

# The Wife's Secret, OR A BITTER RECKONING

By CHARLOTTE M. BRAEME

**CHAPTER XV.—(Continued.)**

Every nerve in Pauline's body was vibrating, and a sense of suffocation came over her. Had this man at last seen the advertisement or been told of it? Perhaps, too, had he been to those dreadful people, Daws & Raven, and obtained from them the information that would ruin her. She turned to Jack eagerly.

"Don't see them, Jack!" she said, pleadingly. "They will keep you all the afternoon, and we are so comfortable."

Jack felt that his position was hardly pleasant. If they had asked for him he ought to go to them. But still he admitted that Pauline's objection was quite natural. He could understand her wish that he should not meet Ethel more than was necessary.

"Very well," he acquiesced. "Not at home, Babette."

The Frenchwoman retraced her steps down the long gallery, with a look of deep disappointment on her face. She had expected so much from the appearance of these people. She had built on the abrupt termination of this hateful engagement through them, and now the chance was lost, utterly lost, just because she could not bring about the desired interview.

This disappointment, coming after her morning's failure at Daws' office, broke down her spirit altogether, and for the first time she began to believe that she must resign herself to the inevitable—that the marriage could not be prevented, and she must be satisfied with the poor reverse of depriving Pauline of her unlawful possession. She clinched her teeth with defeated rage as she entered the boudoir.

"No, madame has not yet returned," she said, and held the door for them to pass out into the gallery.

But in that moment of her utter despair the tide turned and carried her on to speedy victory. She preceded Mr. and Miss Mallett until they reached the central hall, and then handed them over to the footman. She stood watching them as they re-entered the hired carriage. As they drove off some one plucked at her from behind. She turned round in surprise to meet Mrs. Perkins, whom she had passed in the corridor, outside the boudoir, superintending the arranging of fresh flowers in the window stand. The housekeeper's usually florid face was quite pale, and she jerked out her words in a curious, breathless way:

"Who are those people who have just shown out?"

"Mr. and Miss Mallett."

"They are nothing of the kind! The gentleman is Sir Geoffrey Malling, Baronet, brother of Sir Paul and uncle to our present mistress, and the young lady is like enough to the family to be his daughter."

The Frenchwoman stood looking at her with a gigantic triumph in her face as she muttered:

"At last—at last!"

**CHAPTER XVI.**

"Will Mr. Mallett call on Messrs. Daws & Raven, at their offices, 16 Le man street, E. C., between 2 and 3 o'clock to-day? They have private information of the greatest value to impart to him."

Ethel leaned over her father's shoulder and read the telegram.

"What can it mean, papa? It's very mysterious. Shall you go? I wish you would take me with you. I shall be in such a state of excitement until you come back."

"I could not think of taking you to a place I know nothing of my dear. It might be inconvenient to have you with me."

"Why, papa, I believe you are excited and curious! It is the first time I ever saw you so interested."

"Yes, I am curious. It strikes me as odd that, after living an uneventful life for the last twenty years, I should one day break my vow as to never revisiting Mallingford Park unless as its owner, and the next day receive this curious message. I dare say it is only a coincidence; but still it is strange and I can't help connecting the one event with the other."

Surely there was some strangely exhilarating quality in the atmosphere this morning, for Ethel went about her business in a brisker manner than she had lately. Her nerves were a little bit unstrung, too, for, when about 3 o'clock there came a very decided rat-a-tat-tat at the door, she was worked up to such a state of extreme expectation that she almost shrieked aloud. She ran to her usual post of observation, the stair head, and was surprised, pleased, sorry, disturbed, all in a moment, at the sight of Captain Pelling.

She was almost tempted to send him a message to the effect that she could not see him just then; but she had a horror of deception, and indeed she was really glad to see him again. A few seconds later she was shaking hands with him, and her shyness had completely vanished.

After the question as to sport there was an awkward little pause, and Ethel felt her heart quicken with dread. Shaking herself free from this feeling, she turned to her visitor.

"You have not asked why papa is not at home," she remarked, with a determination to avoid personal topics.

"To be sure! It is Saturday! I had forgotten! And why is he not at home?"

"I will show you why," and she fetched the telegram and gave it to him.

"How mysterious! Quite like an event in a novel! Has Mr. Mallett any idea as to what it means?"

"Not a bit! I'm expecting him home soon, and then we shall hear all about it."

"In which case I had better be off. It may be private family business, you know."

"I don't think papa would mind your knowing. He looks upon you as a sincere friend. You are the only one he has cultivated within my memory."

Poor Ethel! She had unwittingly

brought down an avalanche upon herself.

"You see, he has a treasure beyond price in his keeping, and he guards it jealously."

For a moment the drift of his remark did not strike her; she concluded he was alluding to the secret of her father's birth, which she had thought was known only to Lord Summers. She was surprised that he should know the secret; but she said nothing, and quietly awaited an explanation.

Pelling was slightly disconcerted by her unexpected silence and her inquiring gaze. He felt that he had committed himself in some way, and honestly regretted that he had been so indiscreet, but he felt that he had gone too far to recede, and therefore went on recklessly.

"Mr. Mallett is well aware that if a man meets you often he must learn to love you."

He stopped abruptly after this, and noticed the quick flush that overspread her face; then, impelled by an irresistible impulse, he continued:

"I know I ought not to say this to you without first speaking to Mr. Mallett; but he has been so kind to me that I have allowed myself to hope he would not object to me as a son-in-law, beyond the one great objection that applies to every one—I should rob him of you. Yet I would not even do that entirely. He should have his own rooms in our home, and he could be with us as often and as long as he liked. I would make both so happy, if you would let me! I would cherish you so tenderly and take such care of you that an anxious thought should never come near you, and the trouble in your face which I cannot help seeing sometimes should die from sheer inanition."

He paused, while Ethel sat quite still, her hands pressed closely together in her lap, the flush still burning in her cheek. He yearned to take her into his arms and hold her there; but, reading distress in her burning cheeks and averted eyes, he determined not to press for an answer to-day.

"I'm afraid I've worried and distressed you. I'm very sorry. I won't trouble you about it any more just now. Try to think the best you can of what I have said, and let us go on for a time as we have been, good friends." He rose from his seat, and held out his hand to her.

Ethel was touched more than she thought was possible by the unselfishness of his words. He had made no allusion to his own feelings or sufferings, yet she knew the suspense he would undergo if matters were left as they stood then. She resolved to tell him everything, and let him decide.

"Don't go for a few minutes, please," she besought him, nervously. "I have something I ought to tell you. I have loved some one else very dearly."

He looked gravely and pityingly at the pretty flushed face; but there were no signs of surprise as he answered:

"I guessed as much. You must forgive me for having played the spy; but I loved you so dearly from the first moment I saw you that I could not help watching you, and I found it out. I know that whoever is to blame for the breaking off of this previous engagement, it is not you; and, in spite of the fact of your having promised in the past to be the wife of another, I am longing to hear you repeat that promise to me. If you can bring yourself to do it, I will try my best to deserve my great happiness by my devotion to you."

Again she thought of Ethel's heart. "If I had only known this man before I knew Jack!" All that she could find words to say was: "How good you are!"

"Nay, I am afraid there is no great goodness in me; but I would try to be all goodness to you. Will you let me try?"

Should she confess that she still suffered from the pang of sighted love? There was a short struggle in her mind between pride and honesty. The latter prevailed, and she rose from her seat, and crossed to the fireplace. She held the mantelboard firmly by one hand, and then, regarding him steadily, she said, without a pause or tremor:

"You do not understand what it is I want you to know. It is only very lately that my engagement with some one else was broken off—so lately, indeed, that I have not recovered from it. I wish you to bear this in mind—that I am still sorry about it. At the same time I know you have done me a great honor, for I think you are true and honorable, and I believe that if I had time to leave this sad memory behind me I could honestly accept you, and bring not only my gratitude, but my love to our home; as things are just now I feel it would not be right to say simply I would be your wife without letting you know how it is with me."

Poor Ethel! Her heart was laid bare now, and she trembled violently. Pelling came over to her and warmly took both her hands in his.

"My pearl among women!" he exclaimed. "My pure, truthful, little love!"

Her hands trembled in his firm clasp, as he led her to her father's armchair and went down upon his knees, still holding her hands tightly.

"Now, listen to me, my darling, and when I say anything of which you disapprove, stop me. I shall see your father and explain everything to him; I shall claim the privilege of doing what I can to make your life a little brighter and pleasanter in the present. I shall not talk of love to you in any way; but I shall let you see a good deal of me in one shape or another. I will give you plenty of time to get over your present sorrow, and I shall not look upon you as my affianced in the meantime; but one day, a few months hence, I shall come again and ask the same question that I have asked to-day, and you shall answer me as truthfully as you have

done to-day, and then the matter shall be settled one way or the other."

Ethel, blushing, made no reply; and the captain, leaning forward, his face all aglow with feeling, kissed her with a gentle, lingering kiss.

"Heaven bless and keep you, my darling!"

With these words ringing in her ears, Ethel watched the captain as he hastened from the room.

**CHAPTER XVII.**

Mr. Mallett, in evident impatience, walked up and down the confined space between Daws' office table and the door. Daws had refused to say anything in the absence of the lady for whom he was acting, and whom he expected momentarily.

The door opened behind him; and, turning round, he saw Babette breathless and flushed, unceremoniously enter the room. He recognized her at once as the maid he had seen at Mallingford Park on the previous day, and he turned a dusky red as he thought that he had been entrapped into some backstairs intrigue against his niece passed through his mind.

"But I am fortunate to find you here still! I feared you would depart before my arrival."

Mr. Mallett bowed slightly, and waited for her to go on.

"Ah, I see!" cried the woman—"you are of the Malling family!"—he winced—and you have amazement in your heart that I, a mean domestic, should dare to make an appointment with you! But you will have more amazement when I tell you why I do this. Do you know your niece, Miss Maling, very well?"

Mr. Mallett drew himself up proudly. "I came here to receive information, not to answer questions. If you have brought me here thinking that I should help in any scheme against my niece, you are mistaken. If you have any news to impart which concerns me, I will listen; if not, I will wish you good afternoon."

He took his hat from the table and turned to the door.

"But one moment! I have news to tell you—news that concerns yourself very dearly. What would you do if I were to tell you that this woman who calls herself your niece is no niece at all, that the whole estate is of right yours, that your niece is dead and buried?"

She watched him keenly; but beyond putting his hand suddenly on the back of a chair near him, he gave no sign of surprise.

"I should say that you labored under a mistake."

"I am going to show you something that will put you right on to the straight track leading to this woman's downfall and your restoration to what has been yours ever since your brother's death—Mallingford Park."

Mr. Mallett drew a deep breath, and then asked, laconically:

"And your price?"

Babette felt that there was a gleam in the eyes watching her from behind the table, and she looked at Daws instinctively. He mistook the look to mean, "You name the price," and he said, immediately:

"One year's rent roll."

"In other words, between eleven and twelve thousand pounds?" interrogated Mr. Mallett.

Daws nodded his head affirmatively.

"The affair, so far as I am concerned, is ended."

Babette glared for an instant at the lawyer and muttered, "You vampire!" Then turning to Mr. Mallett, she said, in her best manner, "He is mistaken, monsieur; the price arranged between us was five thousand pounds on the day you take possession."

"To be conferred by deed of gift conditionally beforehand," put in the lawyer.

"Very good. I accept those terms on the understanding that the lady in question is proved to be an utter stranger by blood."

"You will sign the undertaking before you see our proof," Daws said, raising the lid of his desk as he spoke, and producing a ready-prepared document.

"We must have a disinterested witness to the signature, if you please. Joe Blake, come here!"

A wretched lad sneaked from the outer office into the room, watched Mr. Mallett sign, put his own name to the paper, and then shuffled out again.

"Now we can proceed to business," chuckled Daws. "The next move is yours, Madame Lestrang. It is plain to be seen that the whole thing is distasteful to Mr. Mallett. He is a man of refinement, and this companionship on an equality with people so immeasurably his inferiors grades most disagreeably on his sense of the fitness of things."

(To be continued.)

**Was Goethe's Sweetheart.**

It is a little difficult to realize that a sweetheart of the poet Goethe was still living only six years ago; yet that such was the fact is recalled by a German writer in T. P.'s Weekly. Her name was Ulrica von Levetzoff, and at her death in 1899 she was in her 96th year. Goethe met her at Marienbad, being then 73. He fell seriously in love with the young girl and proposed for her hand, the grand duke of Saxe-Weimar acting as his intermediary.

Naturally enough Ulrica declined the offer, and Goethe did not press his suit after the first rebuff. Nevertheless, he could not dismiss the matter from his mind, as is shown by a letter to a friend written some considerable time later. Ulrica herself never married. She is described as having been a woman of much personal charm and of strong character.

**Her First Impression.**

"Just to think," remarked Mr. Stubbs, stirring his coffee thoughtfully, "of the Russian battleship Kutaz Potemkin cruising around with a red flag at the mast!"

"It was rather unusual," replied Mrs. Stubbs. "Who cares to buy a battleship at auction?"

The vitality of seeds is a constant source of astonishment to naturalists. A pine forest when cleared away is often followed by a dense growth of oaks or birches, but where the seed comes from is conjectural.

**BOBBIE'S CHRISTMAS PRAYER.**

"Dad bless all the family dear;  
Dad bless mamma, papa, too;  
Dad bless little sister Fan—  
An' bring me a sled, nice an' new."

"Dad bless all the children poor,  
An' make all the sick folks well;  
An' dear Dad, please don't forget  
To send a pony, big an' swell."

"Dad be gracious to your lambs,  
An' keep 'em all out of my life;

**Talbot's Christmas**  
BY FRANCIS HART.

**JAMES** said Gerry Talbot suddenly, looking up from the letter he had just received, "you needn't mind about the rest. The dinner will not come off, after all."

The decorated and of the big, sumptuous studio looked oddly distasteful to Gerry Talbot since the reading of Miss Wakefield's telegram, which had shattered his enthusiastic plans. He had invited her—and her brother and his wife—to a Christmas studio dinner which he meant to make as festive as possible. Of course, her rejection at the last hour had been a gentle invention prepared to avert a greater disappointment, for he had let her know unmistakably how it was with him, and he had been so hopeful of success that he had selected a ring for her Christmas gift—a little gold and on a circlet set with a clear white solitaire.

The streets were thronged with bustling Christmas shoppers, glad of heart, with merry, expectant faces, and here and there a wistful one, too, looking on, but not buying. Talbot noticed two little girls gazing wistfully into a confectioner's window.

"Yes, Min, I would. I'd do it first thing," said the taller of the two. "Oh, my, wouldn't it be nice to be rich an' invite all your friends to a big turkey an' ice cream dinner?"

They were very poorly clad, thin-featured and ill-nourished, but not unpleasant to look at. Talbot was conscious, all at once, of an inexplicable impulse to gratify the child's wish.

"So you would really like to give your friends a Christmas dinner?" said he, smiling down at her astonished eyes. "I have a great mind to let you have your wish."

"Oh, dear me, Min!" gasped Lou. "I can't hardly believe it, can you? It sounds just like a make-believe thing. Won't Miss Posey be s'prised! An' Jonas an' Meg an' Tom, Oh, won't they be just too pleased!"

"How many shall you invite?" Talbot asked gravely, taking out his notebook.

"Well, there's Aunt Katie an' Uncle Tim an' the baby. Miss Posey, Jonas Boggs, Meg an' Pat Fooley—Min, can you think of anyone else?"

"Lame Betsy an' Moll."

"How many's that?" asked Lou.

"Twelve, counting us three."

"Don't you think it would be nice to have a little present beside each plate?" asked Talbot.

Both girls gasped, but looked immensely pleased.

"Suppose you two go round with me and pick out what you consider suitable for each of your guests, because I should not know what to select."

When Lou appeared at the studio on the following morning she was a very different looking girl, and any one would have known by the pure joy of her voice that some great and festive event was at hand. Talbot had finished the decorations which had been so harshly interrupted by Miss Wakefield's message, and the result was extremely gratifying, especially after Lou's rapturous exclamations.

At precisely 12 o'clock the bell rang for the first time to announce the arrival of Aunt Katie and Tim and the baby, all polished and prinked to the verge of painfulness. Next came Miss Posey, a little faded, bowed, ancient woman in rusty black, with long gold loops in her wrinkled ears. Lame Betty thumped in on her crutches, closely followed by Moll, in her decorated finery, of various sizes. Meg brought blind Jonas, and a merry little wraith of a man called Tom Doom.

Talbot shook hands all around with a "Merry Christmas!" after which they all took their places at the beautiful

table, the like of which none of that humble party had ever looked upon. But it was a kindly madness that possessed the host of that bountiful dinner, for his stories were of the pleasantest and his watchful care was unflagging. His guests rewarded his efforts by a spontaneous enjoyment of all that was set before them. It was good to see them wait upon blind Jonas, who could not help himself, and upon lame Betty, whose crippled hands made difficult the use of knife and fork.

Talbot rose to replenish a half-emptied plate as the hall bell thrilled merrily. There was a pause; then James' quiet, well-trained voice said: "Yes, madam; he is at dinner in the studio."

The door swung inward. Talbot knew that he was not dreaming when she came toward him with outstretched hands and a ripple of explanation of which he heard not one word. Indeed, to him one isolated fact filled the world—that she was smiling up at him with a great promise in her eyes.

"A little friend of mine wanted to give her friends a Christmas dinner, and I persuaded her to let me share it," he explained jauntily. "It has been a great treat to me."

Miss Wakefield read the whole truth for herself as she looked into the good, honest faces that reflected their host's smiles in every glance. She said nothing, but her eyes told what Talbot would have given all he possessed to hear from her lips. Then Mr. Wakefield and his wife ventured in, and Talbot bethought himself to ask if they had dined, which they had not.

Lou and Talbot made room for three plates here and there, and as there was a plenty of crullers and turkey and ice cream, all went well to the very end of the function, when the eleven originally invited guests rose and made their adieux with glad hearts and beaming faces.

Miss Wakefield stood before the grate while her brother and his wife examined a row of pictures half hidden behind the holly wreaths.

"I was so sorry to disappoint you yesterday," she said, "but poor Ted's telegram was so urgent that we were afraid he was worse, and hadn't the heart to refuse him. When I discovered that we could take an early train home I made up my mind to run in and wish you a Merry Christmas, anyway, and so we came, you see."

Talbot thought of the ring. He had taken it from his hiding place. "For a long while I have wanted to ask you to accept this—and what goes with it," he said simply, holding the glittering bauble toward her.

A red glow crept into her face. She made no audible answer, but when the young couple at the other end of the room sauntered toward them they were smiling.

**CHRISTMAS TREE FIRES.**

**How the Danger of Parlor Conflagrations May Be Minimized.**

Several accidents on Christmas eve and day each year recall the fact, apparent only on that day; that the Christmas tree is quite as dangerous as it is pretty, and that the proud father personating Santa Claus should take the precaution to equip himself with asbestos whiskers. About the usual number of fires are recorded in the country each year as a result of the inflammable nature of the Christmas tree and its decorations and their careless handling.

This warning always follows Christmas just as the outcry against toy pistols is raised after the Fourth of July. Of course no rose is free from thorns, and apparently no holiday can be observed in the conventional fashion without risk of accident to the merry-makers. Sputtering candles on a Christmas tree are a very real danger, and the same may be said of the trees themselves, the wreaths of evergreen and the mistletoe. After a day or two they become dry and inflammable to a high degree, and in the joy of the celebration risks are run and precautions neglected. A tree thus loaded down with presents and decorations may become in an instant a torch capable of starting a disastrous fire, as many cities discovered the other day, to their great cost and to the serious discomfort of their fire departments.

By taking preventive measures thousands of dollars will be saved every year. Trees should be bought late and kept out doors until used. In the case of fresh, green trees the risk will be minimized. Candles should not be too close together and should be constantly watched. Above all, a wet blanket should be at hand, also a sponge on a pole long enough to reach any point of the tree or ceiling. So, at least, say the fire fighters, who every year have their own Christmas spoiled by the neglect of these very obvious precautions.

**Old Ideas About Christmas.**


Even as late as 1753 there was some doubt as to the exact date of Christmas, the old count bringing it to the 5th of January, the new count giving us the 25th of December, which is "the day we celebrate." In Devonshire, England, it is believed that if the sun shines at noon on Christmas day a plentiful crop may be looked for in the following year.

**The Thoughtful Giraffe.**

The absurd and long-legged giraffe said: "Here is a thought makes me laugh. If we giraffes should wear stockings, how could Old Santa Claus even fill half?"

**ORDERED OFF.**

The New Year—You'll have to move on, old man.

- ## THE WEEKLY HISTORIAN
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- 1213—First regular English Parliament assembled at Oxford.
  - 1490—Perkin Warbeck, pretender to the throne of England, executed at Tyburn.
  - 1538—Proclamation issued by Henry VIII, declaring Thomas Becket not a saint.
  - 1572—First Presbyterian meeting house in England opened.
  - 1621—The little ship Fortune from England arrived at Plymouth, Mass.
  - 1644—Henry McMabone executed at Tyburn for conspiring Irish massacre.
  - 1656—Treaty of Liebau signed by Charles X. and the Great Elector.
  - 1690—Treaty of alliance signed between Peter of Russia and Augustus II. of Poland.
  - 1712—Duel between Duke of Hamilton and Lord Mohun. Both killed.
  - 1737—Queen Caroline of England died.
  - 1772—Three hundred chests of tea thrown overboard at Boston because of the duty imposed by England.
  - 1777—Articles of Confederation of the United States agreed to. . . American Congress recalled Silas Deane from Paris and appointed John Adams. . . Passage of the American forts on Delaware river by the British. Fort Lee, N. J., on the Hudson, opposite upper New York City, captured by the British.
  - 1785—Sir David Wilkie, English painter, born; died 1841.
  - 1789—North Carolina ratified the Constitution of the United States.
  - 1796—Catherine II. (the Great), empress of Russia, died at St. Petersburg; born 1729.
  - 1797—Thurlow ween born.
  - 1805—British and Russian forces land in Naples.
  - 1806—Napoleon issued a decree declaring the British Isles in a state of blockade.
  - 1811—Great riots at Nottingham, England. . . John Bright, great English statesman, born.
  - 1813—Battle of Leipzig.
  - 1815—Second Peace of Paris.
  - 1816—Bells of Notre Dame, Paris, baptized.
  - 1834—Melbourne ministry dissolved.
  - 1846—Cracow annexed to Austria.
  - 1848—Assassination of Count Rossi, first minister to Pius IX. at Rome.
  - 1849—Steamer Louisiana exploded at New Orleans. Nearly 100 killed.
  - 1852—Labos islands difficulty between United States and Peru settled.
  - 1857—Relief of Lucknow.
  - 1862—Gen. Sumner demanded surrender of Fredericksburg, Va.
  - 1864—Treaty of peace between Denmark, Prussia and Austria ratified. . . Gen. Sherman began his march to the sea.
  - 1866—First G. A. R. post instituted at Decatur, Ill.
  - 1870—Duke of Aosta elected King of Spain.
  - 1873—Encyclical letter issued by Pius IX. against Old Catholics.
  - 1883—Standard time adopted in States east of the Rocky mountains. Four standards adjusted to be an hour apart and to differ by exact hours from Greenwich were adopted. The divisions are eastern time, central time, Rocky mountain time and Pacific time, being respectively 75 degrees, 90 degrees, 105 degrees and 120 degrees west of Greenwich.
  - 1886—Chester Alan Arthur, twenty-first President of the United States, died in New York City; born 1830.
  - 1888—Rear Admiral Charles H. Baldwin, Union naval veteran, died in New York City; born there 1822.
  - 1891—Ex-King Milan of Serbia renounced all rights to the throne.
  - 1893—Town of Kuchan, province of Khorassan, Persia, destroyed by an earthquake; over 12,000 people killed.
  - 1894—Jose Salvador, anarchist who threw bomb in Barcelona theater and killed many persons, garroted.
  - 1897—President McKinley signed the treaty adopted by the Universal Postal Congress. . . Rev. George Hendricks Houghton, rector of the Church of the Transfiguration (the Little Church Around the Corner), died in New York, aged 77.
  - 1898—Michigan State Supreme Court declared boycotting illegal.
  - 1899—Admiral Dewey transferred to his wife the Washington house given him by the American people. . . Garrett A. Hobart, Vice President of the United States, died.
  - 1901—James J. Jeffries defeated Gus Ruhlin in a battle for the world's pugilistic championship at San Francisco.
  - 1903—A canal treaty with the new republic of Panama signed at Washington.
  - 1904—King Edward VII. of England arrived in Portugal on a visit to King Carlos.