



The Wife's Secret, OR A BITTER RECKONING

By CHARLOTTE M. BRAEME

CHAPTER XXI.—(Continued.)

"So you have been a rich woman, Pauline," he said, turning to her kindly. He did not know yet how far this estrangement had been intentional on her part, and he would give her the benefit of the doubt. "I, too, have fallen on prosperous times. Now, what are you going to do? Shall I see you home? Or shall I call on you to-morrow, when you will be quieter and calmer? Or will you come and look at my little place now?"

Then, for the first time, Pauline raised her head; and again Jack saw the expression of the carved tigers' heads as she answered her husband.

"I will not accompany you anywhere; I would sooner kill myself—for I hate you!"

The shocked clergyman would have spoken; but Pelling stopped him courteously but firmly.

"You must pardon me; but this is my affair, as you must acknowledge, and mine only." Then turning to the raging woman, he went on: "In those circumstances further discussion would be useless," and only Jack, who was watching him closely, guessed what wonderful self-control he was exerting to keep himself from exposing and upbraiding the woman to whom he spoke. "I will give you the address of my solicitor, and all future communications must be made through him." He wrote the address on a leaf of his pocketbook, tore it out, and placed it on the table beside her. "And now, Mrs. Pelling, may I see you to your cab?"

She rose and drew herself up defiantly, and then swept from the vestry; and Pelling followed her in polite attendance. He returned in a few seconds.

"And now, Mr. Dornton," he said, "if you will favor me with your company, I shall be glad to give and receive explanations."

After wishing the clergyman "Good morning," the two men jumped into the cab which brought Pelling from the station, and drove to a hotel. They talked on indifferent subjects until they were in possession of a private room, and the waiter had finally retired, after receiving orders for luncheon in half an hour. Then Pelling turned to Jack and began:

"It seems to me that you and I are fated to cross each other's paths, Mr. Dornton. I have heard you spoken of pretty often lately by a Mr. Mallett, a particular friend of mine."

"Indeed?" said Jack, uncomfortably, not relishing this sudden and intentional introduction of the Malletts' name; for, since his conversation with Lord Summers, Jack felt less proud than ever of his own share in the rupture with Ethel. He thought, too, that Mr. Pelling would not have heard much to his credit from that source.

"I see what you are thinking," Pelling observed; "but you are wrong. Mr. Mallett has spoken of you to me only as a promising man in your profession. The other matter that is in your mind I took the liberty of finding out for myself. Now, I have a proposition to make to you."

CHAPTER XXII.

Pelling paused and looked attentively at the young man. He knew there was not much generosity in giving Ethel up, as he could not marry her himself during the lifetime of his wife, and, having plenty of true manliness, he did not mean to make any show of the miserable pain that was gnawing at his heart; but he felt he should like to know what sort of man this was whose path he intended to smooth for him as far as lay in his power; and, while he thought of this, the memory of Ethel's face, pained and sorrowful as he saw it when she made to him her confession of love for this Dornton came suddenly before him, and he knew that the greatest kindness he could do her would be to restore her lover. Presently he said, abruptly:

"You have nearly broken Ethel's heart."

Jack flushed furiously, and half rose from his chair. Pelling motioned to him to keep calm.

"I asked you to be patient with me," he reminded Jack. "My motive should excuse me to you. The pith of the whole matter is this—the engagement between you and Ethel broken off in consequence of your infatuation for my wife, or had you ceased to care for her before you met Pauline? As a man to man, I ask you for a truthful answer."

"I can't for the life of me understand by what right," began Jack, hotly.

"For heaven's sake, don't waste time in splitting straws when so much is at stake!" Pelling said, impetuously. "You can't understand my right to interfere? I will explain. I love Ethel Mallett as I never loved, never shall love, never believed it possible to love; and until this morning I had the hope of making her my wife some day, when she had had time to forget you. I think my love for her gives me the right to do what I can to secure her happiness; and I believe her happiness rests with you. I can't have her myself, or I do not think I could be unselfish enough to give her up. I might, but I don't think it. Now to return to our point—was your infatuation for my wife the only cause of the estrangement between you two?"

Jack was greatly impressed, as he understood now why Pelling spoke with so much effort, and he felt touched by his

devotion. Added to this was the feeling of shame that had oppressed him ever since his talk with Lord Summers.

"Come—you needn't mind confessing your weakness to me," Pelling went on, encouragingly. "Bless you, man, I know how Pauline can twist any man round her finger if she likes to try! I suppose she was smitten with you, and spread her nets to snare you, and you, not seeing the snare, found yourself enamored of her without knowing how it happened. And I dare say, if the truth were known, when the first mad burst was over, and you thought out things quietly, you would have given a good deal never to have seen her at all, and wished you had behaved differently to Miss Mallett."

Jack jumped up, his face beaming, and wrung Pelling's hand.

"I could not say it myself, but that is really just how it has been with me. I am not good at expressing my feelings; but I know you are behaving very well to me—much better than I deserve—and I thank you. And now what do you wish me to do?"

"Go right away for a few months. Write to me now and again, and I will take care that Miss Mallett hears whatever is likely to be of use to you. Give her time to forget the indignity you have put on her and her love. I shall be on hand in the character of a benevolent patriarch, and the moment I see signs favorable to our plot I will bring about a meeting. The rest will lie with yourself."

"How can I thank you?"

"You owe me no thanks. Relieve your mind on that point. What I am doing I do out of my sincere wish for Miss Mallett's happiness. If you really think you owe me anything pay it in kindness to your wife after you are married. Here is luncheon. We will talk by and by of your immediate plans."

When they had finished luncheon, and Jack had left, Pelling laid down on the hard horsehair sofa, with his hands under his head, gazing steadfastly at the ceiling; and it was not until the evening, when the waiter came to light the gas, that he was roused from his deep reverie. He then pulled himself together, called for his bill, and having settled it, went out into the wretched night.

When Pauline left her husband at the church door she knew that her scheming had been futile, and that she could never again show her face at Mallingford; but it was not that which caused her the agony of mind she was suffering.

She had lost Jack. The one pure, unselfish cup of joy she had longed to taste had been snatched from her lips at the moment of raising. She was stunned with despair.

She paced up and down the platform at Charing Cross station, watching for Babette and concocting plans for obtaining what ready money she could before the grand denouement came. She knew her jewels must be worth at least five thousand pounds, and, though some of them were heirlooms, and others had been bought with money obtained by her dishonesty, she would not scruple to apply them to her personal use. Then she would draw at once two thousand from her bankers. She would go and do this personally lest they might scruple to pay so large a sum on a check. And so she laid her miserable plans, refusing to listen for one moment to the prompting of her better nature, which would even now suggest her return to the husband whose only sin had been his poverty.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Notwithstanding all Pelling's efforts, the story soon got into the newspapers, and, it being the dull season, was seized upon with avidity by the gossip purveyors. It was "dished" and "redished" day after day, with numberless distortions, exaggerations and additions. One society journal had it that the beautiful Miss M—— of M—— Park, in Exbridge-shire, had attempted to poison her husband, to whom she had been secretly married only a month or two, in order to become the wife of a celebrated R. A., with whom she had fallen deeply in love; while another declared that the husband presented himself at the altar with pistols, and, dragging his would-be successor outside the sacred edifice, insisted upon a duel there and then, and wounded him dangerously in the shoulder, and that the unfortunate man now lay in a most critical condition, while the husband had carried off his reluctant bride, a veritable prisoner, on board his yacht, for a twelvemonth's cruise in the Pacific.

At last Pelling, annoyed beyond measure at these absurd stories, decided to lay bare the truth. With the assistance of his lawyer, he drew up a concise statement of the real facts, giving his own and Pauline's name in full, but suppressing Jack's. He carefully conveyed the idea that Pauline believed him to be dead, and gave the circumstance to her, change of name as sufficient to account for his not having discovered her existence since his return from Africa. This he sent to two of the daily newspapers, and, thus divested of all mystery, the story lost its charm, and no longer afforded any interest.

Pelling sent one of these newspapers, with his own letter specially distinguished, to Ethel by post, and the next morn-

ing he called in Buckingham street to make matters clearer.

Ethel's frank candor once more overcame the difficulties of the situation; she stood at the top of the stairs with her hands outstretched and her face bright with friendly interest.

"I have been longing to see you," she began, warmly, as they entered the room; "we have both so much that is wonderful to tell each other!"

She looked at him steadfastly as he stood in the light from the window, and what she saw in his face quickened her pulse with a sudden pity, but she would not give way to the impulse that urged her to console him. She went on, a little hurriedly at first:

"I can see that your pleasant news is in some way mixed up with painful thoughts; so, as mine is altogether pleasant, I shall speak first. To begin—papa came home last night, and he has brought the most wonderful news; it is like a fairy tale! I don't suppose you know yet that your wife is my cousin!"—Captain Pelling started at the words—"I knew you would be greatly pleased. My father is not really Mr. Mallett—his true name is Sir Geoffrey Malling, and he is your wife's uncle. In some extraordinary way, which papa will explain, the whole of the Mallingford property comes to him in the event of Pauline's marrying under twenty-five without her guardian's consent; so, you see, we are going to be very great people. I believe my mother was not so well born as papa, and the late baronet was so angry when he heard of the marriage that he disinherited papa, who at once changed his name and worked hard to keep his wife. I hope you are not angry with us because we are going to take away your wife's wealth. Of course that is only nonsense! I know you are not angry; I've heard you say often how glad you would have been to share what you have with her."

Ethel paused. Pelling did not speak, and she felt a little anxious. She had unintentionally stumbled upon the subject; but she knew it could not be avoided between them, so she screwed up her courage and went on:

"Perhaps I should not say what I am going to say; but no real harm can come from straightforwardness. We have been such good friends in the past that we need not stay to pick and choose our words to each other, need we? I want to congratulate you on the recovery of your wife; but there is something in your face that checks me. Will you tell me all about it?"

"I can't tell you all about it," he said. "I only know that my wife refused to have anything to do with me, and that she is now in Paris."

"If I were you I should go to Paris, too."

"I suppose I ought—in fact, I know I ought—and I have tried to make up my mind to go; but I cannot."

For an instant he dropped his head upon his hand, and a great rush of pity set Ethel's heart beating oddly. He pulled himself together with an impatient exclamation.

"What a bore you must think me!" he said, quickly. "Let us drop the subject. If I ever find you can help me in any way, I will come as you at once. As things are now, the less said the better. And so you are to possess the wealth which Pauline has forfeited? I am very glad—very, very glad—on all accounts but one."

"And that is?"

"It will make Dornton's task harder."

The blood rushed over Ethel's face in a quick flush, and it left again as quickly.

"I don't know what you mean," she said.

"I mean that Dornton was beguiled by my unhappy wife into doing as he did, that he was not master of his own actions, and that he would give a very great deal to be assured of your entire forgiveness. He has loved you all through his mad folly. He told me so himself on the very day of the wedding, before he could have known anything of the change in your worldly affairs; so, when you think of him in the future, you must not believe he was governed by mercenary considerations."

"Thank you for your kind defense of him," she responded, rising as her father entered the room. "I will remember to do as you say," and she turned gayly to the door. "And now let me introduce you to Sir Geoffrey Malling of Mallingford Park."

A few weeks later Ethel and her father were settled at Mallingford. All the necessary legal formalities had been gone through, and the county families had called upon Sir Geoffrey and his daughter. Lord Summers had suggested that the baronet should have a public reception; but Sir Geoffrey had sternly and emphatically opposed any such demonstration. So father and daughter had come down and been met at the railway station by the family carriage, and had gone quietly to their respective rooms, after shaking hands with a few of the old servants whom Sir Geoffrey remembered in his brother's time, and had eaten their first dinner at Mallingford as if they had but just returned from a short visit.

(To be continued.)

He Waited No Longer.

"You may refuse me now," said the persistent suitor, "but I can wait. 'All things come to him who waits.'"

"Yes," replied the dear girl, "and I guess the first thing will be father; I hear him on the stairs."—Philadelphia Ledger.

Progress.

"How are you coming on with your new system of weather prediction?"

"Well," answered the prophet cheerfully; "I can always get the kind of weather all right, but I haven't quite succeeded in hitting the dates exactly."—Washington Star.

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SALE OF GOODS.

State Law Provides Protection for the Creditor.

Portland—The Portland Association of Credit Men, one of the state's oldest and strongest commercial bodies, has taken up the matter of purchasing goods without the buyer knowing whether or not there is any indebtedness against the same. A law on the statute books of Oregon, covering this question, follows:

SALE OF GOODS IN BULK.

It shall be the duty of any person who shall purchase any stock of goods in bulk, for cash or credit, to demand and receive from the vendor, at least five days before the consummation of such purchase, and at least five days before paying or delivering to the vendor, any part of the purchase price, a written statement under oath, containing the names and addresses of all of the creditors of said vendor, with the amount of indebtedness due and owing, or to become due or owing to each of such creditors, and if there be no such creditors, a written statement under oath to that effect; and it shall be the duty of such vendor to furnish such statement at least five days before such sale. After receiving said written statement, the vendee shall at least five days before the consummation of such purchase, and at least five days before paying any part of the purchase price, in good faith notify personally or by wire or by registered letter, each of the creditors of the vendor named in said statement, of the proposed purchase by him of such stock of goods; and whenever any person shall purchase any stock of goods in bulk, without having first demanded and received from his vendor, the statement herein provided for, and without having also notified all of the creditors of the vendor named in such statement, such purchase, sale or transfer shall, as to any and all creditors of the vendor, be conclusively presumed fraudulent and void. Any vendor of a stock of goods in bulk, who shall knowingly and wilfully make or deliver, or cause to be made or delivered, any false statement, or shall fail to include the names of all of his creditors in any such statement, shall be deemed guilty of perjury. Any sale or transfer of a stock of goods, wares or merchandise out of the usual or ordinary course of the business or trade of the vendor, or whenever thereby substantially the entire business or trade theretofore conducted by the vendor shall be sold or conveyed or attempted to be sold or conveyed, shall be deemed a sale or transfer in bulk, in contemplation of this act; provided, that nothing contained in this act shall apply to sales by executors, administrators, receivers, or any public officer acting under judicial process.

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While at work for the F. C. & P. E. 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 175 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.

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