

THAT WOMAN'S SECRET.

CONTINUED.

ON THE following morning Ralph Marsden eagerly perused the papers half expecting to read an account of the discovery of the dead body of the unfortunate girl, Laura; but not finding anything of the kind, concluded that she had been merely stunned.

"A curse on the girl!" he muttered, "I fear she will cause me trouble yet. What evil genius brought her to that place last night?"

At the appointed time—eleven o'clock—Ralph Marsden and Major Heath met at a certain fashionable uptown saloon.

"Well, my boy," was the major's familiar greeting, "how did you succeed last evening? Has the fair Mara promised to be yours?"

"No," Marsden replied, moodily; "she evidently regards me with but little favor—says she would rather die than become my wife; and all that sort of thing."

"Ha—ha!" laughed the major, "a few days' solitary confinement will probably affect a considerable change in her sentiments. But what ails you this morning? You seem out of sorts."

"I am," Marsden replied, with an oath, "I was seen to enter Jared Percival's last night with that girl."

"Ah, by whom?"

"By a woman with whom I was once acquainted; but whom I had not until last night seen for a lifetime, and whom I wish I might never see again."

"Ah I comprehend; Marsden you're a sad fellow! But how do you know this person saw you?"

"She met me as I left the house, and told me so."

"Well, she put you on your guard; that's not as bad as it might be."

"She begged me to release Mara."

"Does she know her?"

"No."

"Merely made the request out of a sort of sympathy for the girl, eh?"

"Yes. I do not suppose I need apprehend any interference from this woman as far as Mara is concerned. Percival's doors are closely barred; the girl is as safe in that house as she would be in the Tombs. It is not in that quarter that I apprehend danger."

"Indeed! May I inquire in what quarter you do apprehend danger?"

"I am engaged to be married to a young lady, an heiress moving in the best society. I care but little for the girl; but I care a great deal for her money. Now my interview with this woman last night—her name, by-the-way, is Laura Odell—was not of the pleasantest description; and I fear I have incurred her mortal enmity—if I had it not before. If she should learn of my engagement I fear she would give my betrothed some hints of my past life which might cause me to lose the prize now almost in my grasp."

"Is it probable that this woman Laura, knows of your engagement?"

"I think she does not; but she may learn of it."

"Not probable, but possible. It might be well to hasten your marriage however."

"It is to take place in a month."

"I believe you did not mention the lady's name."

"It is Alice Leighton."

The major started.

"Leighton!" he exclaimed. "Not the daughter of Mark Leighton, the banker?"

"The same. Do you know her?"

"I have not the honor; but I was once acquainted with her father."

"'Twas not a pleasant acquaintance, if I may judge from your face?"

"You are right; but let us dismiss the subject."

A few minutes later the two men parted. We will follow the major.

"And so Marsden is to marry the daughter of Mark Leighton," he muttered. "My revenge will then, indeed, be complete; for the girl cannot but be wretched as his wife. Fortune favors me!"

The major proceeded but a short distance, when he was joined in accordance with a preconcerted arrangement, by Rodney.

"Good-morning," was the young man's greeting. "I have seen Edith Bentley and Elmore together this morning, evidently on the best of terms. They meet daily, I have no doubt, and unless our plans are quickly matured, I shall have no chance to win her. We are wasting valuable time."

The major was not in the least downcast.

"Don't be discouraged, my dear boy," he said; "it isn't worth while. You have me at your side, and you can't fail. We will now take decisive means. I will employ my wits at work concocting a plan which shall effectually rid us of this

energy and fire? But perhaps your love is cooling, eh?"

"No!" the young man, exclaimed, half fiercely. "It will never die!"

"Then what ails you, I again ask?"

"I am sick of this trifling."

"Do you mean to resign the girl to your rival?"

"Never!"

"Ha—ha! Rodney, your vehemence amuses me; but I like your spirit—I like your spirit! I see you are desperately in earnest. Well, my boy, you need not fear; she shall be yours. Such is my will, and I never yet failed in gaining any end, to the accomplishment of which I give my whole heart as I have given it to this. Yes, Rodney," the major added, after a short pause, "I failed once, most signally failed! I failed to win the only woman I ever cared for; one whom I worshipped, adored; of whom I cannot think even now, without being strangely moved. But all that is past. You have my word, Rodney, that Edith Bentley shall be your wife!"

"This can only be accomplished in one way."

"You mean by putting Walter Elmore out of the way? You are right. You will then be able to win her without trouble, I am certain. Trust to me for effectually removing him from your path."

"What do you propose doing?"

"I don't know. Stay, I have an idea! You remember the conversation we overheard in Union Square between Elmore and his friend, Dr. Oakley, in which he spoke of a mystery surrounding his birth, which he was anxious to penetrate?"

"Yes."

"He would do much to learn the secret of his parentage," said the major, musingly. "Yes, Rodney, I believe the plan I have in my mind would prove a success. Let us go in here and talk it over."

They entered a saloon which they were passing, and seating themselves at a table, ordered brandy. For some minutes they discussed the major's project in a low tone.

"Do you know any one whom you could trust to do the job?" asked Rodney, when the major had given him an idea of the foul plot he had concocted.

"I do; but I will not trust the secret to the keeping of another. I will strike the blow myself. It will be the safest."

"You are right; but cannot I, in some way, assist you?"

"No; I can do better alone."

"Very well. But do you not think Bentley will suspect us when Elmore is missed?"

"If he should he would not dare make his thoughts known."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive. He is in my power; he would not venture to speak. But I do not think he will suspect either of us. Leave all to me, Rodney; and rest assured that Elmore will be removed from your path."

"When do you propose putting this plan into execution?"

"I'll consider the matter a day or two longer, and when everything is ready I will inform you."

"Very well; I leave it all to you."

"Don't think me conceited, my dear boy, if I say it could not be in better hands."

The days wore wearily on; but Henry Oakley could obtain no clue to Mara's whereabouts.

Ralph Marsden, meanwhile, visited her daily, renewing at each visit, his proposition of marriage, which was always met with a firm refusal. He assumed, in her presence a calm and agreeable demeanor; and endeavored in every way to induce her to look more favorably upon him; but she loathed and abhorred him; and had determined to die by her own hand rather than under any circumstances to be his.

One morning, the fifth after Mara's disappearance from her home, a woman, dressed in black and heavily veiled took her station in Twentieth street at a point where she could see any one who might enter or leave Jared Percival's mansion. For half-an-hour she stood watching. At the expiration of this time she perceived a man, evidently a servant, leaving the house.

"Now," she murmured, "may Heaven aid me or that poor girl is forever lost. Weak and foolish I know I am; but because of what Ralph Marsden once was to me I would fain spare him exposure and disgrace. But at any cost this girl must be saved. If it can be done without harming Ralph it shall be; if not, though I would gladly spare him he must suffer the consequences of his crime."

This woman was Laura Odell. She followed the servant until they were out of sight of the house; then, moving swiftly forward she touched his arm, saying:

"You are employed in the house No. — 20th street?"

"I am," was the reply.

"I want you to do me a favor."

"What is it?" the man asked suspiciously.

"Do you know Ralph Marsden?"

"Perhaps I do, perhaps I don't. Why do you ask that question, ma'am?"

"He has a young girl imprisoned in an apartment in that house."

"That's none of my business," said the man; "I've nothing to do with it."

"But you know in what room she is imprisoned?"

"I know nothing about it."

"For Heaven's sake!" exclaimed Laura, with a sudden burst of feeling, "do not drive me mad! Will you not answer my question?"

"I know nothing about it," repeated the man.

"You are paid to know nothing."

"Perhaps," replied the fellow with a significant smile.

"Here is money," said Laura, forcing a ten-dollar note into his hand. "Now answer my question; are you acquainted with the location of the young lady's apartment?"

"Well, then, I am! but if Mr. Percival knew I'd said even that I believe he would kill me! I'm paid to keep my eyes shut, ma'am. I've no right to know anything about his business affairs."

"But you do know that he is at the head of a notorious gambling-hell, situated in that house, and gold can secure his aid in any scheme, however vile; that he is a man utterly devoid of principle?"

"I know he pays me regularly; and good pay I get, too; and I've no right to be standing here talking over his private affairs with a stranger. I must go."

"No—no!" cried Laura, grasping the man's arm, "you must not leave me yet."

"Why not. What do you want?"

Laura trembled with agitation as she answered:

"I want you to procure me admittance to that young lady's room."

The man stared.

"Impossible!" he exclaimed. "I couldn't do it. It's out of the question."

"But I must see her," Laura cried, passionately, "you can admit me if you will."

"Oh, ma'am, I wouldn't dare do it. If 'twas found out as it surely would be I don't know what would become of me. I can't do it."

"Do not say that, or my wretched heart will break, indeed! I tell you, it must be done. See here," drawing a purse from her pocket, "here are twenty dollars, all the money I have in the world; the price of many weary hours; all is yours if you will but secure me ten minutes conversation with that lady."

"The man's cupidity was excited; he looked eagerly at the money."

"I don't know," he muttered, uncertain what he had better do.

Laura observed his hesitation with joy.

"Why don't you decide at once to do as I wish?" she cried. "Twenty dollars are not so easily earned every day."

"What do you want to see the young lady for?"

"I desire a few minutes conversation with her on a subject of great importance."

"If you are going to try to get her out I tell you now I can't afford to be a party to no such plan. If she leaves the room with you, I'll give the alarm."

"She will not leave the room with me."

"Well then, I'll do as you wish; I'll admit you."

"When shall you return to the house?"

"I ought to be there now. I'm going to the market to leave an order, and from there straight home. When you enter it must be at the basement door, and you must leave in the same way. Then if you should be seen, you would, perhaps, be taken for a friend, I could say you were my sister."

"In fifteen minutes I will be at the door. Watch for me from a window, and be ready to admit me."

"I will, ma'am; and the money—the twenty dollars—"

"Shall be yours when I am inside the house."

"Very well. Oh! if this should be found out, I don't know what Mr. Percival would do."

"If questioned, I would not implicate you. But do not think of such an occurrence. The door of this young girl's room—will it not be locked?"

"It is fastened by a spring-lock, and can be opened from the outside; but if you shut the door when you are inside you cannot open it unless you know where to look for the spring; and this I cannot tell you, for Mr. Percival keeps it a secret from the servants."

"Then I must leave the door ajar during my visit," exclaimed Laura.

"No; that won't do; for some one passing through the hall might notice it. You shut the door; and—how long do you want to remain there?"

"Ten minutes; only ten minutes."

"Well, then, ten minutes after your arrival I'll come and open the door for you, and let you out."

"Agreed."

"Now I'll go. In fifteen minutes you'll be at the door?"

"In fifteen minutes."

The man hastened away.

"Now," murmured Laura Odell, "Heaven aid me; and in mercy grant that I be not too late!"

If Jared Percival should find me out he'd murder me," muttered the man, as he re-entered the house. "It's risky; women but seldom enter the house, and should she be seen, it would occasion me a deuced deal of trouble. But I need that twenty-dollar bill, and I'll risk it."

In fifteen minutes Laura Odell was at the door. The man admitted her without being perceived.

"Which room?" she whispered.

"Second floor, back."

"Very well; here is your money. In ten minutes come to release me."

"I will."

Laura Odell proceeded in haste up the velveted staircase, and entered the designated room, closing the door noiselessly behind her.

Mara Sydney was seated upon a sofa. As Laura entered she sprang up.

"Who are you?" she cried.

"I am a friend," Laura said, throwing aside her veil. "Speak in a lower tone. I am here to release you."

"To release me!" Mara exclaimed.

"So I said; but speak low. My presence in this house is known by but one person—a servant whom I bribed to admit me. In ten minutes this man will open this door to allow me to depart; then you must go."

"But will he allow us both to leave?"

"No; you must change clothes with me. We are of about the same height; and in this dress, my veil concealing your face, you will be able to easily pass for me."

"Oh, madame, I cannot do this! What would become of you?"

"Think not of me. You must do as I bid you—I insist upon it. To remain here would be certain ruin. Ralph Marsden has asked you to be his wife?"

"He has."

With sudden fear the woman asked:

"You have not consented?"

"No; nor never will."

"Child," Laura Odell exclaimed, "(for though you are but a few years my junior, you seem but a child to me) perhaps you, in your innocence, suppose that this man would in reality make you his wife. No—no; your marriage would be but a mockery of that holy rite; and when, after a few weeks, he tired of you, he'd send you from him wretched, disgraced, ruined forever."

"Lady," Mara exclaimed, "you chill my very blood."

"But," cried Laura, "we are wasting precious moments. Quick! make no further objections; dress in my clothes, and as you value the happiness of your future life, make haste."

Mara did as she was directed; and soon the two women had changed garments.

"But what will become of you?" exclaimed Mara.

"How can I leave you in this place; in the power of that man?"

"I do not believe that Ralph Marsden will harm me," said Laura. "Fear not for me, dear girl; if you are saved, I shall be happier than I have been for many weary months."

"Will you tell me your name?"

"'Tis a disgraced one; but you shall know it. 'Tis Laura Odell."

"I will remember it in my prayers. But we must meet again."

"Never; my company is not for you. But if you will pray for me, for my peace hereafter, perhaps Heaven will graciously answer your supplication, and give me rest. Ah! these tears; they are the first I have shed for long months."

The woman's frame shook with emotion.

"But our time must have almost expired," she exclaimed. "Be ready to act your part. Before you go, tell me your name."

"You do not know it? You have done all this for an utter stranger? My name is Mara Sydney."

At this moment the servant opened the door. Laura's face was buried in her hands, and Mara's was heavily veiled. The man noticed nothing to excite his suspicions, though he glanced sharply around the room, and at the women. He conducted Mara to the door. The young girl quickly made her exit, and once more was free.

"Can this be true?"

The speaker was Alice Leighton, a beautiful blonde, a society belle; the person addressed, her friend Edith Bentley; the locality, the parlor of Miss Leighton's residence; the time, the morning on which the events related in our last chapter, occurred.

"Can this be true?" Alice Leighton exclaimed, her face pale with emotion.

"There can be little doubt of it, I fear," Edith replied.

On this evening during Edith Bentley's visit, Alice informed her of her approaching marriage.

On hearing Marsden's name, Edith could not restrain a start of surprise, which Alice, with a young girl's curiosity, wished explained.

Edith hesitated, much distressed. She had heard from Walter Elmore the story of Marsden's persecution of Mara Sydney, and of the character he bore among those who know him best. She believed that he was an unprincipled man; but should she tell her friend all this?

Edith's was a perplexing position. She could not bear to think of ruining Alice's happiness; but would she be justified in remaining silent and allowing this young girl to become the wife of such a man as she believed Marsden to be?

Her hesitation was of but short duration.

In a few words, Edith told her friend what she had heard.

"Forgive me, dear Alice," she said, "for thus wounding your feelings. Believe me, it pains me most deeply to tell you this, but, Alice, I feel that you ought to know it."

"Ah, Edith!" Alice said, "I could never be happy with such a man as I now believe Ralph Marsden to be. I would sooner—far sooner die than become his wife!" Ay, Edith, much as I have loved him, I can only say that. But he shall have an opportunity of proving his innocence. When he visits me this morning—and I expect him momentarily—I will confront him with these charges, and in his face read his innocence or guilt. And you say that Ralph Marsden is suspected of abducting this Miss Sydney?"

"He is, by Dr. Oakley; but there is no proof that he is guilty."

"Have detectives been employed?"

"Yes—at least one; a private detective, named Stoner."

"This man has kept a watch on Ralph?"

"He has; but he can learn nothing of the missing girl." To be Continued.

**VEGETINE**

AN EXCELLENT MEDICINE.

Springfield, O., Feb. 15, 1877.

This is to certify that I have used Vegetine, manufactured by H. L. Stevens, Boston, Mass., for Rheumatism and General Prostration of the Nervous System, with good success. I recommend Vegetine as an excellent medicine for such complaints.

Yours very truly,  
G. W. VANDIGFT.

Mr. Vandigft, of the firm of Vandigft & Huffman, is a well known business man in this place, having one of the largest stores in Springfield, Ohio.

**OUR MINISTER'S WIFE.**

Louisville, Ky., Feb. 15, 1877.

Mr. H. E. Stevens.

Dear Sir:—Three years ago I was suffering terribly with inflammatory Rheumatism. Our minister's wife advised me to take Vegetine. After taking one bottle, I was entirely relieved. This year, feeling a return of the disease, I again commenced taking it, and am benefited greatly. It also greatly improves my digestion.

Respectfully,  
Mrs. A. BALLARD.  
1011 West Jefferson street.

**SAFE AND SURE.**

Mr. H. E. Stevens.

In 1872 your Vegetine was recommended to me; and, yielding to the persuasions of a friend, I consented to try it. At the time I was suffering from general debility and nervous prostration, induced by overwork and irregular habits. Its wonderful strengthening and curative properties seemed to affect my debilitated system from the first dose; and under its persistent use I rapidly recovered, gaining more than usual health and good feeling. Since then I have not hesitated to give Vegetine my most unqualified endorsement as being a safe, sure, and powerful agent in promoting health and restoring the wasted system to new life and energy. Vegetine is the only medicine I use, and as long as I live I never expect to find a better.

Yours truly,  
W. H. GARK,  
130 Monterey Street, Allegheny, Penn.

**VEGETINE.**

The following letter from Rev. G. W. Mansfield, formerly pastor of the M. E. Church, Hyde Park, and at present settled in Lowell, must convince every one who reads his letter of the wonderful curative qualities of Vegetine as a thorough cleanser and purifier of the blood.

Hyde Park, Mass., Feb. 15, 1876.

Mr. H. E. Stevens.

Dear Sir:—About ten years ago my health failed through the debilitating effects of dyspepsia; nearly a year later I was attacked by typhoid fever in its worst form. It settled in my back, and took the form of a large deep-seated abscess, which was 15 months in gathering. I had two surgical operations by the best skill in the State, but received no permanent cure. I suffered great pain at times, and I was constantly weakened by a profuse discharge. I also lost small pieces of bone at different times.

Matters ran on thus about seven years, till May, 1874, when a friend recommended me to go to your office and talk with you of the virtues of Vegetine. I did so, and by your kindness passed through your manufactory, noting the ingredients, &c., by which your remedy is produced. By what I saw and heard I gained some confidence in Vegetine.

I commenced taking it soon after, but felt worse from its effects; still I persevered and soon felt it was benefiting me in other respects. You did not see the results I desired till I had taken it faithfully for a little more than a year, when the difficulty in the back was cured; and for nine months I have enjoyed the best of health.

I have in that time gained twenty-five pounds of flesh, being heavier than ever before in my life, and I was never more able to perform labor than now.

During the past few weeks I had serofulous swelling as large as my fist on another part of my body.

I took Vegetine faithfully, and it removed it level with the surface in a month. I think I should have been cured of my main trouble sooner if I had taken larger doses, after having become accustomed to its effects.

Let young patrons troubled with serofula or kidney diseases understand that it takes time to cure chronic diseases; and, if they will patiently take Vegetine, it will, in my judgment, cure them.

With great obligation I am,  
Yours very truly,  
G. W. MANSFIELD,  
Pastor of the M. E. Church.

**VEGETINE**

Prepare  
H. L. STEVENS, Boston, Mass.

Vegetine is Sold by all Druggists.  
January 1, 1878, 1m.