WAS SHE AN ----?

THE STORY OF A WOMAN'S SECRET.

BY JENNIE DAVIS BURTON.

CHAPTER III.

EVEN LOVE LIKE YOURS COULD NOT STAND SUCH A TEST!

From New York Weekly.

"Keep back! you think you have gained some knowledge of my secret. How can you think me anything but a vile wretch; how can you care for me, thinking that?"

"How, indeed? But I have not believed it," he said, doggedly. "I have always felt sure that you could make your whole record clear. What ever hold that man had upon you, it is not what it seemed; your brother, or a lover in the past, perhaps—nothing more. Juno!" in sudden panic under that inexplicable gaze, "you can explain the mystery of that time, you will tell what that man is to you?"

"I can and will do neither the one thing nor the other."

"You refuse?" he huskily asked. "Do you understand the consequence?"

"You may tell it to me."

"You never could be wife of mine! For Heaven's sake," in one last, impassioned appeal, "don't wreck the happiness of both of us! Don't tell me I have been deceived."

"I have nothing to tell you but this: In your immeasurable self-conceit you have deceived yourself I love you, a man who would employ such means to hunt down a defenseless woman! I saw you come out of that room that night after I had left it; I divined that you would search into my past, and make use of the knowledge you would gain to blast my reputation in a good man's eyes. For the schemer in such a worthy cause, for the man who could not even be true to his friend, I have no feeling but one of supremest contempt."

Utterly amazed and stunned, it was moment before Mr. Dillon could collect himself to reply.

"You choose the richer prize; I might have known it," he said bitterly. "If I were not strictly loyal to my friend, I will be just to him. He shall know what I have learned but you will not find it difficult to make your peace with him. When I was willing to be credulous, what may we not expect of August?"

A quick gloom blotted out the scorn and anger in her face.

"I asked you once to save him, and you would not. I cannot explain; my secret must be a dead secret to the end. You have shown me that no honorable man could overlook such a mystery. August will give me up, as you would have done, had the choice rested with you."

"He never will! If you are free to come to me, my love, no secret shall stand between us; no shadow from that painful past shall reach you as my beloved wife!"

Both started. It was August himself appearing before them, eager and flushed and pleading.

"I was in the next room when Dillon was shown in here," he said. "I have overheard all; I do not admit it as a feather's weight against you, Juno. If you are free to come to me, I ask no more."

She looked at him wistful and undecided.

"No, no! she said. "Even love like yours could not stand such a test!"

"It could—it will! If I trusted you less, I would love you less. If the devotion of my life will make you happier I will be content."

"Then," she said, putting her hands into his, "I will be your wife if you wish, and may Heaven deal by me as I shall deserve if I ever give you cause to regret it."

* * * * *

"Forgive and forget, old boy. By-gones are by-gones, and we will not allude to them. Come up to Fenn Eyrie for a month; well, for a week then The colonel will be rejoiced to see you there again."

It was one year later, and August and Dillon had met for the first time since that day. Met quite by accident in a crowded railway station where that invitation was given, and after a moment's hesitency was accepted.

"The colonel!" echoed Dillon in his thoughts, when they had parted and he recalled the others words. He did not mention his wife, and he does not look over and above blessed now that I think of it. Is he repenting at leisure that hasty marriage of his, and was she only a designing adventuress after all?

Mr. Dillon could speculate coolly upon the matter. His head had cleared during the past year, and it was as much a desire to learn the sequel of the old experiance as anything else which drew him later to Fenn Eyrie.

A single day's observation there confirmed him in the conclusion to which he had leaped. Not only was August changed; he seemed haggard and harassed when he thought himself unobserved, and was unnaturally gay at fitful intervals; but Mrs. Fenn, fair, graceful and self-possessed, did not deceive the keen-sighted guest. He could see that she watched her husband furtively and anxiously, that she sighed frequently, and that there was a constraint in the manner of each, as if some invisible barrier had come between them.

"The same old story," mused Dillon. "I wonder if there ever was a passion that connumbial bliss did not wear threadbare? No more, I suppose, than that there never was a house which did not have its skeleton in the closet somewhere; and, by Jove! it looks as if they somehow had run afoul of the skeleton."

I am not sure that Mr. Dillon was not devoutly thankful just then that it was his friend and not himself who had "run afoul" presumably of the questionable possession aforesaid.

He went out to smoke a cigar with his old friend, the colonel, who was the only vivacious member of the little party at Fenn Eyrie that day. Their desultory talk drifted naturally into a personal channel.

"My pleasure at seeing you is increased by an alloy of selfishness, Forde, my dear fellow, though I must have been glad under any circumstances. To tell you the truth, I am anxious on August's account. You used to exert as much influence over him as any one ever did, and I think you will not refuse your service in that way for his good now."

"You forget—perhaps you never knew—how signally I failed when I endeavored to exert that influence last."

"Ah, but we were all wrong there,' declared the old soldier, with enthusiasm. "I have come to my senses at last, but I was as blind and as obstinate as any aid fool at first. Let my little Juno alone to win her own cause. I saw her, and I 'caved,' as a matter of course, and I'm as proud of my son's wife today as he possibly can be."

"Then your anxiety does not refer to their mutual relation, or anything partaining it?"

"Certainly not. They are the most devoted and best mated pair in the world; but young men will be young men, you know; and even his marriage, I grieve to say, has not broken August off from all the follies of his youth. He was a little wild once!" He was keenly watching his companion as he said it.

"Indeed, you surprise me! August was considered a paragon of excellence among his most intimate associates. You might accuse me of wildness quite as justly, Colonel Fenn."

"Then it is as I feared; he is intoxicated by a new danger, not won over for the moment by an old vice. He has been gambling and loosing heavily of late, and he has made a constant companion of a certain M. De Laurant, a Louisiana Frenchman, who, I am sure, does him no good. He is a dangerous fellow, that De Laurent, and playing for a high stake. Unless something is done to stop his game he will ruin my boy."

"Is it so bad as that? It is not like August to make an associate of a common sharper and gambler; and no one but a sharper and gambler would plan such an end."

"The boy is infatuated with him," said the colonel, sadly. "And whatever De Laurent may be, he is no common man. You will have opportunities enough to see and judge for yourself. He is quite at home at Fenn Eyrie, and almost as punctual in his appearances as its young master."

Notwithstanding this fact, it was three days before M. De Laurent reported there and was presented in due form to Mr. Dillon. He was slim, tall, smart and handsome, with a sort of diabolical beauty, such as we may all encounter once in a life time, seldom oftener; and yet an odd sense of familiarity in the graceful Creole struck the other guest. Mr. Dillon had a memory for faces, but he racked his brain vianly to remember where he had seen De Laurent before.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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MRS. LEE. "Yes, and last week you said you wished I could manage to look as stylish as Mrs. Allen,—and she makes all her own clothes. But she has what I haven't."

MR. LEE. "What is that?"

MRS. LEE. "Well, she gets all of her information from the Magazine they take. I admit that she knows all that is going on, and is bright and entertaining in conversation; but I could do as well as she can if I had the same source of information. She lent me the last number of her Magazine lately, and I learned more in one hour's reading, about various social matters and the topics of the day, than I would pick up in a month by my occasional glances with Brooks. It certainly covers every top of interest, from the news of the day down to the details of housekeeping; and everything is so beautifully illustrated, too. Every time Madame goes over to the Allens' she comes home and tries her to get you to take Demorest's Family Magazine, as the stories are so good. Even the boys watch for it every month, as a place is found for them also in its pages; and Mr. Allen swears by it. It is really wonderful how it suits every member of the family!"

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"Hello! Tom. Glad to see you, old fellow! It's almost ten years since we parted. Sit down! Let's have an epistolary meeting. How's the wife?"

"Just as queer as usual,—always wanting something I can't afford."

"Well, we all want something more than we've got. Don't you?"

"Yes; but I guess 'want will be my master.' I started to keep down expenses; and now Lil says I'm 'mean,' and she's tired of saving and never having anything to show for it. I saw your wife down street, and she looked as happy as a queen!"

"I think she is; and we are economical, too,—have to be. My wife can make a little go further than anyone I ever knew, yet she's always surprising me with some dainty contrivance that adds to the comfort and beauty of our little home, and she's always 'merry as a lark.' When I ask how she manages it, she always laughs and says: 'Oh! that's my secret!' But I think I've discovered her 'secret.' When we married, we both knew we should have to be very careful, but she made one condition: she would have her Magazine. And she was right! I wouldn't do without it myself for double the subscription price. We read it together, from the title-page to the last word; the stories keep our hearts young; the synopsis of important events and scientific matters keeps me posted so that I can talk understandingly about what is going on; my wife is always trying some new idea from the household department: she makes all her dresses and those for the children, and she gets all her patterns for nothing, with the Magazine; and we saved Joe when he was so sick with the croup, by doing just as directed in the Sanitarian Department. But I can't tell you half!"

"What wonderful Magazine is it?"

"Demorest's Family Magazine, and—"

"What? Why that's what Lil wanted so bad, and I told her it was an extravagance."

"Well, my friend, that's where you made a grand mistake, and one you'd better rectify as soon as you can. I'd tell your wife I did it here, on my wife's account; for she's bound to have a china tea-set in time for our 'tin wedding' next month. My old watch was the premium I got for getting up a club. If you can't agree with your wife about the new Premium Lil's fond of,—the handsomest thing out! Hush! Don't say a word! I know what you want, who her birthday comes in June, and I will [illegible] for you.