

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 shivered up at once, and Mr. Mallett, with a show of surface courtesy, turned to Babette. "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. Babette 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 Babette stood by, anxiously awaiting his answer.

"I see the name 'Pauline' plainly and the last letters of the second name—'t-l-a-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 Mallett.' 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. Babette 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 Mallett, 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 Babette, 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 that 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 fingered 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 raised 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 Mallett 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 Babette. "But let us waste no more time. I must get back to my fine madame, and you, Sir Geoffrey, will have to say good-bye 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, Babette 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 little 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. Dorton 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 Dorton 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 I 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 betwined 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 Mallett'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 park-lands, and an intense stillness in the air, which proved very trying to the majority of Miss Mallett'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 gladdened 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 Mallett," 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 un-

locked 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 Mallett 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 only 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 Mallett 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 Dorton'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. Dorton?" 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 should like, if possible, to deliver 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. He did not know how much interest in his private affairs to be led into investigating them, he answered, with a decided touch of displeasure in his voice.

"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.)

Plaster Better for the Purpose.

Customer—Got those "Pillman's Popular Pellets" in yet?

Rural Drug Clerk—Yes; just come this morning.

Customer—Good. I've been asking for them for a week back.

Rural Drug Clerk—Gosh! I didn't s'pose they were good for that—Philadelphia Press.

Strenuous Hint.

She—I don't like your first name, Mr. Slowboy. Cornelius is so long drawn out.

He—Well, suppose you call me Nell for short. Several of my friends do.

She—I'd call you Corn if—if—

He—if what?

She—if I thought you would pop.

A Generous View.

"They say that sneaky-looking man across from us in two-faced!" whispered the first boarder.

"Well, I hope he is, for his sake," said No. 2 generously. "It would be too bad to be reduced to the one he has on, wouldn't it?"

Just Before the Ceremony.

Clarence—I told the minister he mustn't kiss you.

Cordelia—And what did he say?

Clarence—He thanked me and said under those circumstances he would only charge me half the usual fee.

A Child Fancy.

"What are stars?" said little Mary.

"Are they the nails that hold the sky up?"—Philadelphia Bulletin.

FAITH IN SANTA CLAUS.

I used to watch for Santa Claus With child faith and childish awe And listen in the snowy night To hear his sleigh bells chime. Beside the door on Christmas eve I put a tray of hay To feed the prancing steeds That sped him on his way.

I pictured him a jolly man With beard of frosty white, And cheeks so fat that when he laughed They hid his eyes from sight; A heart that overflowed with love For little girls and boys, And on his back a balmy pack, Brimful of gorgeous toys.

If children of a larger growth Could have a Christmas tree From Father Time, one gift alone Would be enough for me— Let others take the gems and gold, And trides light and vain, But give me back my old belief In Santa Claus again!

—Life.

NANNIE'S XMAS IN 1799.

BY JULES ADAMS POWELL.

It was the day before Christmas. Dame Yarrow stood in the store-room doorway, gowned in a warm frock of gray wool-hemp, over which was tied an ample white apron. Her white-capped head nodded as she counted the piles on the shelves.

"Fifteen pumpkin—fifteen mince—fifty custard cups and two plum puddings—eighty-two in all, not counting Nannie's three little turnovers. I think that will do for the holidays this year, though Brother John is coming with those ten boys and one little girl. How cold it is. There is surely a storm brewing, and I hope the folks will get here before it breaks."

The good woman turned the key in the lock, and a door blowing open just at that moment, at the other end of the passageway, she hurried off to close it and forgot about the key.

By 3 o'clock dame was robed in her pretty gray poplin with white kerchief crossed on her breast, and a dainty white lace cap on her brown curls, which would stray out from beneath the cap band, and which Papa Yarrow slyly pulled as he passed through the hall where sat his wife and little daughter in front of the blazing wood fire.

"All ready for company, Nancy mine?" He caught the little one up in his arms and kissed her on either cheek, continuing: "And mother, too? Why she looks as young as the day I saw her for the first time."

Farmer Yarrow put the little girl down, glanced at his wife, who, with drooping face, did not respond to his merry speech.

Her husband, noticing this, bent over her tenderly, with the words, "Yes, my wife, our life has been one of great happiness, married only by one sorrow. If he—our eldest child—our Henry—were alive to-day, he would be a brave lad of 17."

"John," for the first time his wife raised her head and looked into his face, her brown eyes filled with tears. "John, sometimes, methinks our boy may yet be alive. In the fight with the Indians, we were told that he was carried away by them, and even though the country about was searched by scouts and others, it might be that they saved his life, for he was but a baby—5 years old, and if there was a woman in that tribe surely she would have mother-heart enough to preserve the life of an innocent babe who had never done harm to any."

"Wife, wife, this is very wrong for you to hope for the return of one who has been so many years from us. I am sure that our son cannot be alive, or we would have heard of him in some way. Ah! I hear sleigh bells."

Noting Nannie up again, he turned toward the window, and coming up the driveway were seen three immense sledges drawn by strong horses and filled with merry faces, the owners of which were soon clambering out. The front door was thrown open, and Madame Yarrow's tears vanished in the hearty handshakes and embraces of sisters, cousins and aunts.

Even Great-grandmother Hartwell had come, for this year it was Mary Yarrow's Christmas feast, and all had come to make the old house ring with joy and laughter until after New Year.

That night a merry crowd sat down at the supper table. There was Brother John Hartwell, his wife and eleven children. There was Great-grandmother Hartwell, and her daughter-in-law, Grandmother Hartwell. Mr. Yarrow's father and mother were present, as were also his two brothers and one sister with their wives, husband and children. In all there were thirty-three.

One might well wonder where all this goodly company were to sleep, but if you had gone into the great garret you would have ceased wondering, when you saw the trundle beds for the little ones. Of course, the very smallest babies slept in their mothers' rooms.

Christmas Eve the children were always allowed an extra half hour around the fireside to listen to the stories of their elders, while the corn popped and chestnuts burned black, or else hopped across the floor.

Cousin Rod saw the look of terror in the eyes of some of the little ones, and interrupted with the words, "Well, now, Aunt Mary, wouldn't it be a great joy if these hungry Reds should get into your store-room and carry off all those pies and puddings? Know you have there for to-morrow?"

"Are they really so hungry, Cousin Rod?" asked a little voice from his lap.

"Yes, dear, an Indian is always ready to eat one out of house and home."

Late that night no one heard the "pit-pat of tiny bare feet along the dark, cold hall, as a little white figure emerged from the attic, and flew down stairs in the moonlight, which flooded the house with its kindly rays.

She went directly to the store-room. At the same instant a tall, dark form, that had but a moment before climbed



Freddie Green he said 'at Santa Claus was let a fake an' he laid awake in bed to find out for sure, an' when Santa Claus came in with a whole lot of things he hollered right out loud to 'Get a half-cent to Santa Claus, an' Santa Claus 1st picked up everything 'at he was going to leave an' turned out the electric light an' Freddie Green didn't get nothing! Pa says Freddie Green hadn't got no manners— an' 'at's the reason.

An Improved Diary.

"This," explained the bookseller, "is our latest patent diary. We think it is the cleverest thing in that line ever devised."

The shopper turns the leaves idly.

"But I can't see where it is different from any other," she observes.

"No? Well, if you will look at all the dates after Jan. 23 you will see that in each space has been printed, 'Got up, ate breakfast, lunch and dinner and went to bed.' That insures a complete diary for the year."

—Judge.

The Dawn of Christmas.

Christmas day begins in the middle of the Pacific ocean, and there is where Santa Claus starts and ends his great and only journey of the year.



- 602—Mauritius Tiberius, Emperor of Rome, died.
- 1213—Possessions of Knights Templar in England appropriated by the crown.
- 1415—Henry V. entered London after victory at Agincourt.
- 1490—Perkin Warbeck, pretender to English crown, executed.
- 1542—English defeated Scotch at battle of Solway Moss.
- 1547—Henry II. of France forbid printing any book relating to Holy Scriptures.
- 1572—John Knox died.
- 1586—Sentence of death announced to Mary Queen of Scots.
- 1615—Marriage of Louis XIII. of France with Anne of Austria.
- 1618—Charter granted for the colony of Virginia.
- 1630—Great earthquake in Peru.
- 1638—The site of New Haven, Conn., bought from the Indians for 12 cents and some trinkets.
- 1652—Province of Maine taken under protection of Massachusetts and made a county called York.
- 1700—Philip V. proclaimed King of Spain.
- 1739—Porto Bello taken by Admiral Vernon.
- 1747—Robert Livingston born.
- 1748—Isaac Watts died.
- 1759—Fort Duquesne, now Pittsburgh, Pa., evacuated by the French.
- 1774—Robert Clive, ex-Governor of India, committed suicide.
- 1783—British troops evacuated New York City.
- 1789—Paper money first issued in France.
- 1792—The Scheidt opened to all nations.
- 1795—King Stanislaus of Poland deposed by Catherine of Russia.
- 1804—Franklin Pierce born....Thirty thousand perished in inundation of the River Nile.
- 1800—Fanny Kemble, celebrated actress, born.
- 1814—Treaty signed at Ghent ending War of 1812 between the United States and Great Britain....Elbridge Gerry, Vice President of the United States and one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, died.
- 1816—Philadelphia theater lighted with gas, first in this country.
- 1826—Treaty signed between Great Britain and Brazil for suppression of the slave trade.
- 1829—Camden, S. C., nearly destroyed by fire....New England began custom of celebrating Thanksgiving day.
- 1837—Wings of Herat begun by Persians.
- 1841—Faraday's discovery of the electric current presented to the Royal Society.
- 1852—Countess of Lovelace, daughter of the poet Byron, died.
- 1855—Robert Bunyan, last male descendant of the author of "Pilgrim's Progress," died....Revolution at Montevideo.
- 1857—Garrison of Lucknow rescued by Sir Colin Campbell.
- 1861—Mason and Slidell imprisoned at Fort Warren, Boston.
- 1863—Battle of Lookout Mountain and Missionary Ridge.
- 1870—Bavaria enters the North German Confederation.
- 1874—G. S. Bangs first proposed 24-hour trains between New York and Chicago.
- 1882—Thurlow Weed died.
- 1884—Grand Opera House at St. Louis burned.
- 1891—E. Bulwer Lytton, British minister to France, died.
- 1894—Five villages in Sicily destroyed by earthquake....Public executions abolished in Spain.
- 1898—Steamer Portland sunk off New England coast, 115 lives lost....Hawaiian commission held first meeting in Washington.
- 1899—Thomas H. Ismay, founder of the White Star line, died...."Brave Bill" Anthony, hero of the Maine explosion, died in poverty....Samuel H. Elbert, ex-Governor of Colorado, died.
- 1901—United States landed marines at Panama to preserve order.
- 1902—Frederick Alfred Krupp, great German gun manufacturer, died.
- 1903—Germany officially recognized the Republic of Panama....Settlement announced of the great Chicago railroad strike.

Humorous News Notes.

The Russians are better strikers than they are soldiers.

Everybody in Russia seems to be winning his freedom except the Czar.

At last Sweden and Norway have agreed to a complete divorce without alimony.

The average Russian begins to chase manifestos and ukases with gold-brick circulars.

The Tammany Tiger just managed to get its body through, but caught its tail in the door.