

The Wife's Secret, OR A BITTER RECKONING

By CHARLOTTE M. BRAEME

CHAPTER IX.

For some reason Pauline Malling was in a very irritable state of mind. Perhaps she was regretting the moment's impulse that had prompted her to accept a nameless young painter. Babette, too, seemingly had a weight on her mind. She crept about her work, laying out Miss Malling's elegant evening toilet with a subdued air very different from her usual noiseless activity. Babette was doing her best to get through her duties, when, as ill luck would have it, memory for a moment asserted itself and brought before her a picture of a pretty black-eyed urchin tossing from side to side in his small cot and crying out her name unceasingly as he refused the cooling drink offered by a hand he did not love. The maid sobbed—sobbed audibly.

Miss Malling raised her eyes from their contemplation of the carpet and looked in dignified surprise at the young Frenchwoman. Noting for the first time the signs of tears on her face, Miss Malling felt angry.

"What in heaven's name is the matter with you, Babette? Pray don't let me have any weeping and wailing. If there is one thing that exasperates me more than another, it is a crying woman."

"Pardon, mademoiselle; the grief overcame me in spite of myself. I did not intend to speak; but, as you have noticed my sorrow, I will make bold to tell you that I have a little stepbrother, the only being in the world who is related to me, and I have here a letter telling me he is very ill, and that he asks for me night and day—night and day." The poor girl's voice broke for a moment; but she rallied and went on. "If mademoiselle could spare me for just enough time to get to Boulogne and back to see the poor little fellow?"

"And what am I to do in the meantime?" Pauline asked icily. "Of course you can go if you like; but you need not come back. I am surprised you should ask me such an insane thing, when you know the house will be full of people the day after to-morrow. I could not possibly do without you. Pray do not say another word about it, and please leave off crying."

Babette moved away to the far end of the room, wiped her eyes, and stood for an instant quite still, repressing the sobs that shook her frame.

"If my little Pierre dies without seeing me I will never forgive you—never! I will watch for a chance of doing you a great harm; and it will come if I am patient," the girl thought.

After dressing Miss Malling and making the dressing room tidy, Babette passed through the picture gallery on her way to Mrs. Perkins' sanctum for her usual cup of tea. Thinking everybody must be downstairs, she stopped at Jack's easel and looked at Pauline's picture.

"So you think the world is made for your pleasure? You are too high a lady to trouble yourself with your servants' affairs; but perhaps they will trouble themselves with yours, madame! I have seen you flinch and shrivel up strangely sometimes. People don't shrivel up for nothing, unless they have a fear of something; and if they have a secret fear, there must be something bad to cause it. If my little darling dies without the comfort of kissing his Babette once, it will be your fault; and all my life long I will watch, watch, watch, to try to repay your cruelty to me and him!"—and she looked as if she meant it.

Jack, who had stopped until the last moment finishing his rather difficult letter to Ethel in his own room, was struck by the intense hatred in the woman's face as he opened the door, wondered for the moment what could have caused it, wished the next that he could call it up at will and use her as a model for a fiend, and the next moment forgot all about it. Throwing his letter on the hall table, he hurried into the drawing room to make his peace for being late.

Babette had her quiet cup of tea with Mrs. Perkins, and, with a plentiful shedding of tears, wrote to the woman who had charge of little Pierre, to say that she could not come to her darling just now.

The letter was full of loving messages and promises, and the poor girl's heart felt very heavy as she put it into the bag. She had taken it into the hall herself. There was another letter lying there ready stamped for the post; she took it up carelessly, recognized it by the red seal as the one Jack had had in his hand when he passed her in the gallery, and stood transfixed with surprise as she read the address.

"The address of that pretty demoiselle that I followed home from the museum, by her orders! Why, there is something in this! Why, if she wants the address of a lady who is known to Monsieur Dornton, does she not ask him, instead of setting me to follow her like a policeman? I shall have that to find out!"

"Babette, I want you," Mrs. Perkins called from the door that shut off the servants' quarters.

Something in the voice, some subtle touch of sympathy, struck Babette's quick ear. She turned so sharply that Mrs. Perkins did not time to conceal the black bordered letter she held in her hand. With a heartrending cry, Babette started forward and snatched the letter from her.

She was a quick, impetuous, unreasoning and unreasoning creature; she did not stop to consider that she could not have reached the child even if Pauline

had given her instant consent. She remembered only that her mistress had been cruel to her in the time of her trouble; and she registered a vow that, if there was any secret in Pauline Malling's past life, she would hunt it out and humiliate her.

A letter lay by Ethel's plate; but she did not touch it. Mr. Mallett, self-absorbed as ever, did not notice how his daughter was struggling to preserve her usual composure all through the breakfast time.

Jack Dornton had not intended to be cruel when he wrote; but, after destroying a dozen sheets of paper in his desire to be neither too soft nor too hard, he decided at last that the shorter and plainer he made it the better; and this was what he had written:

"My Dear Ethel—I should not have had the courage to do as you have done; but perhaps you are right—as indeed you always are. For the future will you allow me to consider myself."

"Your faithful friend,
"JOHN DORNTON?"

"I am glad—so very glad I wrote it. It would have been dreadful if we had married, and Jack had found out that he did not care for me afterward. Now I had better destroy that anonymous letter. I thought that perhaps Jack might have wished the engagement to continue, in which case I should have sent the letter to him and asked for an explanation."

No Ethel went bravely about her home duties, though her very lips were white with the restraint she was putting on her feelings. She tried with all her strength of mind she possessed to put her humiliating grief away from her.

"Why should I sorrow for him if he can throw me off without one word of regret?" she asked herself, angrily.

Still, in spite of her determination to crush her love under the weight of her self-respect, she now and again felt as if her heart would break. She resolutely denied herself the relief of tears, and suffered far more intensely in consequence.

The thrushes and the lively robins and perky sparrows were having a good time of it on the lawns at the Wigwam that morning. Captain Pelling was fond of these small birds, and liked to see them about the place, and he had determined to do what he could to tame them during the hard winter weather, should he decide to stay on in the Wigwam, which he had taken furnished for six months. He did not take much notice of the little creatures this morning, though. He was in a "brown study," and sat so motionless on his comfortable cane chair under the veranda that the more courageous of the birds hopped about within a yard of his feet.

The fact was Captain Pelling was disappointed. He had expected a letter either from Ethel or Mr. Mallett that morning, to settle their visit on the morrow.

"Even if they do not care to come," he told himself, "they might have been civil enough to send some conventional excuse."

After awhile it occurred to him that perhaps the Malletts had written, and that the letter had miscarried—and he felt somewhat relieved at the bare idea. He made up his mind that he would go up to town in any case; and as he went along he would decide upon what course he would pursue. And all through his vacillation he never once admitted to himself that it was his longing to see Ethel again that had for the moment transformed him into a human shuttlecock.

Notwithstanding a short notice, the phaeton was ready a minute before the appointed time, looking perfect in every detail. Pelling had the reins in his hand and his foot on the step, when he noticed a telegraph boy coming toward the house. He waited a moment. Yes, it was for him!

"From Geoffrey Mallett, Buckingham street, Bloomsbury, to Captain Pelling, The Wigwam, Wimbledon. Shall be with you at 2 o'clock to-morrow. Get sketches in inspection order."

And the man of thirty felt a lad again in his light-heartedness, as he sent his handsome bays along the road.

CHAPTER X.

Jack's love-making went on swimmingly during the lovely summer weather and among the beauties of Mallingford. The house was full of visitors now, and, in accordance with Pauline's wishes, their engagement was kept strictly private. Still, in spite of all their care, the state of affairs was pretty shrewdly guessed at by most of the people about them, and the well-bred guests wondered immensely at Miss Malling's sudden fit of unworl'dliness. Strangely enough, Babette, with all her sharpness, was one of the last to hear of her mistress' infatuation for the "artist chap," as he was scornfully described among the servants; but the moment she did hear of it she began wondering and watching until in her own mind she was sure that Miss Malling was really deeply in love with this good-looking Mr. Dornton. Babette liked Jack, and, knowing, as she believed she did, the evil of Pauline's heart, she was sorry to think that such an altogether too charming young man should be so thrown away.

So Babette was always on the watch for some clew that would help her to

discover her young mistress' secret; and at this time she showed great interest in Mrs. Perkins' gossip about the family hoping to glean some scrap of information that might be of use to her in furthering her revengeful purpose.

"And if mademoiselle had married against the wishes of Milord Summers, or without his consent, she would have lost the whole estate?" she asked, one evening in August, as she sipped her tea leisurely.

"Yes, if she did so before she was twenty-five; but after her twenty-fifth birthday she will be free to marry whomsoever she pleases; and, as she will be twenty-five on the seventeenth of next month, there is not much chance of her sacrificing the estate at this late day, after waiting until now."

"That is so," observed Babette, with a disappointed air. She reflected for a few moments, and a flash of intelligence crossed her face as she asked, "And if mademoiselle had married in her extreme youth—before she was known as the heiress of the property—how then?"

"I think she would lose everything."

"Who would have it after her?"

"Sir Geoffrey, the late baronet's brother."

"To be sure! It must have been a great blow to him when he found himself robbed of everything by his brother's injustice. What did he do? Where did he go?"

"I don't know. He is as proud as any of the family, and, when his brother told him never to come near the place again, he put on his hat without one word, and walked away with his head as high as if he were the heir of thousands. We've never seen a sight of him since that day, and it's my belief we never shall."

Babette believed she had found the keynote to Pauline's secret trouble. That there was secret trouble she never doubted for an instant. She had observed her mistress too closely to be misled on that point; she knew that nothing but some mighty fear could cause those sudden starts, followed by periods of anxious, heavy-browed thought, to which she was subject. And, when Babette went upstairs, she reasoned the matter out.

"I have heard that she never knew she was her uncle's heiress until after her father's death. What is more likely than that she should have married out there in Italy—married some poor idiot who was caught by her pretty face? And then, when my lady suddenly finds that she is a rich woman, she is tired of this poor fool, and runs away and enjoys her life by herself. I believe I have found the dark spot in my fine lady's life! If this is as I think, I can take from her her beloved fiancé and her riches at one blow. How glorious that would be!"

Her face glowed with savage satisfaction at the bare thought of so complete a revenge. She left her seat by the bay window of Pauline's dressing room, and paced up and down, her excitement being too great for her to remain still. The dusky gloom deepened until the room was all in shadow, and presently a housemaid came in and lighted the candles in the large silver branches on the toilet table.

As the door closed behind the maid Babette resumed her promenade, and came to a sudden stop as her eyes rested on the key left in the lock of a small bronze box. This box contained Miss Malling's private keys! She locked up very little; but what she did lock up she was rather particular about, and her keys were invariably kept in this Indian box, the key of which she carried about with her.

As Babette stood looking with a dull, fascinated gaze at the key, she heard the rustle of silken skirts in the gallery outside. With a swoop like a hawk's, so swift and noiseless was it, she plucked the little key from the lock and slipped it into the pocket of her dainty frilled apron. The next instant Miss Malling turned the handle of the door and saw Babette rearranging the lace draperies round the looking glass. She crossed the room and went straight to the table, glanced quickly at the box, and then turned to Babette.

"Have you seen the key of this box?"

"Not to-day, mademoiselle."

"Provoking!" She took it up in her hands and shook it. Yes, the keys are inside. Babette, I wish you not to leave these rooms to-night until I come up to bed. I have dropped the key somewhere. I don't suppose it will be found until we have daylight to help us—it is so small. Have your supper sent up to you here."

"Very good, mademoiselle."

Babette stood with her hands held tightly over her heart, listening to the rustle of the silken skirts along the gallery and down the stairs. Then her expression changed from strained attention to vivid triumph. She threw her clasped hands high over her head. She locked both doors, closed one window to prevent the blinds from fluttering, and then unlocked the small bronze box. She laughed as she picked out a key from the bunch and tried to unlock Pauline's large desk.

"At last!" she whispered, as the lock of the desk flew back.

(To be continued.)

Just Resentment.

"You say your head began to grow when you were 16," remarked the visitor at the dime museum. "May I ask how long it has taken you to bring it to its present magnificent proportions?"

"Sir," said the Bearded Lady, justly incensed, "you are the first man that has ever dared to ask my age!"—Chicago Tribune.

Artful Dodger.

He—Then I may hope?
She—Well, you may ask papa.
He—Impossible.
She—Why do you say that?
He—Because I haven't been able to get sight of him since I loaned him \$10 before Christmas.

CATARRH ANNOYING-DANGEROUS

Catarrh is usually regarded as nothing more serious than a bad cold or slight inflammation of the inner skin and tissues of the head and throat, when it is, in fact, not only a vexatious and troublesome disease, but a complicated and dangerous one. It is true that Catarrh usually begins with a cold in the head, but when the poisons, which are thrown off through the secretions, find their way into the blood, it becomes a constitutional trouble that affects all parts of the body. It has more annoying and disgusting symptoms than any other disease. There is a sickening and offensive discharge from the nostrils, a constant buzzing noise in the ears, headaches and pains in the eyes are frequent, while filthy, tenacious matter drops back into the throat requiring continual hawking and spitting, and in certain stages of the disease the breath has an odor that is very offensive. Catarrh is worse in winter, because the cold weather closes the pores and glands, and the poisonous and unhealthy vapors which should pass off that way are thrown back on the tender linings and tissues, causing the inflammation which starts the unhealthy secretions to be absorbed by the blood. When the blood becomes diseased with this catarrhal matter all kinds of complications may be looked for. As the blood circulates through the body the foul matter finds its way into the stomach, ruining the digestion and producing chronic Dyspepsia, or Catarrh of the stomach. It also affects the Kidneys, Bladder and other members of the body, while the general health is weakened, appetite lost and the patient feels despondent and half sick all the time. But worst of all, if the trouble is not checked the lungs become diseased from the constant passage of poisoned blood through them, and Catarrh terminates in Consumption, the most fatal of all diseases. You cannot get rid of Catarrh by treating it with sprays, washes, inhalations, etc., because they only reach the membranes and tissues, while the real cause of the trouble is in the blood. These relieve the annoying symptoms for a time, but the poison is all the while getting a stronger hold on the system and when they are left off will manifest itself in worse form than before. S. S. S. is the greatest of all blood purifiers, and when it has cleansed the blood, this pure, rich stream circulates through the body, carrying healthful properties to the diseased parts. Then the inflamed membranes and tissues begin to heal, the discharges cease, the general condition of the system is strengthened, every one of the annoying and disgusting symptoms pass away, and the patient is left in perfect health. S. S. S. is the best remedy for Catarrh. It goes right into the blood and removes all effete matter and catarrhal poison and cures the disease permanently, and at the same time builds up the entire system by its tonic effect. S. S. S. is a purely vegetable remedy—non-injurious to the system and a certain, reliable cure for Catarrh. Catarrh sufferers will find our free consulting department helpful in advising local treatment to be used with S. S. S.

Several years ago my blood was bad and I had in addition a dreadful case of Catarrh. My nose was stopped up, I had headaches, ringing noises in my ears and felt unfit for work. I commenced the use of S. S. S. on the recommendation of a friend, and in a short time it cured me sound and well. It put my blood in good condition and I have never had the slightest return of the Catarrh since that time.

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First Summer Girl—Did you hear about the miserable luck I had yesterday?
Second Summer Girl—No; what was it?
First Summer Girl—While in bathing a man rescued me from drowning.
Second Summer Girl—Why, I'd call that good luck.
First Summer Girl—But the man in the case is married.

European Breakfasts.
Mark Twain, in speaking of the typical European breakfasts, said: "Do you know what I'll do? I'll nail a piece of cuttle-fish bone to the chimney, and every morning I'll hop up on the mantel and take a peck at it with a tin bill. It will be just as filling and much cheaper than a European breakfast."

It is evident that Mr. Clemens prefers the typical American breakfast dish of Pillsbury's Vitos with good cream and sugar.

Economical Thought.
"Oh, George!" said Mrs. Youngman, "my canary bird's dead."
"Yes?" replied her husband. "You're not grieving much."
"No; you see, I can have it stuffed for my hat next fall, and then the rest of the hat won't cost you so much."—Philadelphia Press.

In After Years.
Wife—But during our courtship you never objected to my talking.
Husband—Of course not. Being talked to is one thing and being talked at is quite another.

Everything Limited.
The old farmer went to one end of the swaying coach to wash his hands. He could find only a few remnants of soap. "Boy," he drawled, "there don't seem to be much soap here?"
"No, sah," chuckled the porter, "you know dis is de limited. Ebbything abohd am limited."
Then the old man tried to fill a glass from the water cooler. He could only force out a few drops.
"Where's the water, boys?"
"Not much water, sah. Dat am limited, too."
Presently the porter brushed the old farmer down and the latter handed him nine coppers.
"Why, boss," protested the porter, "yo' gib de porter on de udder train a quarter."
"I know that," chuckled the old farmer, "but you know this is the limited, and everything should be limited."—Chicago News.

No Ruben's Work.
Mrs. Al de Mustahd—And have you any paintings by Rubens?
Mrs. Justin de Bunch—Mercy, no! All our pictures are by the best artists.
Mrs. A. de M.—But Rubens—
Mrs. J. de B.—Don't tell me. I never saw a rube yet that could paint.—Cleveland Leader.

Restoring the Balance.
"Wonderly has made a fortune in cotton."
"Yes, but according to his wife's dressmaker, he's fast losing it in silk."—Detroit Free Press.


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