

# DARK DAYS

(Continued from First Page)

## CHAPTER VII. FLIGHT.

I read the woman's letter again and again—read it with feelings in which joy and disgust were strangely mingled; but the former was the predominant sensation. In the first place, if Mrs. Wilson kept her promise of secrecy, it seemed to me that all danger of suspicion falling upon Philippa was removed. There would be no one else to whom I could turn for help, but the night of Mr. Mervyn's death a woman whose life's happiness had been clouded by the villain's treachery met—a woman of strong passions, who in her temporary delirium might easily be turned into such vengeance for which I at least held her quite unaccountable. If I could but feel sure of the safety of the one person whom I loved, I would even return to London, and fear nothing. I wavered. After all there is something commendable in it. I said I trust to Mrs. Wilson's promise, and my own responsibility for the next best but for nothing.

No, a thousand times no! Philippa's safety is far too precious to me to be trusted in the hands of one excitable woman—a woman, moreover, who has wrongs of her own calling for vengeance. To comfort her and to change and instead of furthering our safety, she may be urging on the pursuit. Let me trust no one save myself.

For my love's sake, I was overjoyed to hear that, supposing the woman's promise to meet and date were correct, Philippa was the dead man's lawful wife. Not that the fact for one moment palliated the guilt of his intention, or lessened the contentment and hatred I bore toward him; not that it changed in my eyes by one iota my love's position. Married or unmarried, to me she was all that a woman could be. Though a blackguard's craft had wrought what would be her shame in the eyes of the world, though her hands were unaccountably red with a man's blood, to me she was just as vital, innocent as a child.

Yet for her sake the news gladdened me. I knew that for the time being I could place Philippa in her hands; that she was a wife—that she could, if she chose, bear her worthless husband's name and face the world without fear of scorn, the realization of her self-respect would bring with it a joy which only a woman could fully comprehend. And Philippa, with all her pride and passion, was a true woman, full of the softness and delicate dread of shame which characterizes the best of her sex.

Yet when should I be able to tell her? Whenever I did I must also reveal the fact of her husband's being dead, and my doing so must bring the whole story of his death to her knowledge. I trembled as I thought what this might mean. Surely his dramatic surroundings must suggest something to her mind—must bring back the night and its horrors; must, in fact, tell her what she had done in her madness! Rather than risk this, I must let her continue to bear the cruel weight of what she thought her shame. My aim must be to make her believe that Mr. Mervyn is still alive, and troubling nothing as to what has become of the woman whom he once fairly swore to love and cherish until death. I erased the wretched memory as I thought of him.

The sending of Philippa to live under the charge of one of his own discarded mistresses was but another proof of the man's revolting cynicism. Mrs. Wilson's acceptance of the charge showed me to what a level a woman could sink. It told me, moreover, that in spite of her letter she was not to be trusted. A woman who could lend her name to her former lover's purposes in such a way as this must have parted with every atom of pride. It seemed to me that the woman and the man were well matched in baseness.

Still her letter lifted a load from my mind. I felt that for awhile there could be no pursuit; yet I resolved to risk nothing, but to hurry on with all possible speed. Only when we crossed the frontier of Spain should I sleep in peace.

All resolutions with a view to obtaining evidence of the first Lady F. Brand's death, I postponed indefinitely. Some day, if all went well, I would return to England and procure the documents necessary to prove the validity of Philippa's marriage. There was no pressing hurry. As to my money, which should be hers, never with my consent should she touch a penny which had belonged to the dead man.

Protracted as my meditations seem on paper, they were in reality much longer; indeed, they were not at an end when the boat steamed in Biscaya harbor. I went in search of my companions, who, I was glad to find, had borne the voyage well. We were soon in the train, and without any events occurring worth recording, at eight o'clock stood on the Gare du Nord, Paris.

We drove through the brightly lit streets to the Hotel du Louvre. The status of travel washed away, my mother gave a sigh of satisfaction as she seated herself at the dinner-table. Like a sensible woman, she was no despoiler of good things of this life. There were other late diners in the great room, and many a head was turned to look at the beautiful girl who sat on my right hand; for every day which brought her new health and strength, brought also to my love an installment of her former rich beauty. In a very short time she would be to all appearances the Philippa of old.

"How long shall we stay in Paris, Basil?" asked my mother.

"It is now half-past nine; our train starts at 10.35 in the morning. Claiming the time," "Oh, nonsense! It is years since I have been in Paris. I want to look at the shops. So does Philippa, I am sure."

"My dear mother, the man, much more the woman, who lingers in Paris is lost. If you are going elsewhere the only way is to go straight through, or else you get no further. I have proved this, and mean to run no risk."

"But remember we are only weak women. This poor child is far from strong."

"She smiled at Philippa, whose eyes thanked her for the affectionate application. "Don't be merciful, Basil," she continued, "give us at least one day."

"Not one. I am just going to look after a courier, so that you may travel in all possible comfort."

"That my companions were too roughly alarmed. We had brandy with us, which was duly administered to me. After awhile I recovered, and although the fear was still with me, eat with the stoicism of an Indian at the stake, awaiting what might happen at the frontier. I had done all I could. It at the last moment, disaster overtook us. I had at least driven by every means within my power to avoid it."

(To be Continued.)

—A Pennsylvania woman has been sent to prison for horse-stealing. The dear creature is petting her rights one after another, thanks to the efforts of the noble policeman in the field of agitation.—*Boston Transcript*.

—There is an Irishman in Ansonia, Conn., who works twenty hours regularly every day, and only ends four out of the twenty-four in sleep.—*Hartford Courant*.

—One family has made all the paper used for a rank of England notes. Its manufacture has been the inheritance of a dozen generations.

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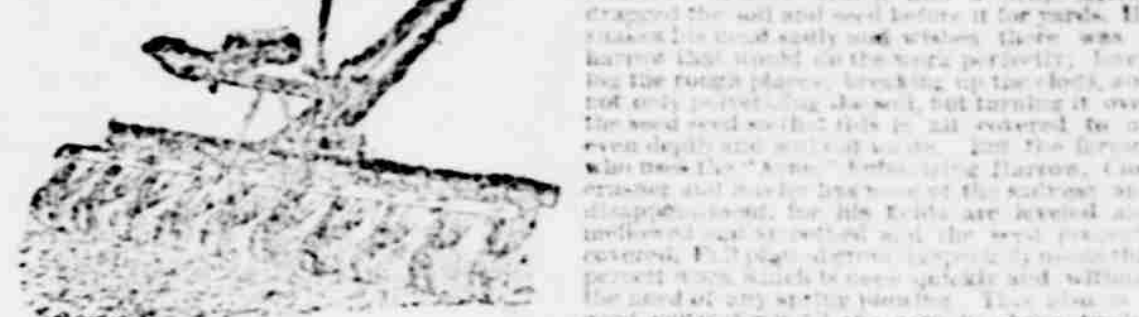
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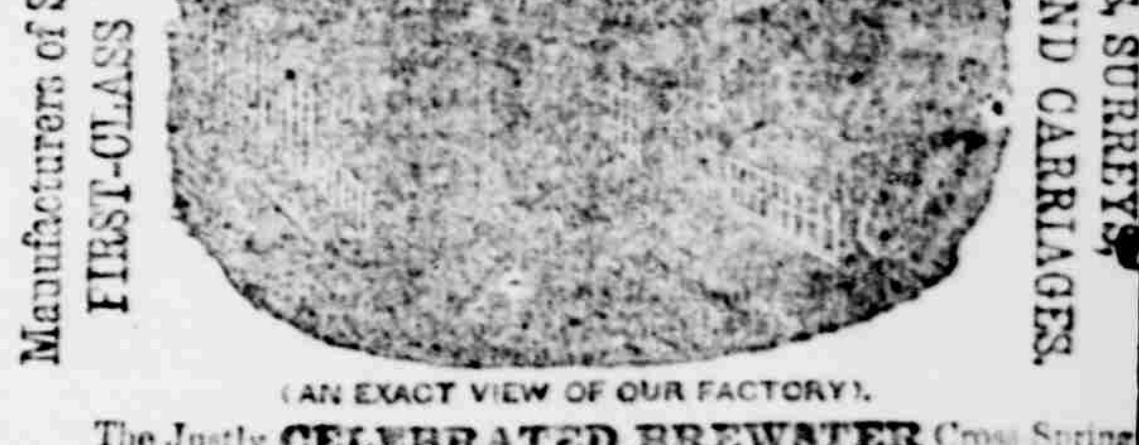
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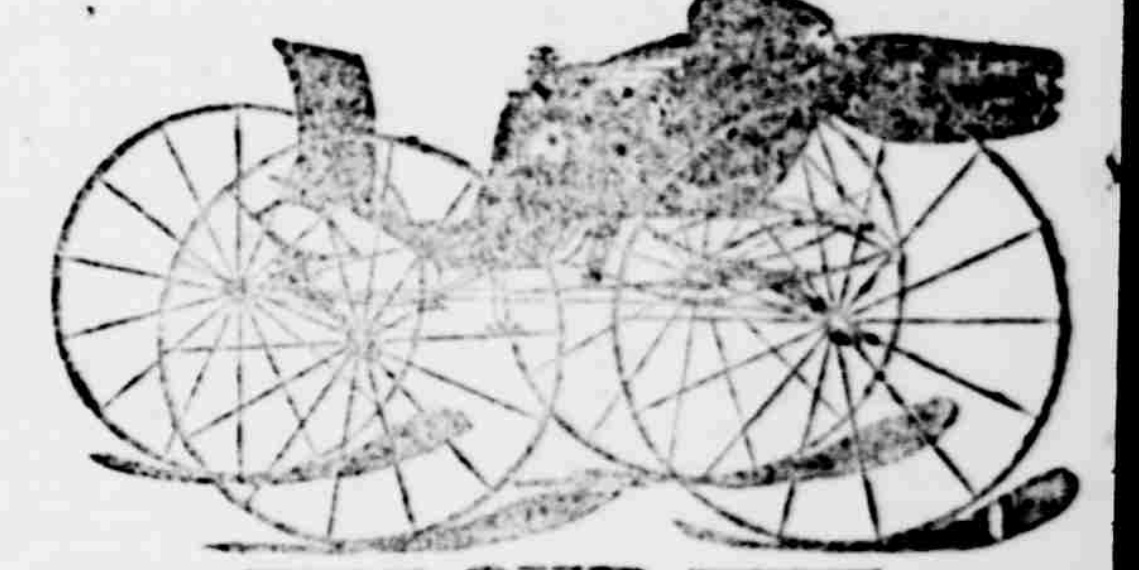
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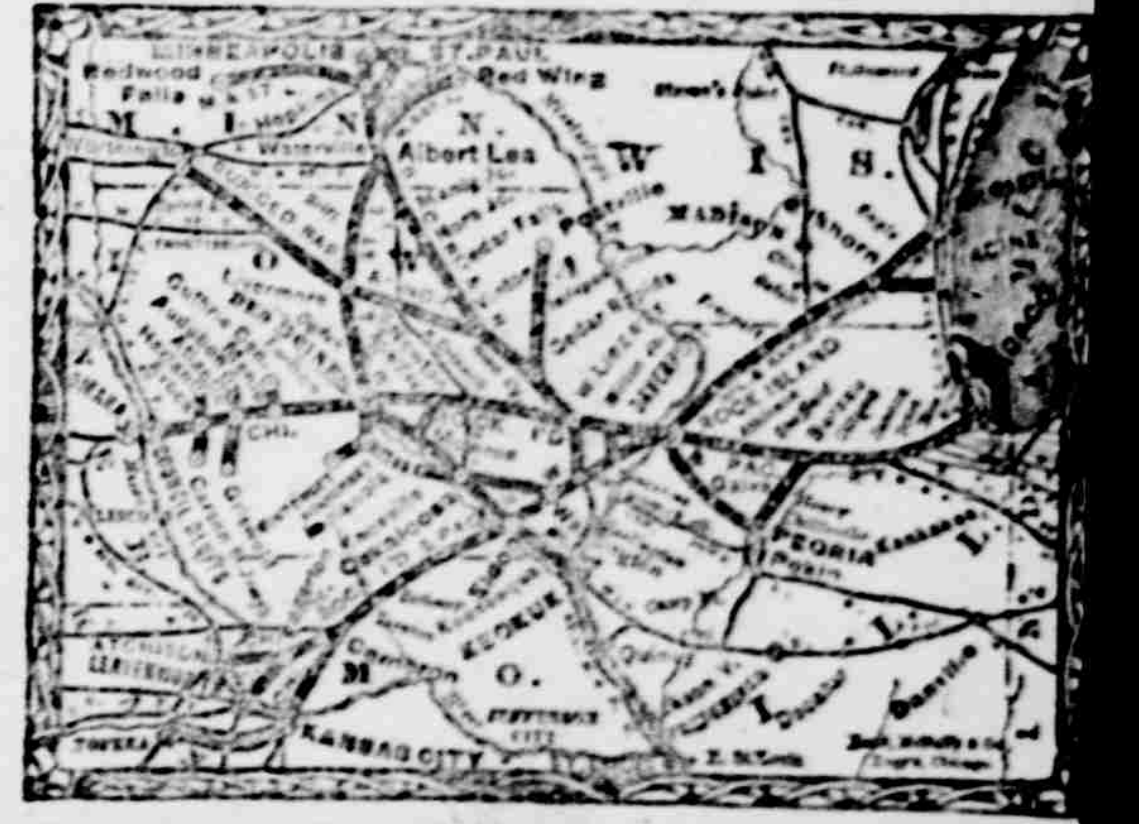
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