

WOMAN AGAINST WOMAN.

BY MRS. M. E. HOLMES.

CHAPTER IX.—Continued.

But all these feelings died down now as he contrasted the two women, everywhere he looked he seemed to see the sweet fair face of his wife gazing at him, and at the vision his heart swelled.

"How beautiful she was last night," was his thoughts as he hurriedly performed his toilet. "No lady of the land could have been more superb. There is blood in her veins as blue as flows in any Darrell—I know it; I am sure of it. Oh, how cruel we have been! How I have misjudged her! I have left her all these months neglected, unhappy, and despised. But now—now—all shall be changed. I feel as if a heavy cloud were rolled away from my life. Sunshine is everywhere, and blue sky—blue as the glorious radiance of her wonderful eyes—around me; but I must not startle her. How do I know she will forgive me—my poor sweet darling? I will plead to her to-day. This very morning shall see me at her feet, then, if she will forgive me, we will go away—away to Italy or some sunny place—together, alone with our love.

His valet scarcely knew his master, he seemed so happy and changed; he smiled and spoke cheerfully, and looked like a man who tasted joy after a long sorrow.

"It is a dark day, Mason," the Earl said, as he opened his letters by the window.

"Yes, my lord; looks like a storm. I beg pardon, my lord, but I forgot, here is a note from my lady; your mother."

Roy took and read it rapidly.

"Lady Darrell is fatigued. I will go and see how she is. Send my letters and newspapers down to the breakfast-table, Mason."

The Earl left his room and wended his way to his mother's apartment. She was still in bed.

"I am too tired to rise for breakfast," Roy said with a faint smile, as her son bent and kissed her white hand.

"Had you not better go and ask your wife to take my place?"

Roy pressed his lips again to the slender fingers.

"Mother," he whispered passionately, "you see all."

"All," she answered gently, "I read it in your face last night. You love your wife, Roy; it is good and right, my dearest, that you should; I honor and respect the girl; she will make you a true wife, and a proud Countess. She has been tried severely, but has come through the fire without a scar. You do love her, Roy?"

"Yes, mother, I do. I did not know how much till now, when I hear you praise her. I will go at once and give her your message. And this morning I want to write to Brown, or his wife, to make inquiries about her birth; there is some mystery, I am sure. She is nobly born."

"I agree with you," Lady Darrell replied. "We must try and discover the truth now."

A sharp knock at the door disturbed them, and in answer to the summons Davis entered abruptly, with marks of agitation on her face.

"Oh, my lady—I beg your pardon, my lord; but I am so frightened. I can't find the Countess anywhere!"

"Can't find the Countess?" exclaimed Lady Darrell, while Roy stood silent, grasping the bedpost.

"She is not in her room; the bed has not been slept in; her mantle and hat are gone; and I think she has left the castle."

"She has gone for a walk," cried Roy, suddenly pushing aside the horrible pain that crowded his breast.

"How can you be so absurd! The Countess is in the grounds somewhere; she will be in directly. Don't you see how you have alarmed her ladyship?"

"My lord, I am very sorry," murmured Davis, her eyes full of tears, "but I feel somehow that my dear young mistress has gone. The room looks so strange; and why did she not sleep in the bed, my lord?"

"You are talking nonsense," Roy said roughly, scarce knowing what he said, the tread and fear that came at her first words almost suffocating him again.

"There is some mistake, Roy," Lady Darrell interrupted quietly. "Davis, send my maid to me; go back to your mistress's room, and wait for me there. Roy, go into my dressing-room. I will go and investigate this mystery."

The Earl strode into the other apartment, while Davis white and nervous, went back to Alice's room.

In a very few minutes Lady Darrell called her son. She had wrapped a warm silk peignoir round her, and though her face was pale she smiled at him.

"She often rises and goes into the grounds, I know," she observed, as she put her hand on her son's arm; still, it will satisfy Davis, perhaps, if we go and investigate matters."

The Earl did not speak, but he pressed her hand gently, and they moved towards the young Countess's apartments in silence.

Davis met them in the doorway, and Lady Darrell walked into the bedroom, while Roy remained just outside, his hand grasping the door-post for support.

"Could it be true? Was he not to slip from him just as he had had it in his hand?"

His mother stood in the room and glanced around. She saw in an instant the maid was right.

flushed as he remembered her loveliness.

"I wish I could see her again," he murmured as he turned from the window to go out. "She looked so unhappy, and now I know her story I understand what she meant about being friendless. I do not care to see her at the castle. I should like to be able to do something for her."

"Well, you are off," exclaimed Geoffrey Armistead, "to the abbey again. Why, Frank, I believe there is some siren hidden in the ruins. Don't blush, old man."

Frank smiled, and at that instant Sir Robert Carlyle was announced.

"Have you heard the news?" he said hurriedly.

They both answered in the negative.

"The castle has been robbed, the celebrated Darrell diamonds are stolen, and who do you think is the thief? No one less than the young Countess Darrell!"

Frank uttered an exclamation.

"I could not have believed it," went on Sir Robert, "at the dinner, the other night, he was charming, and yet he discovered yesterday morning—he had eloped with a guest staying in the house—a Count Jura—taking the diamonds and a quantity of plate with her."

"Jura!" repeated Geoffrey Armistead. "Where have I heard that name?"

"She is in trouble," thought Frank Meredith hurriedly; "there is some mystery here, I am sure. She may let me know. Well, let her summon me when she will, I shall be ready."

The cart with its strange burden was driven rapidly by Paul Ross along the deserted lanes.

Count Jura sat silent, beside his companion.

The smock-frocks and slouched hats were complete disguises. Any one meeting them would have taken them for honest farmers returning to their homes from a distant market-town.

The Count was thinking and planning.

It was not the first time by many he had robbed a host of heirlooms and valuables; but never before had he carried away, or attempted to induce a woman to come to his secret and hazardous life.

His reason and good common sense had fled before the passion that Alice had inspired within him. His lawless heart bowed down before her fair, sweet beauty. He had thrust all fear from his mind, and with Valerie's aid had got the girl into his hands.

He determined as they approached the Abbey to make speedy arrangements with Paul about disposing of the plate and jewels, and then to start at once from England, taking Alice with him.

When the cart drew up outside the ruins, Count Jura bent over the girl's lifeless form, and lifted her easily from her hard resting-place.

"Show a light, Paul," he said sharply.

Paul Ross at once opened his dark lantern and shot a ray of light into the broken steps that led to the vaults of the Abbey.

"Wait here; I will return in an instant. You are sure Dame Burden is here all right?" said the Count.

"Yes," answered Paul shortly, as he held the lantern high over his head and threw the light on his companion's path.

The Count moved down the steps carefully and entered a dark passage. He traversed this for a few seconds, then a glimmer of light at the father end told him he was in the right direction.

He whistled softly, and a figure came towards him.

"Dame Burden?" he asked quickly.

"Yes, George. What is it? The swag's safe?"

"Yes—yes, outside. Lead the way in. I have got something here for you to look after."

"In another moment he stood in a large stone chamber. It was a curious scene. On the rough walls, stained and wrecked by time, were hung rich curtains, caught on great rusty nails.

The stone floor was lined with rugs and skins thrown carelessly down; a pile of cushions were hung on one end of the mattress, over which was stretched a rich silken coverlet.

The light came from two tallow-candles stuck into the most beautiful old silver vases. A profusion of strange and costly silver and glass stood on the ground at the extreme end of the vault.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

Keying Company.

Sailing ships sometimes spend long intervals at sea without raising a sail of any kind above their ever-changing horizons. Hence the unique experience of the Lorton and Cockermouth is well worth recording. They left Liverpool together, and arrived at Astoria, Oregon, within forty-eight hours of each other.

Throughout this long passage of over 15,000 miles they were not widely separated at any given instant, and for forty days were actually in close company. Captain Steel and his family of the Lorton would dine on board the Cockermouth on one Sunday, and Captain McAdams and his wife of the Cockermouth would pay a return visit to the Lorton on the following Sunday. Life may be made more worth living on sailing ships, remote from the land, were such an interchange of courtesies always possible.—Chamber's Journal.

No More Ice Wagons.

It is predicted that ten years from now the distribution of cold air will be as general in the cities as is gas or water, and the system will be perfected whereby the refrigerating gas necessary for attachment to a family refrigerator will be delivered in a tank just like carbonated water is to the soda fountains, once a month or as required.

The man who walks through life on a carpet of velvet, and has a nice time of it, is the one who thinks twice before he thinks once, and then doesn't say much.

"That was a sad blow," exclaimed the man whose house had been overtaken by a cyclone.

THE CITY CHOIR.

I went to hear the city choir. The summer night was still; I heard the music come to the street. They sang: "He'll take the pill—"

"I'm on! I'm on!" the tenor cried. And looked into my face; "My journey home, my journey home," Was followed by the bass.

"It is for thee—It is for thee—" shrieked the soprano shrill. I knew not why they looked at me. And yelled: "He'll take the pill—"

Then clutched wildly at my breast. Oh, Heaven! My heart stood still! "Yes, yes," I cried, "if that be best, Ye powers! I'll take the pill—"

As I, half fainting, reached the door, And saw the starry dome, I found them singing: "When life is over He'll take the pilgrim home."

CHARLIE DID OWN UP.

The London express was standing in the station at Bristol. Porters were running to and fro with luggage, passengers were tumbling over one another in their hurry. Among the latter was a young man who was walking up and down by the train in an undecided sort of way. To a stranger he would appear to be looking for a friend in the carriages. In reality, he was weighing the attractions of two different compartments against each other. The one was a smoking carriage, the other was not. Smoking, he considered, was a good and pleasant thing, especially on a long railway journey. And then he stopped in front of the door, and hesitated with his hand upon the handle. And yet in the next compartment, seated in the further corner, was a dainty figure. And the seat opposite to her was vacant. He could just see it as he stood by the door. Charlie Blagden was young, as I had said, just young enough to be on the lookout for adventures.

"Any more going on?" cried the guard; and the bell rang.

The girl won. Charlie threw away his cigarette and stepped into the carriage just as the whistle sounded and the train moved out of the station. There was but one other passenger in the same compartment besides the dainty figure in the corner, an elderly lady of the complexion that comes not forth but by prayer, and fasting. She looked as though she belonged to societies for Preventing things, and lived on tracts. She was lunching at the time on "Short Cuts to Hell." The girl in the further corner looked up for a moment, as Charlie entered and drew back her feet slightly. Charlie accepted the silent invitation and sat down opposite to her. By that time her eyes had returned to the novel she was reading. So Charlie unfolded his newspaper and began skimming the news, taking care, however, to hold it so that he could keep one eye on his opposite neighbor. Presently, as she turned a page of her book, she glanced across and caught Charlie's eye. He thought he detected a half smile as her eyes dropped again. She was certainly good-looking, with dark-brown waving hair contrasting with a white smooth forehead. Her mouth was straight and firm, and in her eyes, as indeed in her whole pose, there was a look of calm assurance, which probably made her look somewhat older than she was. She looked about five-and-twenty.

Charlie was a critic of woman's dress. And even if this girl had not been pretty, it would have been a pleasure to look at her dress. For she possessed the secret which is so valuable and so rarely known, of making her dress appear part of herself—as though, so to speak, it had grown out of her, like her hair. Altogether she was most satisfactory to look upon, and Charlie did not regret his wasted cigarette. But having looked upon her for a while, he was conscious of a longing to talk with her. For some time he cast about for an excuse for addressing her, feeling all the time that the elderly lady at the other end of the carriage was watching him, doubtless with the view of putting the Society for the Prevention of Young Men on his track. Suddenly an expedient flashed across his mind. It was the same which has flashed across the minds of numberless young men ever since railways were first invented, and was probably resorted to by our amorous ancestors in the old coaching days. But to Charlie it appeared a perfectly original idea. He watched further to turn the next page of her novel, feeling sure that she would glance at him. She did. He leaned forward and said politely, "Would you like the window up?"

The girl calmly turned down a pane of her book, closed it and laid it on the seat by her side. Then she smiled pleasantly at Charlie and said, "You don't mean it?"

"I beg your pardon," said Charlie, a little startled. "I mean that if you like the window—"

"No, no," interrupted the girl; "you don't mean to say would I like the window up, because it is up already, you mean would I like to talk to you—well, I would."

The elderly lady in the corner who saw very well what was going on, smiled audibly. Charlie was a little astonished at finding the girl had brushed a side his conventionalities so easily; but her perfect self-possession rescued the situation from all embarrassment.

"It seems to me so absurd," she said leaning back and crossing her hands in her lap, "that two human beings should think it necessary to travel a hundred miles together without speaking, just because they have never met before. They ought to be thankful—if they are two nice human beings—that they met at last."

Charlie assented, blushing; he felt the girl was running away with him.

"Yes, I thought we should get on well together when I saw you at Bristol," said he. "I asked you in the carriage, you know."

"And I don't mind confessing that"

I hoped you would get in here, and not into that horrid smoking compartment."

"I'm glad I did," said Charlie.

"Now then," said the girl, "you must tell me all about yourself—what is your name, where you come from, and where you are going to."

There is nothing more flattering to the young man, or, indeed, to the man of any age, than the interest of a pretty woman.

So by the time the train drew up at Swindon, Charlie had told her all about his people, all about the other fellows in the bank, and how he had a fortnight's holiday, and how he was on his way to town to pay a visit to a friend who had got married, and how he was rather nervous as to whether he would find favor in the eyes of his friend's wife, whom he had never yet seen. At Swindon he went into the refreshment room to get some sandwiches for his new friend. She said she would like some soda water as well, adding, as an after-thought, that there might be the smallest drop of brandy in it. When Charlie returned to the carriage, he found that the elderly lady had left. And for the rest of the journey to town, the couple had the carriage to themselves. Not that they occupied the whole compartment. They only occupied two seats in close proximity to each other.

By the time the train reached Westbourne Park, Charlie and the young lady had decided that it would be a great pity not to see more of each other in the future than they had done in the past. The young lady suggested a little dinner that same evening, and Charlie, mentally determining to delay his arrival at his host's later in the evening, accepted the suggestion. The young lady, whose name, as Charlie learned, was, for all practical purposes, Madge Benson, had some business to do first. So they settled to meet at 7 o'clock at a restaurant. The train was gliding slowly into Paddington, when the girl, who was looking anxiously out of the window, drew back hurriedly.

"There's some one on the platform that I don't want to see," she said.

"I shall wait till the platform is crowded and then slip over to a hansom."

Charlie helped to gather up her wra's, umbrellas, and things.

"Look here," she said, picking up a rather heavy dressing bag. "I wish you would take this for me; you can give it to me when we meet this evening. It will delay me so if I take care of it myself."

Charlie took the bag and left the girl in the carriage, still looking cautiously up the platform. As he stood by the luggage-van looking for his own bag, his eye happened to fall upon the address card let into the top of the dressing bag in his hand.

"This might give me her real name," thought Charlie, as he bent down to examine it. "I don't believe it is Benson."

The name was Emily G. Fardell.

"Hullo, Charley," said a voice at his elbow, "delighted to see you. Have you seen my wife? I expected her by this train." Charlie turned and found himself face to face with Martin Fardell, his host. Now, it takes a man with pretty strong nerves to take calmly the discovery that he has unknowingly been making violent love to the wife of his best friend.

"My dear fellow," stammered Charlie, "I—I haven't seen your wife. I don't know her, don't you know?"

"Ah, of course not," replied his friend. "Well, she will probably come by the next train. There is another in about half an hour. She has been down into the country for a dance."

"Look here, Martin," said Charlie, keenly alive to the necessity of getting away and clearing up the situation with Mrs. Fardell at once. "I have an appointment that will keep me for an hour or two. I shan't turn up until after dinner."

"All right," said Fardell; "I'll wait here for the wife."

"Thank goodness, he didn't spot the bag," muttered Charlie, as he got into a hansom and drove off. "I must put a stop to this nonsense at once. Poor Martin—well, if ever I marry—"

Charlie felt that he had put his foot in it. A man may be as unscrupulous as most men; but he generally has some scruples concerning his friend's wife. Charlie was not a bad fellow. He was only a bit of a fool in the ways of the world. And as he drove along to the restaurant he had the uncomfortable sensation of having acted as a blackguard. He had not long to wait. His new acquaintance drove up about ten minutes after he arrived, and Charlie hurried out to help her to alight.

"Have you my bag?" she asked at once.

"Here it is," said Charlie. "And I've looked at the name on it."

"Ah! you saw it wasn't Madge Benson. I told you a story, you see," said the girl.

They went into the dining room and sat down together at one of the tables.

"I say," said Charlie, "I don't think we're acting quite fairly to Martin. Do you know I'm going to stay with you?"

"Oh! you are?"

"Yes, and I met Martin at the station—and he was looking for you."

"Did you tell him you had been with me?" she asked this with an anxiety she could not conceal.

"Certainly not," replied Charlie.

"That was right. I wouldn't have had him catch me for anything. Champagne—eh?" Charlie nodded in an absent sort of way, and the girl indicated her favorite brand to the waiter.

"All the same," said Charlie, drumming uneasily on the table with his fingers, "I don't think it's fair."

"Fair! to whom?"

"To your husband—and friend."

"Oh!"

They ate in silence for a time.

"Well, after all, there's no harm done," said the girl, after a pause.

"He'll never know."

"No, he'll never know," replied Charlie. "But there will always be that beastly secret between us. Anyway for the future we must wipe out all remembrance of to-day. We must meet as if we had never met before."

"As you will," she replied; "but you are such a nice boy."

"Anyhow, I'm not a blackguard," Instead of looking annoyed, Charlie's companion appeared to be amused. "He made an excellent dinner and drank fully three-quarters of a bottle of champagne. As for Charlie, the discovery that Madge Benson was none other than Mrs. Martin Fardell had taken away his appetite. For the woman who answers very well as an evening acquaintance does not necessarily come up to the standard one requires in the wife of one's best friend. And Charlie's admiration for the undoubted beauty of Madge Benson was quite swallowed up in disgust at the highly improper conduct of Mrs. Martin Fardell. They talked but little during the rest of dinner. The lady wate ed Charlie with a look half of amusement and half of pity. The latter was glad when it was time to call for his bill and get away. He felt that every instant he spent alone with his friend's wife was a fresh insult to his friend.

"You're going home to-night?" asked Charlie, as they stood up to go.

"Of course," answered she.

"But we can't go together."

"No; if you'll get me a hansom, I'll start first. Don't forget my dressing-bag."

Charlie called a cab and placed her in it, handed in the bag, and told the driver the address. She waved her hand to him as the cab drove off, and Charlie turned away with a muttered oath.

"Thank Heaven! that's over," he said to himself as he turned up Piccadilly. "I never thought I should feel such a scoundrel as I have done for the last hour. How on earth did Martin get hold of a woman like that for a wife? She has no more heart than an oyster. Poor devil!"

For an hour or more Charlie hummed about Piccadilly, thinking over commonplace sayings to say to Martin when he arrived, and meditating on the best manner of facing the curious situation into which he had fallen.

"Whatever happens," he concluded, "if Martin's wife wants to make a devil of some man or other, that man shan't be Charlie Blagden."

Then he called a hansom and started for Martin's house at Kensington. Martin Fardell met him in the hall.

"Well, Charlie, the wife turned up all right by a later train. She'll be down in a minute and I'll introduce you."

"Ah—yes—thanks—of course," said Charlie.

"It's rather unlucky," continued Martin, "but she lost her dressing-bag on the journey, and it contained a lot of her jewelry. We've been telegraphing in urries, but nothing has been heard of it."

"Oh, but she had it all right when—?" then Charlie stopped.

"Yes, when she started. But it's gone now."

A glimmer of suspicion began to steal over Charlie's mind. Just then a lady came down stairs.

"Here, Emmie," said Martin Fardell, "this is my old friend, Charlie Blagden."

Charlie shook hands in a kind of stupeor. For Mrs. Martin Fardell was not in the least like his acquaintance of the afternoon.

"I'm—I'm afraid," he stammered, "that I have given your bag to—to—"

"You have given it?" exclaimed Mrs. Fardell.

"To whom?" asked Martin.

"Well, I'm d—d if I know to whom I have given it," said Charlie, forgetting his manners in his mystification.

"But where did you find it?" asked Martin.

"Oh, I—I picked it up in the train, and—"

A knock was heard at the door and Martin stepped across the hall and opened it.

"Here is the bag, dear," said Martin, evasively, coming back with the missing article in his hand. "A boy handed it in. He said a lady had given him a shilling to bring it."

Mrs. Fardell opened it at once to see if the jewel-case was there. It was gone. In its place was a piece of paper folded.

"It is addressed to you, Mr. Blagden," said Mrs. Fardell, picking it out. Charlie took it and opened it. This is what he read:

DEAR CHARLIE—Many thanks for your help. I don't know how I should have got the bag through the station without you, as there are one or two people who are always on the lookout for me at Paddington. Under the circumstances, you will excuse my making another appointment to meet you. MADGE.

"Let me see it, Charlie," said Martin. And then Charlie had to own up.—Modern Society.

Save the Pieces.

China may be mended as firmly as a rock by the following recipe: Two persons will be needed for the work, however, for the manipulation must be rapid. The necessary materials are a little unslacked lime, pulverized, the slightly tawny white of egg, and a small hairbrush, such as is used for maulage. Put the white of egg on the broken edges of both pieces to be joined, and immediately dust one edge with the powdered lime; put the two edges accurately and firmly together, hold them in place for a minute or two and then lay them aside to dry.

Not one man in a hundred has sense enough to take care of money after he gets it.