



The Wife's Secret, OR A BITTER RECKONING

By CHARLOTTE M. BRAEME

CHAPTER XXIV.

It was Sir Geoffrey's first dinner party, and Ethel felt just a little nervous as she received the guests. Captain Pelling was watching her in the pauses of his chat with Bertha Collins. He caught her eye presently and smiled at her reassuringly, for she had confided to him her dread of the awful occasion.

"You are an old friend of theirs, are you not?" Bertha was saying to the captain. "We all think Miss Malling quite charming. I took her from the first; but, do you know, she is not easy to get on with. Of course she is all one could wish as a hostess; but it is impossible to gush with her. She has a way of sifting all one says and showing up anything that is absurd without certainly in the least intending to give offense. You would hardly believe it, I dare say, but I have adopted the habit of trying to talk seriously when she is listening."

"I think that is the greatest compliment you could pay her. Will you adopt the same practice with me?"

"I should not dare," she replied, with mock gravity. "If I were to get a reputation for seriousness I should probably die an old maid. Men always prefer frivolous talkers for their wives. There is the dinner bell. Are you to take me down?"

Later in the evening Miss Collins dropped into a quiet corner and discussed the things with the utmost freedom with an intimate friend whom she had not seen since the end of the season. She was describing the breaking up of the party when Pauline's intended marriage had been discovered.

"Now tell me—could there be anything more ridiculous than her running away from her own house and marrying, or trying to marry, a man secretly, when there was no one to prevent her doing it openly? My dear, you should have seen our faces when Mrs. Sefton read us the note she had left behind, as we dropped in, one after another, to luncheon! At first everybody looked very surprised, and then the absurdity of the whole proceeding struck us. Why could she not have been married properly? No one could have objected to her marrying that good-looking artist if she chose to do so."

"Was she very much 'gone' on him?"

"Awfully! It must have been a terrible blow to her when her husband turned up."

"Rather! Isn't it odd, his being there?"

"I don't think so. He was very good to Sir Geoffrey when he was in less affluent circumstances, I believe."

"Things seem a bit mixed. From what I could make out, he had believed himself a widower, just as she had thought herself a widow, until they met in the church. Don't you think it probable that, while he was under the impression that his wife was dead, he may have had a liking for Miss Malling?"

"I believe you are right," Bertha replied, energetically, "for I saw him looking at her before dinner with his heart in his eyes."

"It is certainly very strange that he should have fallen in love with the girl who was being kept out of her right position by his own wife! It looks like the finger of Fate, doesn't it—though which way the finger is pointing I can't see."

As the guests, one after another, took their departure, Ethel felt her burden lightening. Her first party had been an unqualified success, but she was none the less glad to have it over. Lord Summers stayed behind, talking earnestly with Sir Geoffrey.

"I admit I was disappointed when I heard that she had taken the family jewels with her," he said, in allusion to Pauline. "I'm afraid she has inherited some of her father's want of principle. The Luftons were never particularly distinguished for honesty. What do you mean to do about it, Geoffrey?"

"Nothing openly. I am in communication with her waiting maid, who had promised to let me know if there is any idea on Pauline's part of selling them, and I shall, unknown to her, become the purchaser."

"An excellent idea and a very generous one. By the bye, as things have turned out, how fortunate it is that the engagement between our charming Ethel and young Dorton was—"

He stopped suddenly as Ethel and Pelling came back from bidding farewell to Miss Collins. They both caught the drift of his words, and Ethel glanced at Pelling's face; but it was calmly unconscious. Thinking this a good opening to talk of Jack, he said:

"If you are not too tired, I want to show you a delightful style of title page that I came across this morning. I thought you might elaborate the idea for your 'Central Africa.' It is on this table somewhere."

"I am afraid my share of 'Central Africa' will not be anything to be proud of," he replied with a smile.

"That is nonsense, and you know it, Captain Pelling! I have made up my mind that your sketches are to be the principal attraction of the book. It is really unkind of you to make light of your work after all our interest in it!"

"That is just it," he returned, laughingly. "I have become so accustomed to working in company that I find I can't move a step by myself."

"You would not be offended at anything I should say for your good?"

"Go on," he said, and waited with knitted brows for what she had to say. Ethel, in her short life, had often had unpleasant tasks to perform, but never one so unpleasant as this.

"Out of your own mouth shall you be judged," she began, smiling at him to hide the trembling of her lips. "You say you have become so used to working in company that you cannot move a step by yourself; but I say you must take the one needful step by yourself that will secure you good company to work in for the rest of your life. Go to Paris at once, seek out your wife, and give her the protection of your presence. She will yield. You must not judge her by her words when you last met. You had her at a cruel disadvantage. Think what an awful shock your sudden appearance must have been to her! It is very, very hard for me to say this to you, after all your kindness to us in the past; but you will not misjudge my motive. I am speaking for your good. By and by, when you are quite happy with each other, you will be thankful to me for sending you away in this abrupt manner."

"You wish me to go at once?" he asked.

"That is a very cruel way to put it," she answered, gently. "You know I do not wish you to go at all. True friends are not so plentiful that one can afford to play battledore and shuttlecock with them for one's own pleasure. For your own good, Captain Pelling, I advise your going at once."

"You are one of the best women that ever lived," he exclaimed, "and I am proud to have had you for a friend! I ought to have known my presence would give you pain, and refused Sir Geoffrey's invitation. Don't speak until I've finished," he went on, hurriedly, holding up his hand to check any interruption. "I shall follow your advice to the letter. I will thrust aside my own inclinations, and run over to Paris and see what Mrs. Pelling is doing, spend Christmas among the Frenchmen, and perhaps in the New Year Captain and Mrs. Pelling may have the honor of receiving Sir Geoffrey and Miss Malling at the Wigwam."

For once Ethel looked at him with her eyes brimming with tears; but she did not dare make an attempt to speak. He took her hand in his, and held it close as he finished.

"You must make some plausible excuse to Sir Geoffrey for my abrupt departure in the morning; or, better still, I will wire from town. I shall write to you from Paris, if I may. And now, before I say good-night, I must give you this letter. I received it two days ago from Dorton. I know it will please you. He and I correspond regularly; so I shall keep you posted up in his movements. Good-by, my true, honest little friend."

She sat, as he left her, holding Jack's letter in her hand, hearing his voice faintly in the distance as he excused himself with the plea of fatigue to her father, and wondering how it had happened that this interview, which she had brought about for the sole purpose of hearing news of Jack, had ended in so sudden a determination on the captain's part to seek his wife. She knew his resolve was the result of her advice, and she hoped devoutly that good might come of it.

And Pelling mounted the wide stairs very slowly, deep in thought as he went. "She is quite right, as she is always. It is the only thing to do; and I never saw it myself. My place is undoubtedly by my wife's side."

CHAPTER XXV.

"I tell you your presence here is an unwarrantable intrusion! If you do not leave my apartment of your own free will, I shall be compelled to have you ejected!"

It was the third day since Pelling left Ethel, and this was his wife's greeting! He had had a long battle with himself; but duty had been triumphant, and his mind once made up he was not to be discouraged by a few bitter words.

"That is not necessary. Of course I will leave you; but you will not refuse to answer me one or two questions first?"

"Ask your questions then, and, if I choose to answer them, I will. If I don't choose, I will not. But, for heaven's sake, get over them quickly!"

"Will you tell me something of our child, Pauline?" he asked.

She sprung up with a look of desperate fright on her face.

"How dare you come here to browbeat me like this?" she exclaimed, vehemently; and then she sank back on the couch again. But, after a pause, she said quietly enough: "You have touched my one weak point. Of course you have to hear what there is to tell. My baby was born a weakly little thing. I had hard work to keep body and soul together in those first days after my father's death. I knew from the first she could not live long. She died when she was three months old."

"I wish she had lived."

"Why do you wish such a mad thing as that?"

"Because, if it had not been for seeing her grave, I should have gone on searching for you until I found you."

"Ah! And if you had found me then, if you had come to Mallingford quietly and said, 'Pauline, you are my wife; come with me,' do you know what I would have done? I would have killed

you! I would kill you even now, if your death would undo any of the harm you have worked me! But it is all over, and the next thing you will hear is that I have killed myself!"

"Why do you hate me so bitterly, Pauline?" he asked; and she studied her attentively while she answered:

"Because you have been by evil genius ever since I became your wife. If I had not married you, my life might have been as happy and pleasant as other women's lives are. No sooner did I know that I was my uncle's heiress than my happiness was destroyed by hearing that I was to inherit only on the condition that I did not marry without my guardian's consent. Thanks to you, this condition was already broken; and my six years of possession have been embittered by the certainty in my own mind that you were alive somewhere and would surely find me some day, and deprive me of all that I had risked so much to obtain."

Pelling sighed heavily and took up his hat.

"You will let me come and see you again?"

"Why? You do not care for me in the least. Why should you take so much trouble to be civil to me?"

"You are my wife. No amount of dislike or shortcomings on your part alters that fact. We have been very unfortunate in the past. I can see you are unhappy; and, in an indirect way, I am the cause of your unhappiness. I would give a great deal to make things brighter for you, if you would let me."

She was touched by the earnestness of his manner and tone.

"You are very good," she said; "and I am sorry I behaved so badly to you." She stood silent for a few moments, Pelling watching her quietly; while they stood the clock on the mantelpiece struck 12.

"You must go now," she told him hurriedly. "I have an appointment to ride with some friends. Come again at this time to-morrow."

He did not attempt any outward display of affection, but gazed down the stairs. He met Babette half way down.

"With whom does your mistress ride to-day?" he asked.

"With the Baroness de Belette"—a woman well known for the pertinacity with which she had clung to the extreme edge of respectable society for the last five years. "They have a wager as to who will ride the greatest distance on a horse belonging to Monsieur Crevin which has always refused to carry a lady."

Pelling went on with a little unacknowledged anxiety in his heart. He would go back and try to dissuade Pauline from this mad freak, but that he knew it would be useless; and any show of authority on his part just now might perhaps undo the little good he believed he had accomplished.

He drove straight back to the hotel, and sat with his chin resting on his hands at the little table in the window of his room. He was in a strange state of mingled hope and dread. He did not know what he wished; he only knew that he meant to do what he conceived to be his duty; the rest he must leave in higher hands.

While thus musing over the past, he was brought back to the present by the sight of his wife cantering by in company with several others; and, following them, he noticed a fidgety chestnut horse, with a side-saddle on, which was being led by a groom. Pauline looked up and bowed gravely; he returned the greeting.

How handsome she looked! How well she sat her horse! How proud he might have been of her if she had never allowed the love of riches to crowd the womanliness out of her heart! He leaned forward and watched her as far as he could see from the window.

An hour later Pelling was stooping over his wife's poor crushed body in one of the little chalets in the Bois de Boulogne. She had been thrown and trampled on, and was dying of internal hemorrhage. Her voice was very low, and her words came slowly, with many pauses.

"It is heaven's justice! After you had gone this morning I made up my mind to do as you wished. I thought I would try to love you—you were so good—and we should be—happy together. I had no right to be happy—after my wickedness, and heaven has—settled it!"

"My poor mistaken girl!"

"Yes, that is true. I've been mistaken all—my life. No one ever—tried to make me good. I was always left to servants—when I was—a child. Heaven is just, and the great Judge will remember my—great temptations. Will you kiss me—just once, Alec? Say you forgive me—it will make my mind easier."

In spite of his efforts not to disturb her last moments by any show of feeling, a large tear dropped upon her face. She looked at him wonderingly, and put up her finger to his cheek.

"For me," she said very softly—"you cry for me. I do not deserve—to have one mourner—at my death bed. I have done evil to every one—but Jack. Give him my—No, I will not leave messages; they might bring a curse."

Another spasm seized her; and, when it had passed, the hue of death was creeping over her face. It was all finished now, and the strong young life that had been so misused had come to an end.

Pelling took out a card and left it with the people of the house, and then went straightway to see that all the necessary arrangements were made for the interment of her who had once been very dear to him. He wrote a short letter to Sir Geoffrey that night. It ran:

"Dear Sir, Geoffrey—Your niece, my wife, was killed by a fall from her horse to-day. We were reconciled at the last. Tell your daughter I can never express my gratitude to her for sending me here; it will always be a source of thankfulness in my heart. The family jewels

are intact, Babette tells me, and they will be sent by special courier. When the funeral is over, I think I shall join Dorton in Italy, and toward the spring we may work our way homeward in company. Ask Miss Ethel to keep us ever green in her memory. I've set my heart on seeing our young friend Jack a Royal Academician before many years. With his talent, he wants only a little judicious pushing, and I mean to devote my time to pushing him."

"Always your sincere friend,
"ALEXANDER PELLING."

Ethel was greatly affected by this letter, and she went about with a very sober face for some weeks, until the preparations for Christmas absorbed her, and left her no time for thinking of handsome young artists or anything else. But, even in the midst of the excitement of Christmastide, there was always a craving in her heart, a dreary sense of emptiness, which grew and grew until she was compelled, with many blushes, to admit its presence, and to acknowledge to herself that only one person in all the world could fill the void.

(To be continued.)

LONELIEST SPOT IN BRITAIN.

How Time Is Spent in the Skerryvore Lighthouse in Spell of Six Weeks.

The Skerryvore lighthouse is one of the loneliest places in the British Islands. It is the chief rock of a reef which lies ten miles southwest of Tiree and twenty-four miles west of Iona. Previous to 1844 a ship was lost there annually for forty years. The lighthouse was begun in 1838 and took six years to complete, the cost being £80,077. It will always be interesting, if only for the fact that it was erected by Robert Louis Stevenson's uncle, Alan, who followed the method adopted by his father, Robert, in the Bell Lighthouse. The Skerryvore lighthouse is 143 ft. 8 in. high; it is 42 feet in diameter at the base and 16 feet at the top. The light, which is a revolving one, can be seen at a distance of 18½ nautical miles. The tower is built on a rock which is about 15 feet above high-water mark. This is the largest rock above water of the whole chain and is about 60 yards long by 40 yards broad, but is so intersected by channels cut through it by the action of the sea and is so uneven that walking is difficult.

To kill the time on the rock when not officially engaged the keepers try various kinds of handicraft work. "Just now," writes the principal keeper, "I am finishing an inlaid table that has taken up my spare time these last three winters. It consists of over 8,000 pieces of wood and of fifteen different kinds, and is all hand done. I also do a little photography in the summer time."

As it would be almost impossible for human beings to reside continuously on a place like this, the keepers are supposed to be on duty for six weeks, when they get a fortnight ashore. The shore station, where their families reside, is in Earraid, on the southwest of Mull, twenty-five miles away. Life is monotonous, even at the shore station, as the lighthouse families are the only inhabitants.

Explains Confusion at Babel.

"Among ignorant persons," said Frank E. Wallis, secretary of the Architectural League of New York, "there is a belief that architects are useless—that a builder is enough of an architect for all practical purposes. I attended a session of court not long ago when an architectural case was being heard. A young architect was put on the stand, and, after he had given his testimony, the lawyer for the opposition began to cross-examine him. The questions ran like this:

"You are a builder, I believe?"

"No, an architect."

"Builder or architect, architect or builder, it is much the same thing, isn't it?"

"No, not at all."

"What is the difference?"

"The young man explained what the difference was, and the lawyer, with a sneer, said:

"Oh, very well. That will do. And now, after your very ingenious distinction without a difference, perhaps you can inform the court who was the architect of the Tower of Babel?"

"There was none," he answered, "and hence the confusion."

Proverb Comes Out.

Miles—You remember Sapleigh, who went west a couple of years ago and married an heiress, don't you?

Giles—Yes. What of him?

Miles—I understand his wife got a divorce from him recently.

Giles—I'm not surprised to hear it.

Miles—Why?

Giles—Because a fool and his money are soon parted, you know.

Unlucky Thirteenth.

Mrs. Biggs—Mrs. Divorcee tells me she has just declined an offer of marriage.

Mrs. Diggs—Indeed! She has already had twelve husbands. I wonder why she declined another.

Mrs. Biggs—I think she's superstitious.

Trouble Afoot.

The Two-Step—They are all after my scalp.

The Waltz—Well, you're the fellow who crowded me out.—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

FALLS CLAIMED BY CANADA.

Greater Part of Horseshoe Niagara May Belong to Dominion.

It has always been supposed by the people of the United States that they owned one-half of the Horseshoe fall of Niagara, but grave danger menaces their claim to such a title. The international dispute, if such it may be termed, has crept in since the members of the International Waterways Commission were at Niagara. These men studied the conditions as they found them and reviewed maps outlining various features.

Shortly after this Prof. Ladramme, of Quebec, an eminent Canadian geologist, arrived at Niagara to make a survey and inspection of the falls. Suspicion was aroused that the Canadian members believed they had discovered something that was overlooked in the public mind, and it was intimated that the Dominion government would ultimately lay claim to nearly the entire Horseshoe fall. Such claims, if well founded, would leave the Canadian commissioners representing more for the preservation of Niagara than the United States commissioners.

The importance of even a suggestion that the Canadians own more than half of the great Horseshoe fall is of great moment. This can be understood when the magnitude of the power development at Niagara is considered. By far the greater volume of water passes over the Horseshoe fall, and this quantity of water means additional horse power. In fact, it would not be a difficult matter to divert the water of the upper river so that all of it would plunge over the Horseshoe. Nature has several times developed conditions whereby the American fall was nearly dry.

With the Dominion of Canada owning nearly all of the Horseshoe, it is clear that she would own and control the same percentage of the electric power that might be developed by a utilization of the full flow of Niagara. To-day over 400,000 electrical horse power is being developed on the Canadian side of the falls, while the New York side has only about 150,000 developed horse power.

Should a great demand for electric power arise through new possibilities of application or permission the United States might be dependent upon Canada for much of its power supply from the falls of Niagara, and it would be an easy matter for the Canadians to place an export duty on power.

"GHOST" IN MANOR HOUSE.

Occupier Tells a Strange Story of "The Open Door."

A curious ghost story is told by the occupier of the Manor House, Knaresborough, a charming old mansion, parts of which date back to the early days of the thirteenth century. The occupier, A. W. Howes, recently restored the building, and during the alterations the skeleton of a woman was found under one of the staircases, and it is this discovery that has led Mr. Howes to tell his story.

He says there is something about the building that cannot be explained. Formerly he and his wife occupied the blue room, in which stands an old oak bedstead, on which Oliver Cromwell once slept. This room, like the others, is splendidly paneled and has a cupboard, which was formerly a priest's hole, or hiding place, concealed by a spring door.

During the night sounds of footsteps are heard on the landing, and Mr. Howes says it is impossible to keep the door of this room closed. "We have locked it and put a chair against it, and in the morning we have found it open. There are no draughts to account for the opening of the door. Since we have moved out of this room footsteps have still been heard, and on one occasion they were accompanied by a loud bump on the door of our present room."

Mr. Howes is focal on the subject of the ghost, and says that neither he nor his family are alarmed, or indeed believe in the supernatural, but after fifteen years' experience of the house they are still at a loss to account for the sounds. "We used to say it was Oliver's ghost," he remarks, "but now we say it is the woman whose skeleton we found."

Chaucer is supposed to have visited the house, and here learned some of the Yorkshire dialect which appears in his story, "Reeve's Tale." It is believed to be the only house in England in which stands an original roof tree. In this case an old oak of the forest, with its roots still intact, rises through the kitchen up to a bedroom, where it is cut short—being no longer necessary for the support of the roof—and is used as a small table for the occupant's candlestick.—London Chronicle.

Bird Broke Pane of Glass.

The momentum of a swiftly-flying bird is considerable. A partridge flew against a window of the gymnasium at Williams College the other day, crashing through the glass and falling to the floor dead. The force of the blow may be judged from the fact that the glass was "triplethick" and not more than 20x12 in size.