, to quiet her,—I don't think I could bring myself to it if I hadn't lived with you and known you." And then the good nurse told her strange and moving tale.

She described how her master had come out young and careless-hearted to New Zealand in the service of the government, and how scandalised and angry his father and mother, the old Tory squire and his wife, had been to receive from him, after a year or two, letters brimming with a boyish love for his "beautiful Maori princess," whom he described as having "the sweetest heart and the loveliest eyes in the world." It gave them little comfort to hear that her father was one of the wealthiest Maoris in the island, and that, though but half civilised himself, he had had his daughter well educated in the "bishop's" and other English schools. To them she was a savage. There was no threat of disinheritance, for there was nothing for him to inherit. There was little money, and the estate was entailed on the elder brother. But all that could be done to intimidate him was done, and in vain. Then silence fell between the parents and the son.

But one spring day came the news of a grandson, called Benjamin after his grandfather, and an urgent letter from their boy himself, enclosing a prettily and humbly worded note from the new strange daughter, begging for an English nurse. She told them that she had now no father and no mother, for they had died before the baby came, and if she might love her husband's parents a little she would be glad.

"My lady read the letters to me herself," Mrs. Bentley said; "I'd taken the housekeeper's place a bit before, and she asked me to find her a sensible young woman. Well, I tried, but there wasn't a girl in the place that was fit to nurse Master Horace's child. And the end of it was, I came myself, for Master Horace had been like my own when he was a little lad. My lady pretended to be vexed with me, but the day I sailed she thanked me in words I never thought to hear from her, for she was a bit proud always." The faithful servant's voice trembled. She leaned back in her chair, and forgot for the moment the new house and the new duties. She was back again in the old nursery with the fair-haired child playing about her knees. But Alice's face recalled her, and she continued the story. She had, she said, dreaded the meeting with her new mistress, and was prepared to find her "a sort of a heathen woman, who'd pull down Master Horace till he couldn't call himself a gentleman."

But when she saw the graceful creature who received her with gentle words and gestures of kindness, and when she found her young master not only content, but happy, and when she took in her arms the laughing healthy baby, she felt—though she regretted its dark eyes and hair—more at home than she could have believed possible. The nurseries were so large and comfortable, and so much consideration was shown to her, that she confessed, "I should have been more ungrateful than a cat if I hadn't settled comfortable."

Then came nearly five happy years, during which time her young mistress had found a warm and secure place in the good Yorkshire heart. "She was that loving and that kind that Dick Burdas, the groom, used to say that he

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believed she was an angel as had took up with them dark folks, to show 'em what an angel was like." Mrs. Bentley went on:

"She wasn't always quite happy, and I wondered what brought the shadow into her face, and why she would at times sigh that deep that I could have cried. After a bit I knew what it was. It was the Maori in her. She told me one night that she was a wicked woman, and ought never to have married Master Horace, for she got tired sometimes of the English house and its ways, and longed for her father's whare; (that's a native hut, miss). She grieved something awful one day when she had been to see old Tim, the Maori who lives behind the stables. She called herself a bad and ungrateful woman, and thought there must be some evil spirit in her tempting her into the old ways, because, when she saw Tim eating, and you know what bad stuff they eat, she had fair longed to join him. She gave me a fright I didn't get over for nigh a week. She leaned her bonny head against my knee, and I stroked her cheek and hummed some silly nursery tune,—for she was all of a tremble and like a child,—and she fell asleep just where she was."

"Poor thing!" said Alice, softly.

"Eh, but it's what's coming that upsets me, ma'am. Eh, what suffering for my pretty lamb, and her that wouldn't have hurt a worm! Baby would be about six months old when she came in one day with him in her arms, and they were a picture. His little hand was fast in her hair. She always walked as if she'd wheels on her feet, that gliding and graceful. She had on a sort of sheeny yellow silk, and her cheeks were like them damask roses at home, and her eyes fair shone like stars. 'Isn't he a beauty, Nana?' she asked me. 'If only he had blue eyes, and that hair of gold like my husband's, and not these ugly eyes of mine!' And as she spoke she sighed as I dreaded to hear. Then she told me to help her to unpack her new dress from Paris, which she was to wear at the Rochester races the next day. Master Horace always chose her dresses, and he was right proud of her in them. And next morning he came into the nursery with her, and she was all in pale red, and that beautiful! 'Isn't she scrumptious, Nana?' he said, in his boyish way. 'Don't spoil her dress, children. How like her Marie grows!' Those two little ones they had got her on her knees on the ground, and were hugging her as if they couldn't let her go. But when he said that, she got up very still and white.

" 'I am sorry,' she said; 'they must never be like me.'"

" 'They can't be any one better, can they, baby?' he answered her, and he tossed the child nearly up to the ceiling. But he looked worried as he went out. I saw them drive away, and they looked happy enough. And oh, miss, I saw them come back. We were in the porch, me and the children. Master Horace lifted her down, and I heard him say, 'Never mind, Marie.' But she never looked his way nor ours; she walked straight in and upstairs to her room, past my bonny darling with his arm stretched out to her, and past Miss Marie, who was jumping up and down, and shouting 'Muvver'; and I heard her door shut. Then Master Horace took baby from me.

" 'Go up to her,' he said, and I could scarce hear him. His face was all drawn like, but I felt that silly and stupid that I could say nothing, and just went upstairs." Mrs. Bentley put her knitting down, and throwing her apron over her head sobbed aloud.

"O nurse, what was it?" cried Alice, and the colour left her cheeks. "Do tell me. I am so sorry for them. What was it?" It was several minutes before the good woman could recover herself; then she began:

"She told me, and Dick Burdas he told me, and it was like this. When they got to the race-course,—it was the first races they'd had in Rochester,—all the gentry was there, and those that knew her always made a deal of her, she had such half-shy, winning ways. And she seemed very bright, Dick said, talking with the governor's lady, who is full of fun and sparkle. The carriages were all together, and Major Beaumont, a kind old gentleman who's always been a good friend to Master Horace, would have them in his carriage for luncheon, or whatever it was. Dick says he was thinking that she was the prettiest lady there, when his eye was caught by two or three parties of Maoris setting themselves right in front of the carriages. There were four or five in each lot, and they were mostly old. They got out their sharks' flesh and that bad corn they eat, and began to make their meal of them. Near Mrs. Denison there was one old man with a better sort of face, and Dick heard her say to master, 'Isn't he like my father?' What Master Horace answered he didn't hear; he says he never saw anything like her face, so sad and wild, and working for all the world as if something were fighting her within. Then all in a minute she ran out and slipped down in her beautiful dress close by the old Maori in his dirty rags, and was rubbing her face against his, as them folks do when they meet. She had just taken a mouthful of the raw fish when Master Horace missed her. He hadn't noticed her slip away. But in a moment he seemed to understand what it meant. He saw the Maori come

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out strong in her face, and he knew the Maori had got the better of everything, husband and friends and all. He gave a little cry, and in a minute he had her on her feet and was bringing her back to the carriage. Some folks thought Dick Burdas a rough hard man, and I know he was a shocker of a lad (he was fra Whitby), but that night he cried like a baby when he tell 't me," and Mrs. Bentley fell for a moment into the dialect of her youth.

"He said," she continued, "that she looked like a poor stricken thing condemned, and let herself be led back as submissive as a child, and Master Horace's face was like the dead. He didn't think any one but the major and Dr. Danby saw her go, all was done in a minute. But it was done, and some few had seen, and it got out, and things were said that wasn't true. Not the doctor! No, miss, you needn't tell me that; he's told none, that I'll warrant. He's faithful and he's close."

"O Mrs. Bentley, how dreadful for her, how dreadful!" and the girl went down on her knees by the old woman, her tears flowing fast.

"That's it, miss, you understand. I feel like that. It was bad enough for Master Horace with the future before him, and his children to think of, but for her it was desperate cruel. Eh, ma'am, what she went through! She loved more than you'd have thought us poor human beings could. And, after all, the nature was in her; she didn't put it there. I've had a deal to do to keep down sinful thoughts since then; there's a lot of things that's wrong in this world, ma'am."

"What did she do?" Alice whispered.

"She! She was for going away and leaving everything; she felt herself the worst woman in the world. It was only by begging and praying of her on my knees that I got her to stay in the house that night, for she was so far English, and had such a fancy, that she saw everything blacker than any Englishwoman would, even the partick'lerest. Afterward Master Horace was that good and gentle, and she loved him so much, that he persuaded her to say nothing more about it, and to try to live as if it hadn't been. And so she seemed to do, outward like, to other people. But it wasn't ever the same again. Something had broken in them both; with him it was his trust and his pride, but in her it was her heart."

"But the children—surely they comforted her."

"Eh, miss, that was the worst. Poor lamb, poor lamb! Never after that day, though they were more to her nor children ever were to a mother before, would she have them with her. Just a morning and a good-night kiss, and a quarter of an hour at most, and I must take them away. She watched them play in the garden from her window or the little hill there, and when they were asleep she would sit by them for hours, saying how bonny they were and how good they were growing. And she looked after their clothes and their food and every little toy and pleasure, but never came in for a romp and a chat any more."

"Dear, brave heart!" murmured the girl.

"Yes, ma'am, you feel for her, I know. She was fair terrified of them turning Maori and shaming their father. That was it. You didn't notice? No; after you came she was too ill to bear them about, and it seemed natural, I dare say. The Maoris are a fearful delicate set of folks. A bad cold takes them off into consumption directly. And with her there was the sorrow as well as the cold. It was wonderful that she lived so long."

Alice threw her arms round Mrs. Bentley's neck.

"O nurse, it is all so dreadful and sad. Couldn't we have somehow kept her with us and made her happy?"

The old woman held her close. "Nay, my dear bairn, never after that happened. It, or worse, might have come again. It's something stronger in them than we know; it's the very blood, I'm thinking. But she's gone to be the angel that Dick always said she was."

Alice looked away over the starlit garden to where the plummy trees stirred in the night wind. "No," she said, fervently, "not 'gone to be,' nurse dear; she was an angel always. Dick was right."