

The Wife's Secret, OR A BITTER RECKONING

By CHARLOTTE M. BRAEME

CHAPTER XVIII.—(Continued.)
Jack's feelings at that moment were not enviable. He had always looked upon Lord Summers' commission as a direct proof of his own ability. It was a decided damper to his good opinion of himself to discover that it was due to his patron's interest in Ethel Mallett.

"As you do not seem to have been very glad to hear of the engagement, perhaps you will be better pleased to hear that it is at an end."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; and I think you should know that Miss Mallett took the initiative in breaking it off."

"I am surprised! I thought she was very fond of you. But there is no accounting for women's actions."

And then Lord Summers turned to his other neighbor and threw himself into a discussion upon the drainage of land, thus tacitly dismissing the other subject; but Jack was conscious that he was not held blameless in the matter—nor indeed did he feel so.

One point in the conversation had roused his curiosity—Lord Summers' remark as to the name of "Mallett" being assumed. He would have liked to pursue the subject, but as things were, he had no right to feel curious.

Later in the evening Miss Mallett and her guardians were chatting confidentially, and the subject of the mysterious advertisement was introduced.

"Have you any notion what they could mean?" he asked.

"Not the smallest," she answered. "It is curious Sir Geoffrey never saw them."

"But he may have, without our knowing it."

"True. But don't you think that the motive, whatever it was, must have affected the whole family, and that, if he had been found, we should have been mixed up in it?"

"Possibly, but not necessarily. If I had known where Geoffrey was I should certainly have insisted upon his sitting the matter. Indeed, at one time I thought of investigating it myself; but your uncle was always so touchy about any one's interfering in his affairs that I thought it better to let it alone."

For a moment there was a fixed look of fear on Pauline's face; but Lord Summers was too much taken up with his subject to notice it.

"Good-looking fellow, Dornton," he remarked, carelessly, with a glance to where Jack was carrying on the usual war of words with Bertha Collins.

"Very," Pauline answered, shortly.

"Made quite a long stay with you. Been here since the beginning of July, has he not?"

"I forget exactly when he came."

In spite of this apparent indifference, Lord Summers felt satisfied that things were in an unsatisfactory state, and he wished fervently that, in his anxiety to benefit the future husband of his old friend's daughter, he had been prompted to do anything rather than send him down to this particular neighborhood.

Sunday evening was rather a quiet time at Mallingford, and the house was wrapped in darkness earlier than usual.

But the lamps in Miss Mallett's boudoir burned on steadily, for Jack and his fiancée were having their last confidential chat before their marriage. The next morning Jack was to leave for London to obtain the special license and see after sundry small matters, and he would not return until late on Tuesday afternoon.

"I suppose we must say good-by to-night, as I shall most likely start before you are down," Jack said.

"Yes—but not just yet! Don't be in a hurry to leave me, Jack," Pauline answered, with a touch of pleading in her voice. She knelt on the thick white rug at his feet, and added, "I would get up to give you a parting salute if I were not afraid that Lord Summers would hear of it."

"My dear, there is no need," Jack said, calmly. "At the same time, I don't understand your dread of Summers. Surely you may do as you choose in so small a matter?"

"I don't think I understand it myself, Jack; yet I feel it. My life is full of dread just now."

CHAPTER XIX.

It was rather annoying to Pelling that just now, when he was anxious to make the most of his chance with Ethel, her father's absence prevented his carrying out his design. He fretted and fumed impatiently over Mr. Mallett's letter—telling of his enforced absence for a week—when he first received it; and then, seeing the uselessness of repining, he set about making plans for relieving Ethel's loneliness.

He wrote her a letter, telling her he regretted now more than ever that he had neither mother nor sisters, not even a stray aunt, as, if he had, he would press them into play propriety, and carry her off a prisoner to spend the week at the Wigwam. Then he made appointments at the publisher's, always taking care to arrive before her, and generally, after putting her into a cab, returning for a last ten minutes' chat with Mr. Bramwell before starting himself.

Then there was usually either a letter—on business, of course—or a novel by the morning post; and later on in the day would arrive a box of lovely loose blossoms or a basket of late grapes and peaches. So Ethel was always being pleasantly reminded that her happiness

was the chief object of one person's life, and the knowledge comforted her exceedingly.

Meanwhile Mr. Mallett was having rather a hard time of it. He arrived in Paris on Sunday morning, and the wedding was to take place on the following Wednesday. This gave him but three clear days to get to the obscure Spanish town—of which he did not even know the whereabouts—hunt up the evidence of his niece's death, and telegraph the news in time to stop the ceremony.

After a weary two days' struggle with railway officials and time tables, he reached Madrid on Tuesday in the cool blush of the early morning, very fagged, but determined to go on. He had made a friend of the guard, glad to find some one who spoke French—for his Spanish was doubtful from long disuse—and on the arrival of the train they went off together to the inquiry office to find out means to reach the obscure town of Villa Silento.

The station master, half asleep, and wholly angry at being routed out of bed at such an early hour in the morning, at first denied all knowledge of a place of that name; but, when the guard reminded him that such things as reference books of the railway routes were issued for his especial enlightenment, his manner changed, and he proceeded to do his best on Mr. Mallett's behalf.

"It is here, you see," he said in Spanish, putting his fat finger on a spot in the map. "Senor cannot leave Madrid until half past nine; he will then have two hours' railway ride, and then an hour and a half by coach over not the very best of roads."

Mr. Mallett looked at his watch. It was a quarter to six; he would have time for three hours' rest. Thanking the friendly guard for his good services, he tossed his small bag and rug on the nearest back-carriage and drove off to a hotel.

At one o'clock Mr. Mallett, feeling as if his sense had been shaken out of him by the last hour over that never-to-be-forgotten road, found himself standing in the market place of Villa Silento, with the hot midday sun beating down on him, feeling more completely alone and helpless than he ever remembered to have felt before.

"I am afraid I made a mistake in coming myself," he said to the market clock, as he stood in front of it. "You see a man of fifty-seven is not so quick and apt in adapting himself to circumstances as a younger man would be."

For two or three minutes Mallett stood listening to the distant rumbling of the coach wheels, and, great as had been his suffering during the drive, he almost wished himself back again on the awful machine, instead of here in this death-like place.

He shook off the dreamy feeling of unreality that possessed him, and crossed to a deserted looking house on the shady side of the square, where a sign board from which all vestige of paint had long since passed away hung over the door, seeming to denote a house of entertainment.

He pushed open the door and it swung to behind him without noise. He was in a large stone-flagged room which occupied the whole depth of the house, the opposite end opening on to a crazy veranda crumbling under the weight of luxuriant creepers, through which there were glimpses of a weed-grown inclosure beyond. He stamped up and down the stone floor, and shouted until the stones echoed his voice. At the end of ten minutes a sorrow face, surrounded by turbulent masses of frizzy black hair, leaned over the hand rail of the stairs that led up to the next floor. In about five minutes the sorrow face and frizzy hair reappeared, and the woman began to apologize profusely.

Mr. Mallett stood politely silent, hat in hand, until she seemed to have ended her speech, when he presented the envelope given him by Babette, with the name and address of the photographer of the gravestone.

The talkative lady took it over to the light and spelled it out laboriously, and then turned again to Mr. Mallett, and rattled off another little incomprehensible speech, interspersed with numberless ejaculations of astonishment. Seeing at last that he did not understand a word of what she was saying, she pointed to the address in her hand, and said slowly in Spanish:

"My father."

Mr. Mallett understood that, for pointing in his turn to the envelope, he asked:

"Where?"

She smiled pleasantly, motioned to him to repeat himself, and went upstairs looking once or twice over her shoulder to nod and smile at him reassuringly. Could it be that the man he was in search of was here in this house? He could hear an animated conversation going on somewhere in the rooms above, and he recognized the voice of the woman and the tones of a man.

Presently there came to him an elderly Spaniard, with something of the dandy still clinging to him in the shape of waxed mustaches and perfumed hair. Still, the signs of decay that abounded throughout the place showed themselves even here in the ancient fop's frayed jacket and well-worn shoes. To Mr. Mallett's surprise and relief he at once opened the conversation in passable French.

"Monsieur wishes to see me? He has

evidently come a long way for that purpose. I am charmed, flattered and abashed all at one time—charmed and abashed to receive any one who comes a distance to pay homage to art."

He put his hand on his heart and bowed with the air of a prince. His belief that Mr. Mallett had come to visit and compliment art in his person was so evidently genuine that the sensitive gentleman felt almost unhappy to have to undeceive him; but time was pressing. He had none for the observance of unnecessary politeness. He took the little photograph from his pocketbook and held it toward Castellan.

"I believe you took that picture. Now, I want you to tell me where the grave of which this is a picture is to be found, how you came to take the photograph, whom you took it for, and any other circumstances you can remember in connection with it."

The Spaniard leaned forward with his hands on his knees to look at the photograph, but he did not attempt to touch it. He stared at it earnestly while Mr. Mallett was speaking, and, when he had finished, he looked up with a scared face as he answered:

"I said something was wrong about that affair at the time, and now my words are coming to pass. I did not like the job, I can assure you; I have an antipathy to graves and coffins and all that reminds one of death, and I would not have taken that picture for untold gold, but that I was enslaved by the beauty of the lady who asked me to do it. Monsieur has not seen such another—tall, shapely, with eyes, hair and skin perfect, and her voice soft and sweet like a silver bell. I was coaxed me to do it against my will, and I crept into the village graveyard one morning at 3 o'clock with my camera, before even the busy sisters were out of their cells, and took the picture for her. You may see how imperfect the picture is, how many blemishes it has, and you must not judge of my usual work by it, for my hand shook with fear—" The soul of the artist was ousting the shade of the aristocrat.

"Never mind the blemishes, Senor Castellan," interrupted Mr. Mallett. "The photograph is good enough for my purpose. I want you now to tell me the name of the lady who gave you the order, the name of the convent where the grave is, with directions for getting there."

Castellan's hands went up in dismay. "You cannot get there! It would be sacrilege. No man is permitted to enter the gates but on two days in the week, for a couple of hours at visiting time, you understand, when the holy sisters are all shut in their cells at prayer."

"Still I must get to see that grave before sunset to-night, and I will give two hundred francs to any one who will help me."

"Two hundred francs! It is a large sum here in Villa Silento. There is a servant woman who does the errands for the convent ladies, with whom I am acquainted, who might be induced—" He paused thoughtfully.

"That is settled then. And now how far is it, and how are we to get there?" Mr. Mallett asked, rising briskly from his chair.

Castellan motioned him back to his seat. "You must leave this to me entirely, monsieur. One ill-considered step might balk your plan, and rob the servant and me of our reward. It must be done during vapors, if at all; and in the meantime I must see this woman and make my plans. It is now two, and, if I might advise refreshment and rest before we start on our expedition, monsieur would be more fitted for it."

"One moment," said Mr. Mallett, as Castellan rose to call his daughter to their guest. "Tell me the name of the convent before you go."

"It is called the Convent of the Holy Assumption, and it is but five minutes' walk from here."

"And the name of the lady who ordered that photograph?"

"Ah, that I never knew! My accomplice managed all the business part of the affair, as she will do now, and the lady's name was never mentioned."

Senor Castellan went through the front door into the market place, pausing on the threshold, with his fingers on his lips, to say:

"Until six and a quarter then, au revoir."

(To be continued.)

Strong Force.

"I see," said the pretty girl, "that some literary critic claims that a great many poems appearing these days are forced. What would force a poet to write verse?"

"His appetite or his landlady," replied the young man who sold rhymes at space rates.

Comes Natural.

"Mrs. Graftleigh's little boy is awfully polite, isn't he? I called on his mother this afternoon and when I took my departure he told me to call again."

"Yes. He has heard his father say it to the bill collectors so many times."—Detroit Tribune.

Genuine.

"I have seen several 'wild men,'" remarked the lady who had been through the Midway, "but I don't believe there are any real ones."

"You are mistaken," replied her friend. "You should see my husband when he finds breakfast is ten minutes late."

Adulterated Ground.

Customer—Are you positive that was pure ground coffee you sold me last week?

Grocer—Of course I am. What makes you doubt it?

Customer—Oh, nothing—only there was some gravel in the ground.

SAVED BY A BABY.

In 1895 the difficulties between the Chinese and Japanese made the lot of missionaries in China extremely dangerous. They recognized the serious consequences of a general uprising of the Chinese. In "The Tragedy of Pekingfu" there is a letter from an American woman telling how a party of Chinese soldiers were checked when they came rushing toward her house:

A week ago a great crowd of Chinese soldiers came to the compound, about fifteen rods from here. They caused great disturbance among the Chinese servants and others. The racket about the place was something terrible.

Mr. Roberts did what he could to keep them quiet. Dr. Noble soon came, and they two worked all the afternoon, trying to entertain these men by answering their questions and showing them round. They broke into the cellar, but did not break into the houses, although they pushed on the doors and wanted to get in badly; but the gentlemen told them there was only a woman inside, and it was not proper for them to go in. To this they finally agreed, for the Chinese are very particular about such things.

I soon saw them coming toward the house like a lot of hounds on the track of some prey. They came to the windows and began looking in, but did not try the doors.

I saw some faces at one window which did not look very bad, so I sat down at the window with Baby Paul. He immediately reached out his little arms to them and laughed, delighted to see so many faces. They began to smile and ask questions. I asked them where they were from, and they answered me. They thought Paul would be cold, dressed in white. So I showed them that he had flannel on under, etc., and they seemed satisfied.

They finally left. You can imagine my relief.

THE REAL GAUTEMALA.

It is a Country of Great Undeveloped Possibilities.

Guatemala is a country of great undeveloped possibilities. Twenty years ago the first railroad was opened connecting the capital with the Pacific port of San Jose, a distance of seventy-five miles, says Nevil O. Winter in the Pilgrim. From Escuintla, a favorite watering place, a branch extended to Mazatenango, and there connects with another line to the port of Champerico. On the gulf side, a road, the Guatemala Northern, is built from Puerto Barrios to Rancho San Augustin, a distance of 129 miles. With the completion of the seventy miles intervening between this point and Guatemala City, there will be a continuous line between the gulf and the Pacific.

The latter road was well constructed and opened to traffic ten years ago. However, it is a difficult matter to keep a road in repair in these tropical countries because of excessive rain and the action of the elements and insects upon the ties. In the 129 miles of track there are 230 bridges, and many of them are over streams which, in the rainy season, are raging torrents. In that season many of the streams change their course or widen their beds and wash out the track. One who has never visited tropical countries cannot appreciate the difficulties of railroad construction there.

For the last few years the road has been practically abandoned for freight purposes because of washouts and the destruction of a bridge across the Montague river. Now it has been financed again and construction crews are at work all along the line, a new bridge is being built and creosoted ties laid down. At the present time only one train a week is being run to carry the mail and any passengers who may want to go. This train requires two days to run the 129 miles. The passengers do not urge greater speed, for in some places there are scarcely two ties to each rail that will hold a spike. This road and all the others are narrow gauge. Considerable work has been and is being done on the extension to the capital, and it is hoped to have it all completed within two years.

The greatest problem with the railroad, as well as with other enterprises, is labor. The Indians will only work spasmodically. Sometimes the political governors will compel them to work, but this cannot exceed fourteen days. Then they draw their pay and leave. The plantation owners overcome this by advancing the Indians a certain amount of money and the law compels them to work until the debt is paid. Each plantation has an alcalde, or mayor, who has the power to enforce the laws, and he can put the recreant laborer in the stocks or in jail if he refuses to work, or can summon the soldiers to hunt up and bring him back if he attempts to escape. Another mope is often taken as security for the one employed.

A man's idea of an angel is a woman who doesn't talk about her neighbors.

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"Mr. Dustin Stax says he isn't going to endow any more libraries."

"But I thought he was devoted to literature. He has written books himself."

"That's the trouble. The people let the dust lie on his books and stand in line to get 'Mazie's Wooling' and 'When True Love Was in Bloom' and works of that character."—Washington Star.

Controlling Nature.

Everybody knows that of late years natural forces have been wonderfully subjected to man's need. We are dazzled by the spectacular achievements in steam and electricity, but are likely to forget the less noisy but no less marvelous conquest of animal and plant life. Horses are swifter, cattle heavier, cows give more milk and sheep have finer fleeces than in days gone by. In plants the transformation is even more marked. People now living can remember when the number of edible fruits and vegetables was far less than at present and even those that could be grown were vastly inferior to what we now have. For example, our parents knew nothing of the tomato, except as a curious ornament in the garden. Sweet corn was hardly better than the commonest field sorts. All oranges had seeds. Celery was little known and poor in quality. In the flower bed the insignificant heart's ease from which it was developed, and the sweet pea in all its dainty splendor traces its origin to the common garden vegetable.

This progress has been made in spite of the great tendency manifested in all plants and animals to go back to the original type. It is indeed a battle to keep strains pure and up to the standard they have already attained, let alone any improvement. The practical results are accomplished by men operating largely for love of the work, like Luther Burbank, in California, and Eckford in England, as well as by the great seed merchants, D. M. Ferry & Co., of Detroit, Mich., who are not only eternally vigilant to hold what ground has been gained, but have a corps of trained specialists, backed by ample means, to conduct new experiments. The results of their experiences can be found in their 1906 Seed Annual, which they will send free to all applicants.

Self-Supporting Park.

Following the example of many European cities, Los Angeles, Cal., will turn Griffith Park, with an area of 3,000 acres of brush land, into a commercial forest. Four experts, with a view to converting this practically waste place of land into a productive forest, made a comprehensive planting place for the trees, which will not only pay for its cultivation and care through the sale of mature timber, but will prove a constant source of pleasure and recreation for the citizens of Los Angeles. Los Angeles is the first American city to adopt this plan, but it is predicted that other municipalities in this country will soon follow in its footsteps.

Value of Elephants.

An African elephant is of value only for its ivory, of which a full-grown animal yields from \$250 to \$300 worth. On the other hand, a working Indian elephant cannot be bought for less than \$2,500 to \$3,500.

Just the Man He Wanted.

"I sent for you, sir," said Mr. Phamley, "to fix a key in my daughter's piano."

"But," protested the artisan, "I'm not a piano tuner, I'm a locksmith."

"Exactly; I want you to fix the blooming thing so I can lock it up when I feel like it."—Philadelphia Press.

If a man could have half his wishes he would double his trouble.—Poor Richard.

One-half the world doesn't care how the other half dies.

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