



The Wife's Secret, OR A BITTER RECKONING

By CHARLOTTE M. BRAEME

CHAPTER XIII.

Pauline made an effort to look unlike herself; but hers was an individuality not easily hidden under a large plaid traveling wrap and a plain black bonnet and veil. At any rate, Mr. Daws was not deceived by them, and guessed who his visitor was the moment she was shown into his dusty little private office.

He remained standing silent and motionless, with his bright, beadlike eyes watching her from under his heavy brows until she felt almost hysterical.

"I have come with reference to an advertisement in this morning's Times," she began. "I believe you inserted it?"

"No." She looked incredulous for a moment, then said: "Then, if you did not, you know who did, and you will favor me with their address."

"What for?"

"I wish to see them."

"Why?"

"Why?" Pauline drew herself up proudly, for she was getting irritated, as she answered. "I think that is my business."

"Not at all! It is ours."

"You will surely not refuse to let me have the address of the person who put that notice in this morning's Times, when I tell you that I came on Sir Geoffrey's behalf. I am, in fact, a relative of his. It says it is for Sir Geoffrey's 'decided advantage.' But how?"

"That's my client's business. Lawyers never reveal their clients' affairs."

"But, if you will neither tell me yourself nor give me your client's address, how can I find out for Sir Geoffrey what the advantage is?"

"Send him here himself."

"He can't come. He is very ill," she told the lawyer.

"Then we must wait until he's well."

"You will absolutely tell nobody but yourself what this wonderful advantage is?"

"No one."

Pauline rose from her chair, and they looked steadily at each other for a few seconds. She gathered her energies for her last effort. She placed her hand on the table between them, and leaned forward slightly.

"What is your price for the address I want?"

Daws' eyes glittered. Two thoughts passed through his mind before he answered: "You have shown your fear by the offer of a bribe; and heaven save the Frenchwoman if I betray her, for you will certainly murder her!" Then he spoke:

"The information you ask for is priceless."

"I can give more than you think, perhaps. One hundred pounds!" A pause. "Two hundred—three hundred—four hundred—five!"

"I have answered; it is priceless."

She looked for one instant as if she would spring on him and tear the secret from him; then there came the sullen look of one beaten and baffled, and she turned without another word, went down the rickety stairs, and re-entered the cab which had been waiting for her.

Pauline had counted confidently on making a bargain with Messrs. Daws & Raven. She believed that some unknown person had accidentally found out certain facts of her past life which she had pressing reasons for keeping secret, and she thought she had only to offer them a good price for their silence and the matter would end there. Now that she was once more in her own room, wrapped in a warm dressing gown, and with leisure to think, she began to see that there was something more than the mere greed of gain prompting her unknown adversary.

This fighting in the dark was alarming. If she only knew from what quarter to expect the attack she might be able to make some sort of resistance; as it was, there was nothing to be done but sit down and calmly await the onslaught.

On one point only could she make up her mind—she must hurry on her marriage. Let her once be Jack's wife, and, no matter what phantoms should rise from the past to threaten her, she would at least be sure of his love; for she would love him so dearly, she would be so gentle, so winning, that he would not be able to withhold his love from her, even though he should grieve to find her other than he had thought.

And so that evening she got Jack's consent that they should be married a fortnight hence, on the 18th of September, the day after she reached her twenty-fifth year.

CHAPTER XIV.

Ethel was certainly very courageous. She was also strong, young and healthy, and had an unusual amount of self-pride, all of which kept her from giving way under the load of grief that came upon her after Jack's faithless behavior. But she felt her sorrow none the less deeply, and hid it from her father's sight.

Captain Pelling had been away nearly a week on a visit to an old friend, and Ethel was feeling the daily monotony of her life very irksome as she once more set about making her father's coffee.

There were letters on the table, but she did not feel particularly curious about them. As she placed the coffee pot on the table the writing on the envelope next to her own plate caught her eyes. The blood rushed to her face, and, with nervous haste she picked up the envelope and opened it. She read the invitation

card, and the flush faded slowly, leaving an expression of sorrowful contempt on her face.

"Poor Jack!" she sighed. "I wonder if he thinks a few civilities of this kind will make amends for his conduct in the past? Does he imagine he can repay me for the loss of his love by holding out the hand of friendly patronage? Can he believe it would give me pleasure to spend an evening in watching his attentions to his handsome hostess?" She threw the card from her with an impatient sigh. "How contemptibly foolish it is of me to care so much after all this time! Perhaps dad would like to see his old home again; and, as it does not really matter much whether I go or not, I will do as he wishes about it."

As she heard her father's step on the stairs she turned as brightly as usual toward him to say, "Good morning." Then she held his envelope behind her playfully, saying: "A thousand guesses, and you will not guess where this letter is from, papa?"

"I shall not make one—so tell me."

"It is an invitation to Mallingford for the seventeenth of this month—from Miss Malling herself, for a ball."

"A ball!" he repeated. "Why in the world should Miss Malling invite me to a ball?" He looked at the envelope curiously, and then said: "It is addressed to 'G. Mallett, Esq.,' and in Jack Dornton's writing! Oh, I begin to understand!" he went on, in a voice of genuine relief, as he took the card from the envelope. "I feared for the moment that Summers had been doing a kindness, as he calls it, and persuaded Pauline Malling to invite her poor relatives to her ball. But this civility is evidently due to Dornton's good nature, and is sent in all good faith, to 'the Malletts, old friends of mine,' as he would say in describing us."

"Who is Summers, papa?"

"Lord Summers is your cousin's guardian."

"Of course—I remember—the kind-looking old man we met at the Exhibition last May."

"Yes. I've been in constant dread ever since that unfortunate meeting that he would seek me out and try to do something for me. That was why I was so annoyed when you told him you copied in the galleries; I thought he might pounce on you and worm our address out of you."

"Do you think he would tell Miss Malling about my copying at the galleries, papa?"

"No doubt of it; he is an inveterate talker."

Ethel had a sudden conviction that Miss Malling had used this information to obtain their address, if Lord Summers had not, and believed she had at last found out to whom she was indebted for her anonymous letter. This belief did not increase her desire to go to Mallingford; but she held to her resolution to leave the decision in her father's hands.

"Do you want to go to the ball?" he asked.

"I don't care one bit about it, if you don't want to go, dad."

"I don't care about the ball, either; but I should like you to see the old place, Ethel. If we were to go to the ball I should most likely run up against some one who would remember me as Geoffrey Malling, and there would be quite a little sensation over my reappearance; but this invitation entitles us to call on Miss Malling, in any case. Send an acceptance, my dear; we can follow it up by an excuse on the morning of the 17th. In the meantime we will run down one day and leave our cards and take a look round just as ordinary strangers, and no one will think we are anything else."

Ethel was glad the question was settled in this way, for she, too, wished to see the old house that should in justice have been her father's. Mr. Mallett opened the other letter and threw it across to her.

"Read it out, Ethel. It's from Pelling. I've talked so much that I've no time to eat."

Ethel read the letter, which ran as follows:

"My Dear Mallett—I send some birds by to-night's train; hope they will arrive all right. I am tired of this place, but can't get away under the promised fortnight. My old friend has taken a wife since I last saw him. Said wife has three sisters at present staying with her; and, as they are all of the genus 'blue-stocking,' my life has been a burden to me since my arrival here. Sport is excellent, but just the least bit monotonous. The house is full of pleasant people—and yet I miss your society more than I could have thought possible; and I am really anxious to get back to our work. Tell Miss Mallett not to forget her promise—"

"What promise was that?" Mr. Mallett asked.

"I'm not quite sure what he means, unless—" Ethel blushed slightly.

"Never mind; finish the letter to yourself, my dear, for I must be off directly."

After seeing her father off and finishing the letter, Ethel did not feel altogether happy. She was afraid Captain Pelling had set too high a value on her words, and she tried to recall exactly what she had said when he had called to say good-by. What had really occurred was this. When Ethel put her hand into Pelling's he held it while he said:

"I wish I could flatter myself by believing you would miss me a little while I am away, Miss Mallett; but perhaps it would be a welcome miss, for I know I'm a terrible bore sometimes."

He looked so wistful that Ethel felt quite a thrill of sympathy for him, and, on the impulse of the moment, responded:

"I'm sure I shall miss you, and I shall be glad to see you back again."

And Pelling had left her with a face so glorified with delight that she had feared and wondered continually what such glorification might mean, and had alternately blamed herself for her impulsive words, and him for his misinterpretation of them.

Pauline was rather staggered a couple of days later when she received affirmative replies from Mr. and Miss Mallett; but she was in such a whirl of excitement by this time that so small a peril as a visit from her uncle and cousin passed by unheeded.

It was now the 8th of September, and she was to be married on the 18th. Babette was the only member of the household who had been taken into her mistress' confidence with regard to her approaching marriage, and the vivacious French woman was delighted at the prospect of going up to town every day between then and the 18th, to see after the piles of new finery indispensable at such a time.

CHAPTER XV.

The 13th of September had come, and to Babette's great discomfiture Messrs. Daws & Raven had not yet discovered Sir Geoffrey's address. Only five days remained to the date of the wedding she had sworn to frustrate.

She had been to town to get some lace for her mistress, and incidentally to interview the lawyers, and was now returning spiritedly to Mallingford. At the station, as she was about entering a conveyance, she heard some one behind her asking for a fly to go to Mallingford Park. She turned to look at the inquirer, and for a moment stood staring at a tall, well-bred looking man, evidently on the wrong side of fifty, with a sweet-faced girl of eighteen on his arm. She recognized the girl as the young lady she had followed from the Museum to her home, and whose name she had discovered from the neighboring trades people by her mistress' orders about two months before. Then she remembered posting a letter to this young lady for her mistress, and next she recalled having seen Dornton's letter to the same person a few days later, and in a blind fashion without knowing why, she connected their appearance at Mallingford with those letters, and a wild hope sprang up in her heart that this elderly aristocrat and his pretty daughter had come to Mallingford to help on her purpose of preventing Miss Malling's marriage.

Babette was soon deposited at Mallingford House. She made herself presentable, and went down to Miss Malling's boudoir on the ground floor on the pretense of discussing her morning's purchases with her mistress, but really with the determination to hang about the neighborhood of the reception rooms, and witness—if possible, overhear—the interview between Miss Malling and these Malletts.

The windows of the boudoir overlooked a long stretch of the principal drive. When Babette reached the room it was empty. She placed herself to watch for the arrival of the fly from the village. She saw it come up the long avenue and stop at the main entrance. Then she went to the hall and busied herself looking for an imaginary missing shawl among the numberless wraps lying about. The hall porter, for some unknown reason, was not at his post, and an inexperienced footman informed Mr. Mallett that Miss Malling was not at home. Babette, thinking she saw the chance of help from these people gradually slipping away, came forward boldly.

"Are you sure you are right in denying Miss Malling to this gentleman, Philip?" she asked, in a low voice. "I think you have made a mistake. If you will follow me, monsieur, I will see if Miss Malling has returned from her drive."

She took them to the boudoir, stood for a moment in thought, and then flew off to the picture gallery. As she expected, she found Jack and Miss Malling in the deep recess of a window at the far end. She announced:

"Mr. and Miss Mallett in your boudoir, mademoiselle!"

Pauline sprang from her chair and stood glaring at Babette as if she were a messenger from another world. The words "Sir Geoffrey" rose to her lips, but she remembered in time that his individuality was not known to any one but herself, and she checked the name with an effort.

"I am not at home," she told her maid. "I left word to that effect."

"Yes, so they said, mademoiselle; but I happened to be in the hall, and I thought I heard the gentleman ask for Monsieur Dornton; so I offered to see if he was in."

(To be continued.)

Similarity.

"They call these 'dog days,' remarked the man with the wilted collar and palm-leaf fan.

"Any particular breed of dog?" spoke up the warm-weather wit.

"Yes, I should say 'greyhound.'" "Why so?"

"They are so long."

All Trouble.

"May I ask what you are looking for?" said the clerk in the ticket office.

"I am looking for trouble," replied the man who was running his finger over the big wall map of the world.

"Looking for trouble?"

"Yes, sir, I am hunting up Russia."

What the world needs is more workers and fewer dreamers.

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While at work for the F. C. & P. R. R. in the swampy region, I contracted Rheumatism and was completely helpless for about four months and spent over \$150.00 with doctors, but got worse every day, and finally quit them and began S. S. S. I took a few bottles and was cured sound and well. My health is now splendid, and I weigh 172 pounds. There is a lady living near me who is now taking S. S. S. for acute Rheumatism. For two months she could not turn herself in bed, but since beginning your medicine about three weeks ago has improved rapidly, and is now able to sit up. I can recommend S. S. S. to all suffering from Rheumatism.

Ulah, N. C. S. C. LASSITER.

I was severely troubled with Rheumatism. I had it in my knees, legs and ankles, and any one who has ever had Rheumatism knows how excruciating the pain is and how it interferes with one at work. I was truly in bad shape—having been bothered with it for ten years, off and on. A local physician advised me to use S. S. S. I did so. After taking two bottles I noticed the soreness and pain were greatly reduced. I continued the medicine and was thoroughly cured; all pain, soreness and inflammation gone. I recommend S. S. S. to all Rheumatic sufferers.

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The Wasteful Captain.

She was a fair passenger in search of information and the captain was, naturally, only too willing to gratify her. He had explained that the action of the propeller forced the ship through the water and added, as a further item of information:

"We made twenty knots an hour last night, miss."

"Did you really?" said the sweet girl. "And whatever did you do with them all?"

The captain went red and his eyes dilated.

"Threw them overboard," he said, shortly.

"Fancy!" she said.—Tit-Bits.

Somewhat Different.

"Johnny," said the teacher, "pronounce 'delighted.'"

"Yessur," replied Johnny. "Do you want it according to Webster or according to Roosevelt?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, if it is according to Webster it is 'de-lighted,' and if it is according to Roosevelt it is 'dee-light-ed.'"

The Mean Things.

Miss Passay—It seems so funny to me now when I think how terribly afraid of the dark I was when I was a child.

Miss Speitz—But you're not afraid of it now?

Miss Passay—Of course not!

Miss Speitz—No, the dark must be so much more becoming to you than the light now.—Philadelphia Ledger.

An Intricate Problem.

Mrs. Kbrown—That conductor insulted me.

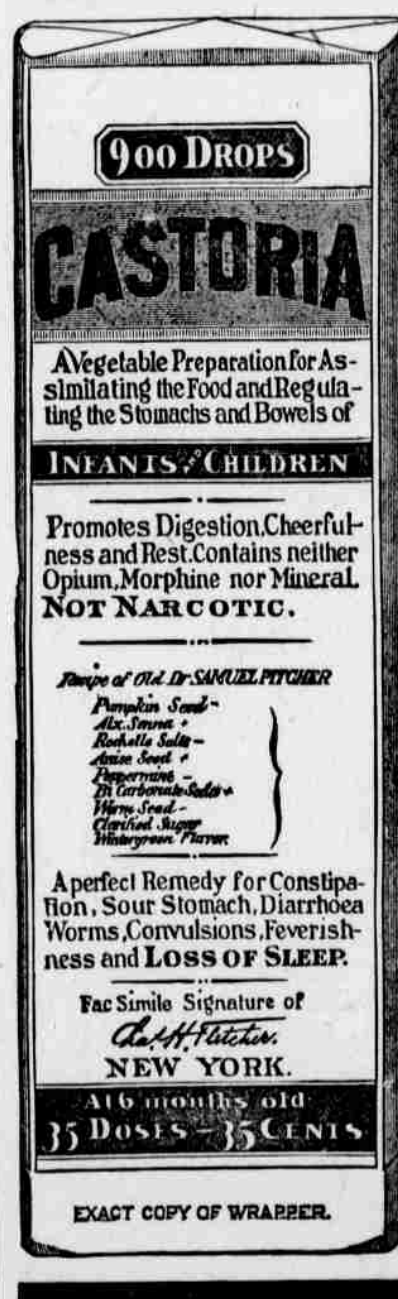
Mr. Kbrown—How?

Mrs. Kbrown—Wanted me to pay fare for Tommy.

Mr. Kbrown—Well, Tommy is quite a chunk of a lad. He looks—

Mrs. Kbrown—And you, too? Do you mean to insinuate that I look old enough to have a child old enough to have to pay car fare?—Cleveland Leader.

Gratitude is the fairest blossom which springs from the soul; and the heart of man knoweth none more fragrant.—Hosea Ballou.



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