



The Wife's Secret, OR A BITTER RECKONING

By CHARLOTTE M. BRAEME

CHAPTER XVII.—(Continued.)

The lawyer's ill-timed attempt at a joke gave Mr. Mallett the opportunity he had been longing for, and he turned upon him almost savagely.

"Be good enough to remember that this is a business interview," he said, frigidly, "and reserve your humor for a more fitting occasion." The small, shabby creature shriveled up at once, and Mr. Mallett, with a show of surface courtesy, turned to Babetta. "And now, madame, I think the rest of this interview can be carried on between us two; the presence of a third person is unnecessary, as I conclude the proofs spoken of by you are in your possession."

"I must speak this once; and I won't interrupt again," jerked in Daws. "I am a partner in this affair—I would not have taken it but on that understanding—and, being a partner, I submit that you have no right to shut me out; therefore I stay."

Mr. Mallett shrugged his shoulders with an expression of utter indifference.

Babetta produced an envelope and took from it the small photograph of a grave, which she had found in her mistress's desk. She drew out a small magnifying glass from her pocket and crossed the room to the dirty window.

"Come and look," she said.

Mr. Mallett did as requested, and then looked at her inquiringly.

"Do you not see the name on the tomb?" she asked, impatiently, for she was so impressed with the truth of her own belief that she was annoyed when others did not jump so readily to the same conclusion as herself.

Mr. Mallett bent down again in the doubtful light that found its way through the dust-grimed panes, and looked carefully at the photograph. Daws and Babetta stood by, anxiously awaiting his answer.

"I see the name 'Pauline' plainly and the last letters of the second name—'l-i-n-g.' What then?"

"Do you not remember that your niece's name is Pauline, and can you not see that those letters which are blotted out by that mark must be the first two letters of your own name? If it were not for that blot, the name would stand 'Pauline Malling.' Can you not understand that you hold in your hand a photograph of your real niece's grave, and that this woman at Mallingford is nothing but an adventuress?"

"Great heaven!"

He stood staring, first at one, then at the other, and then, in breathless amazement, he looked at the card in his hand. Babetta felt satisfied as to the success of her coup.

"And, if that is not enough—I mean the mere name—there is the date, 'May 18—' This woman who has been quietly accepted as the late baronet's heiress first came to light in July of the same year. It is all quite plain."

In a dazed fashion Mr. Mallett passed his hand across his forehead. He could not yet realize the position in which he stood; he could not grasp what it meant for him—comfort, position, riches, splendor, after twenty years of comparative privation. His head was in a whirl.

"Will you not sit? You look over-come, Sir Geoffrey."

He started on hearing himself addressed by his proper name. Yes, that was just what it meant to him—that he was, or would soon be, Sir Geoffrey Mallingford, of Mallingford Park, instead of a hard-working drawing master, doing his daily round of instruction at so many shillings a quarter, and thinking himself fortunate if, after settling his bills, he was able to put away a few pounds at the end of each term. He dropped into the chair placed for him by Babetta, wondering if he should wake up to find it all a dream. He listened, without, however, gathering much of her meaning, to the French woman's voluble explanation.

"We advertised for you day after day in the Times, but could get no answer; and I was in despair, when Providence sent you down to Mallingford. Mrs. Perkins saw you and recognized you as you went out, and told me who you were. How I prayed that she was not mistaken! I telegraphed to Mr. Daws, and he telegraphed to you this morning. I made an absolute necessity of coming to town for some wedding finery; and so here we are."

"And now what is to be done? And am I to go down to the park and turn this woman out with a policeman, or how do you propose to proceed?"

"She must not be interfered with until our proofs are all prepared," replied Mr. Daws. "My suggestion is that Ma'm'selle Lestrange should give you the address of the man who took that photograph—which, with a rare foresight, she withheld from me; that you cross over to Paris by to-night's boat, and from there make your way as quickly as you can to this place in Spain; that, when there, you get affidavits, or whatever their Spanish equivalent may be, from eye-witnesses of your niece's death, also the certificate of her death, and any other evidence that may crop up, and any other on your return you place said proofs in my hands; and before a month has passed you will be in possession of Mallingford, and ma'm'selle and I will be fingering that five thousand."

"I have no money to meet the expenses of such a journey."

"I thought of that the minute I received ma'm'selle's telegram, and I re-

ed fifty pounds at a big sacrifice this morning. Sign this bill for seventy-five at three months, and the fifty is yours."

Mr. Mallett's lip curled with contempt at the shameless extortion.

"You must feel very sure of this game," he remarked, "to be so—generous, shall we call it?"

Daws listened to the innuendo with placid unconcern.

"Well, I do feel sure of it, and I'll tell you why. Miss Malling called upon me the very first day our advertisement of your address appeared, and she was in such an awful state of fright about it that I saw in a minute she was afraid of you for some reason or other. Putting what I observed and ma'm'selle's theory about that photo together, I concluded that we were on the right track—that your niece is dead—died six years ago—and this woman is nothing but an impostor."

"Oh, yes, it is sure enough," interposed Babetta. "But let us waste no more time. I must get back to my fine madame, and you, Sir Geoffrey, will have to say good-by to the charming lady, your daughter, and make arrangements for your absence. Here is the address of the photographer who took the picture. That ends the arrangements so far as I am concerned at present; the rest remains with you and Monsieur Daws; he will let me know how you go on in your search. Good afternoon!"

Daws looked after her in surprise. She had not spoken a word about the need for haste if the marriage was to be prevented; he had been expecting it all through the interview, and she had gone without once introducing the subject. Perhaps she had altered her mind; any way, that part of the business had nothing to do with him. Once more he opened his desk.

"Here is the money, Sir Geoffrey, and here is the bill ready stamped to sign. You will send me an occasional telegram, if you come across any news; and if you find another fifty necessary you can have it on the same terms. I wish you a successful search, sir, and a speedy return."

"I shall wire if necessary, not unless; and you may depend upon my earliest possible return."

He put his name to the bill, took up the small roll of notes, bade the lawyer good day and left the room without seeing his extended hand.

"As proud as Lucifer!" muttered Daws, not a bit abashed. "Never mind, the plainer and simpler the better."

Mr. Mallett reached the noisy, bustling street and looked about him for a cab; time was getting precious, if he meant to start to-night; and he would like to do so, if possible—for an intolerable restlessness had come to him, and he felt that he could not spend a moment in peace until he knew everything.

To his surprise, as he looked up and down the long street, Babetta glided from the shadow of a doorway and beckoned to him.

"I want to say a dozen words to you that I do not care that littl eman to hear," she said, as he reached her side. "I have only two minutes to spare, and I was afraid you would not leave in time. If you find out that your niece is dead, and that this woman is an impostor soon enough let me have a telegram to that effect by Wednesday morning. I will not ask for my half of that five thousand pounds."

Here was another complication.

"Why by Wednesday?" asked Mr. Mallett, in surprise.

"Because she is going to marry Mr. Dornton at Bishopgate church at 11 o'clock on Wednesday next—all in secret, you know—and I would not only give up the money, but the best years of my life to prevent it!"

"Married to Dornton on Wednesday—the very day after her birthday—at a busy city church! Great heavens, what does it all mean?" asked Mr. Mallett, in perplexity.

"It means she is fond of that young man and will marry him in spite of every one, if you do not prevent it. I must fly for my train—do what you can."

He stood for a moment looking after her retreating figure, tried to make out what the news meant, then gave it up in despair and bestowed his thoughts exclusively on the arrangements for his absence.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Sunday at Mallingford Park. The house was full of visitors. Small attics on the top story which had never been slept in since the great doings of thirty-nine years before, when the late Sir Paul came of age, were all occupied now, for Lord Summers having expressed a wish that Miss Malling's majority should be marked by fitting festivities, that lady had thrown herself heartily into the project.

It was a close, stifling day, and there was a faint, white mist on the parklands, and an intense stillness in the air, which proved very trying to the majority of Miss Malling's guests after luncheon. They sauntered out of the reception rooms by twos and threes, and sought the quiet of their own apartments until the ground floor looked quite deserted.

Pauline's health was generally good; but she, too, felt a breathless languor to-day and determined to enjoy the afternoon in her own rooms. She removed the gorgeous toilet which had gladden-

ed the eyes of the villagers in church that morning, and replaced it by a light cashmere gown.

"The last Sunday that I shall be known to the world as Miss Malling," she mused. "Before this time next week Jack and I will be away from here, happy in each other's society, and in the certainty that nothing on earth can ever separate us. Most young women would have numberless love tokens to destroy before their marriage; I have absolutely nothing that I fear my husband's seeing. Circumstances have been against my cultivating lovers as an amusement, and I am spared the farce of destroying the evidences of my past folly."

When she had taken two or three turns up and down the room, she stopped in front of her desk and looked at it thoughtfully.

"I suppose I may as well destroy it," she said, absently. "It can do me no good to keep it, and it might possibly do me harm in the future. That must have been in my mind all the time."

She unlocked the small bronze box on the toilet table with a key that hung from a gold chain round her neck, and took from it a bunch of keys. Then drawing up a chair to the desk she unlocked that also, and went slowly through the contents.

She came upon one or two letters that interested her slightly and drew her thoughts away from her original purpose to search the desk, and it was not until both sides were quite empty that she discovered with a sudden heart-quaking fear the absence of that for which she was searching.

A look of wild despair flashed from her eyes and her breath came in short, sharp gasps, as she turned to the heaps of odds and ends which she had already gone through, with a hope that in her absence of mind she might have passed what she sought without noticing it.

Her quick, nervous fingers turned over the papers until the pile had once more been thoroughly searched; and then Pauline Malling sank back in her chair with her hand to her head and a look of despair in her eyes. Horrible thoughts chased each other through her aching brain; and, when 5 o'clock at last struck, she had arrived at one definite conclusion, that the person who had possession of the missing article and the one who had advertised for the address of Sir Geoffrey Malling were one and the same.

When she rose and relocked the desk, she was haggard and pale, and she looked at herself wistfully in the glass; and an instinctive prayer went up from her heart that her beauty might not leave her until she was Jack Dornton's wife. In the midst of all that threatened her—loss of name, wealth, position—it was almost touching to note how this worldly woman counted everything as nothing compared with her love for Jack.

Lord Summers was one of the guests at Mallingford. He was staying "over the seventeenth," and the fussy, kindly old man was slightly concerned at the existing state of affairs. He arrived only on the Saturday evening, and he was surprised to find Jack still at the Park.

"And when are my pictures to be completed, Mr. Dornton?" he asked.

This very question had been a point of disagreement between Jack and Pauline. He had wished to carry out the commission for those six pictures, and she had urged the unfitness of his earning another penny by his painting after their marriage. So he hesitated a little before he answered.

"Are you anxious to have them soon? I am anticipating a winter in Rome this year, and I should like, if possible, to devote myself while there to a close study of the old masters. But, if you are particular as to time, I will finish your commission before I touch any other work, of course."

"No, I don't think I am exactly in a hurry, if you are not," and as his lordship spoke he thought of the avidity with which Jack had accepted the offer when it was originally made, and his voluntary promise to complete the series by the end of the year. "So you mean to winter in Rome?" he said, pleasantly. "And how does Miss Ethel Mallett like the prospect of so long a separation?"

Jack reddened suddenly, and he hated himself for it.

"I did not know you took enough interest in my private affairs to be led into investigating them," he answered, "Nor do I. You are mistaken; it is Miss Mallett's affairs I am interested in. I beg you will not credit me with prying into your personal affairs at all. As I have spoken on the matter, and as you seem to resent the liberty—which, believe me, was not intended as such—I must explain how things are. I met an old friend of mine, with his daughter, at the Exhibition of the Royal Academy one day last season. I had known him in years past as an enthusiast in art, and I was delighted to meet so congenial a companion."

Lord Summers paused a moment, and looked carefully round the table; seeing everybody occupied in conversation, he went on, in a slightly lowered voice. "My friend has had many reverses in life, which has necessitated his taking the name of 'Mr. Mallett,' and have driven him to earn a living for himself and his family by giving lessons in drawing. I see you begin to understand now"—in answer to Jack's start of surprise. "Well, we went through the rooms together and he came to a picture of yours. Miss Mallett's delight at its position on the line was eloquent of many things. I looked the question I did not dare to ask, and Mr. Mallett told me of the engagement between his daughter and you, and expressed his wish that she should remain in the same class of society that she had been brought up in, in answer to my suggestion that she should come to us for a season out of town. Now, perhaps, you will understand my motive in seeking you out to excuse my seemingly impertinent curiosity."

(To be continued.)

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Lincoln the Farmer.

Matters soon reached a crisis which drove the junior partner out into the fields again, where he undertook all sorts of rough farm labor, from splitting rails to plowing. As a man-of-all-work, however, Lincoln did not prove altogether satisfactory to his employers. He was too fond of mounting stumps in the field and "practicing polemics" on the other farm hands, and there was something uncomfortable about a plow man who read as he followed the team, no matter how straight his furrows ran. Such practices were irritating, if not presumptuous, and there is a well known story about a farmer who found "the hired man" lying in a field beside the road, dressed in his not too immaculate farm clothes, with a book instead of a pitchfork in his hand.

"What are you reading?" inquired the old gentleman.

"I'm not reading; I'm studying," answered Lincoln his wondering eyes still on the pages of his book.

"Studying what?"

"Law sir."

The old man stared at the speaker for a moment in utter amazement.

"Great—God—Almighty!" he muttered as he passed on shaking his head. —From Frederick Trevor Hill's "Lincoln the Lawyer" in the January Century.

An Early Reformer.

"I am looking," said Diogenes, "for an honest man."

"And when you find him, what are you going to do?"

"Sh! I'm not going to find him. That would spoil the joke."—Washington Star.

Past Resuscitation.

In the days of the first settlers in the Chickasaw country, when Davy Crockett still frequented the Big Hatchie, "Old Man Giddins" was a prosperous citizen of the Forked Deer settlement. One day he started on a trip to Arkansas, and thenceforth for several years Forked Deer knew him no more.

As travel in Arkansas was dangerous, and as nothing was heard of Giddins, he was officially declared dead by the court, and his estate divided among his heirs. A year or so later, however, he turned up, and tried to get possession of his property again. He was promptly seized and taken into court.

"What do you mean by coming round here, trying to take this property?" roared the court at him.

"It's my property," asserted Giddins. "Everybody knows it's mine."

"Not at all!" replied the judge. "I'll admit your case seems a hard one, but it can't be helped now. This court has decided that you are extinctus defunctus, which is Latin for dead. This court cannot err. Dead you are. If you want any property round here you must take another name and set to work to earn it. Mr. Sheriff, adjourn this court, and we will all go and see that wrestling match you spoke of."

Much More to the Point.

"Ef yer real interested," said Deacon Skinner, "I'll tell ye what I want fur that horse."

"Oh, I wouldn't be interested in knowin' that," replied Farmer Shrupe, "but I wouldn't mind knowin' what ye'd take."—Philadelphia Ledger.

RHEUMATISM

BODY RACKED WITH PAIN

No other bodily suffering is equal to that produced by the pain of Rheumatism. When the poisons and acids, which cause this disease, become entrenched in the blood there is hardly any part of the body that is not affected. The muscles become sore and drawn, the nerves twitch and sting, the joints inflame and swell, the bones ache, every movement is one of agony, and the entire body is racked with pain. Rheumatism is brought on by indigestion, stomach troubles, torpid Liver, weak Kidneys and a general inactive state of the system. The refuse matter instead of passing off through nature's avenues is left to sour and form uric acid, and other acid poisons which are absorbed into the blood. Rheumatism does not affect all alike. In some cases it takes a wandering form; it may be in the arms or legs one day and in the shoulders, feet, hands, back or other parts of the body the next. Others suffer more seriously, and are never free from pain. The uric acid and other irritating substances find lodgement in the muscles and joints and as these deposits increase the muscles become stiff and the joints locked and immovable. It matters not in what form the disease may be the cause is always the same—a sour, acid condition of the blood. This vital stream has lost its purity and freshness, and instead of nourishing and feeding the different parts with health-giving properties, it fills them with the acids and salts of this painful and far-reaching disease. The cold and dampness of Winter always intensify the pains of Rheumatism, and the sufferer to get relief from the agony, rubs the affected parts with liniments, oils, lotions, etc., or uses plasters and other home remedies. These are desirable because they give temporary ease and comfort but have no effect on the real trouble which is in the blood and beyond the reach of such treatment. S. S. S. is the best remedy for Rheumatism. It goes into the blood and attacks the disease at its head, and by neutralizing and driving out the acids and building up the thin, sour blood it cures the disease permanently. While cleansing the blood S. S. S. tones up the stomach, digestion and every other part of the system, soothes the excited nerves, reduces the inflammation, dissolves the deposits in the joints, relieves all pain and completely cures this distressing disease. S. S. S. is a certain cure for Rheumatism in any form; Muscular, Inflammatory, Articular or Sciatic. Special book on the disease and any medical advice, without charge, to all who write. THE SWIFT SPECIFIC CO., ATLANTA, GA.

About fifteen years ago I had a severe attack of Rheumatism and could not work with any satisfaction. My legs were badly swollen and drawn so I could scarcely walk. I tried many remedies but could get no relief. I was finally recommended to try S. S. S. and it soon cured me sound and well. I am now 74 years old and have never had any return of the trouble.

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Sometime ago I had Rheumatism and had to quit work. The pains in my back and between my shoulders was so intense I could not rest or sleep. I tried everything but nothing did me any good till I heard of and took S. S. S. This medicine cured me sound and well. It purified my blood and made me feel like a new man.

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