

THAT WOMAN'S SECRET.

CONTINUED.

"THEN," said Alice, "it might be she was not abducted by him. It seems to me that if the detective was at all vigilant, and Ralph Marsden ever visited the place where he might have the girl confined, that some discovery would, ere this place, have been made."

"True," Edith replied.

The door-bell rang.

"'Tis Marsden!" Alice exclaimed, her face becoming a shade paler. "Dear Edith, will you wait in the library until he has gone?"

Edith assented, and Alice conducted her to the designated apartment.

When she re-entered the library Ralph Marsden hastened to meet her.

"Dear Alice," he began, but checked himself, noticing an unusual expression in her face, and hastily exclaimed:—"What is the matter? What has happened?"

"Ralph Marsden," Alice said, in a clear, unflinching tone, "I have heard that since I saw you last which has given me a new insight to your character. I— Ah! your paling face tells of guilt! You have deceived me from the first."

A guilty conscience, it is said, needs no accuser.

Ralph Marsden had, of late apprehended exposure from Laura Ordell, and now the thought of her at once rushed to his mind.

He was convinced that she had betrayed him.

Something of his agitation was visible in his face; but he soon gained, in a degree, his equanimity, and exclaimed, with well-feigned astonishment:

"Alice, what do you mean? Of what do you accuse me?"

"In reply I will ask you one question and I wish, I demand, a truthful answer: Did you, a few nights since, abduct a young girl from her home, and—"

Involuntarily, Marsden's white lips uttered the word: "Betrayed!" while his face became distorted with passion.

He doubted not that Laura Ordell had told Miss Leighton all she knew of him—which was enough to condemn him in the eyes of any pure woman.

"No more!" Alice exclaimed, "leave me. I thank Heaven I have been warned in time; and spared a union with one who would have made me miserable for life."

"I will leave you!" Marsden exclaimed, hoarsely; "and rest assured that the wretched woman from whom you received your warning will be amply repaid ere long for the service, the inestimable service she has rendered you."

Alice Leighton shrank from him, terrified at the fierce passion he exhibited.

He swept past her, and rushed from the house like a madman.

"Ah!" he muttered, fiercely, as he hastened down the street, attracting the attention of all passers-by, by his demeanor; "if I had her in my power now her life would not be worth a minute's purchase. Curse her! she's lost me a cool million, and a fair reputation. I knew how it would be if Alice got the least inkling of any of my little indiscretions; but after all my care, it's all out—all up! But I'll find Laura Ordell; I'll hunt her up if it takes me the rest of my life, and when I meet her, she will have cause to bitterly repent the day when she crossed my path. And now I'll go to my captive, my pretty Mara; and to-day, willing or unwilling, she shall be mine! I'll stand upon no ceremony. I have already delayed too long."

So saying, the villain turned his steps towards Jared Percival's, his whole being stirred with conflicting emotions.

Scarcely had Ralph Marsden left the house when Alice Leighton fell fainting to the floor. A moment later Edith was by her side.

"What is this? What ails my daughter?" cried old Mark Leighton, entering the parlor; "just now I met Marsden hurrying down the street like a madman, not even stopping to return my friendly greeting; and now I find Alice in this condition. What is the matter?"

In a few minutes Edith told the old gentleman all. By the time her story was finished Alice had recovered consciousness.

"And so he is a rascal after all!" exclaimed Mr. Leighton. "I have heard whispers derogatory to his character; but, although I never liked him, I refrained from mentioning them, thinking that the marriage with the woman he loved might change him, and knowing that a separation would make my dear daughter miserable."

"Father," Alice said, "I could never be happy with such a man. Though it is very hard to give him up (for I loved him very dearly), I do so with deep

thankfulness that I have been preserved."

"The villain!" Mr. Leighton exclaimed, "he shall pay dearly for the misery he is causing you! How dared—"

"Hush—hush, dear father; don't say or do anything more about it. It's all over now, and might have been far worse—for I might have married him. Please don't talk so."

"Well—well dear, I will not," said the old man, stroking her forehead tenderly. Then turning to Edith, he added:

"In regard to this missing young lady, have the police been informed? Have detectives been employed?"

"One—a Mr. Stoner."

"Stoner!" Mr. Leighton exclaimed. "What! Abel Stoner? My dear young lady, that man is one of the greatest rascals in New York, and if he can get higher pay to hold his tongue than to tell what he knows, he'll accept it. I've had dealings with the man, and know him thoroughly."

"Dr. Oakley and Mr. Elmore have the greatest confidence in him," said Edith.

"They are deceived, for he is a scoundrel. He once belonged to the regular detective force, but was discharged for a flagrant misdemeanor. He started as a private detective, and with a few assistants as unscrupulous as himself, manages to make considerable money one way or another. He's a smart man, but he puts his talents to a very bad use. I don't doubt he is in Ralph Marsden's pay."

"Then all the time that has been spent in the search has been lost?"

"Probably; he may know where the girl is, but if he can get higher pay from other parties for keeping the fact to himself than he can from Dr. Oakley for making it known, he will take it."

"What can be done?" Edith asked.

"I'll see the girl's friends myself. If possible she shall be saved from a life of ignominy and shame. I will see Dr. Oakley at once. I can sympathize with him, for I once lost one very dear to me in a similar mysterious way."

"Indeed, sir?"

"Yes, Miss Bentley. I refer to my daughter, my first child, who disappeared one night eighteen years ago, and whose fate, despite untiring search, I have never to this day learned. She was an infant then; now, if alive, she is a woman. I never expect to meet her on earth again."

Mr. Leighton was much affected.—Edith ventured to ask a few particulars.

"She was stolen from her cradle," the old man said, "while the nurse was for a few minutes absent from the room.—By whom the deed was done has ever remained a profound mystery—one which I dare not, at this late day, ever hope to solve."

Mara Sydney, when she had left the gaming house where she had so long been a prisoner, walked rapidly toward Broadway. She did not feel really secure until she reached that crowded thoroughfare. Then came the thought—where should she go? She instinctively distrusted Mrs. Van Dyke. She dreaded to go back to the woman, for she suspected her of complicity in her abduction.

Mara's feelings toward her had never been those of affection; Mrs. Van Dyke's demeanor toward her had rendered it impossible that they should be. But she remained with the woman in the hope of some day learning the secret of her parentage—for she had never believed Mrs. Van Dyke's story of their relationship; she had noticed many discrepancies in the different statements which had been made to her, and had many reasons for believing that something was concealed from her. But she knew it would be useless to question the woman on the subject, so she had silently waited and watched, but had learned nothing.

Having determined not to return to Mrs. Van Dyke's, her position became a perplexing one. Where could she find a home? After a few moments' thought she determined to go to Mr. Oakley and ask his advice. She had the greatest confidence in the young physician, and thought she would be willing to abide by his decision. Acting upon this thought she immediately proceeded to his office. A servant ushered her to the room in which he was seated.

"Mara!"

He clasped her in his arms and kissed her pale lips again and again. Innumerable questions were asked and answered. I will not attempt to describe the entire interview; let us pass over ten minutes, at the expiration of which time we find them seated in remarkably close proximity to each other, engaged in an animated conversation.

"And so, dearest, you come to me for advice, believing me to be your best friend?"

"Yes, Henry."

"You shall never regret your confi-

dence in me, dear Mara. Well, I have advised you to the best of my ability; and, if my counsel is heeded, you will, in a week's time, be Mrs. Henry Oakley."

There was no reply, but a glance.

"In the meantime," the young man continued, "you shall remain with my aunt—the mother of Miss Davis, your forewoman at Marsden & Miller's, who lives in D— street; and who will, I know, extend to you a hearty welcome."

A few moments later Henry Oakley and Mara Sydney were on their way to D— street. They found Henry's aunt at home. She willingly accepted the charge, being very favorably impressed by the young girl's appearance.

When Henry had arranged all to his satisfaction, he left the two ladies together, and returned to his office. He found a gentleman waiting for him there who introduced himself as Mark Leighton. He stated that he had heard of the search then being made for Miss Sydney, and had called to offer his assistance in prosecuting it.

"You have been deceived in Abel Stoner," the old gentleman said. "He is a rascal, and no doubt has interested motives in putting you off the track.—Waste no more time with him; but secure the services of responsible and reliable parties. I will assist you in doing so."

"I thank you for your kindness," Henry said; "but there is no need of further search. The young lady is found;" and he acquainted Mr. Leighton with all the particulars of the affair.

"I have no doubt," said the old gentleman, when the doctor had concluded his narrative, "that Stoner is in the pay of this Percival or Marsden; were it otherwise, you would have assuredly heard of Miss Sydney's whereabouts long ago. I should like to meet this young lady, doctor; will you favor me with an introduction?"

"I will, sir, with pleasure, at the first opportunity. But I'm wasting time. It is my intention to proceed at once to this house in Twentieth street, and demand the release of the girl, Laura Ordell."

"Good heavens! yes, sir," exclaimed the old gentleman, starting from his seat. This should have been done before. I will accompany you. We will secure the aid and co-operation of the police. I have heard of that house before. We will break up the foul den this day or there's no law in New York!"

The two men left the office, and hastened on their mission.

Walter Elmore was about entering his hotel on the morning when the events above stated occurred, when his sleeve was pulled, and a letter thrust into his hand by a ragged urchin, who immediately disappeared in the crowd which thronged the street. Walter glanced at the envelope which bore his name.—Then he walked slowly into the hotel, opening the letter as he paced the marble hallway.

The scene had been witnessed from a short distance by Major Heath, who, on seeing the letter safely delivered, rubbed his hands with delight, muttering:

"He'll suspect nothing. I'll soon be rid of him forever. The papers will record another mysterious disappearance and that will be the end of it."

The contents of the note which Walter had received, were as follows:

"MR. WALTER ELMORE:—The time has at last arrived when the secret of your birth may be revealed to you.—Come, alone, to-night, at nine o'clock, to the foot of — street, which is pier —, East river. There you will find one who can tell you all you desire to know."

A FRIEND.

"Can it be?" Walter exclaimed, "that I am at last to know the truth? I will be at the appointed place this night, and Heaven grant that this secret which I have so passionately yearned to know be revealed."

He went to his room and endeavored to write, but his excitement was so great that he could accomplish nothing. He soon left the hotel and proceeded down Broadway. He had gone but a short distance when he met Mrs. Clayton.

"At last, madam," he said, approaching her, "notwithstanding you refuse to impart to me the secret you possess, I am to know all."

The woman's face grew white.

"What do you mean?" she gasped.

"Read this," he said, handing her the note he had received.

She read it, half-aloud, her whole form trembling with emotion.

"That handwriting!" she muttered. "It is so like. But that is folly.—It is impossible!"

"What do you say, madam?" Elmore asked.

"You must not go to this place to-night," the woman cried, seizing his hand. "Walter, you must not, I say.—No living being save myself, can tell you this secret."

"Mrs. Clayton, you have deceived me," Walter said, sternly. "I noted your agitation as you read that note. I heard your mutterings regarding the handwriting. I am now convinced that this unknown friend can tell me all I wish to know, and I shall not fail to attend him this evening."

"You must not!" the woman said, earnestly. "Oh, Walter, believe me; no one save myself can put you in possession of this knowledge. This note is a decoy to lead you to those who will rob and perhaps murder you."

"I do not believe it; but if you will tell me this secret I will not go."

"I cannot! I cannot!" the woman exclaimed.

"Then," said Walter, coldly, "blame me not if I seek the knowledge elsewhere. Good morning!" and he hastened away.

"Oh! Heaven!" murmured the woman. "Grant that this wretched heart break not under its heavy load of care! Every harsh word he speaks to me sends a thrill of agony through my being. After all I have suffered and endured for his sake, his scorn and anger are very bitter to me. But I am very thankful that I have seen this note, for now I can, and will save him from whatever danger awaits him at that place to-night. But to whom can I apply for assistance? Ah! I know! I'll go to my friend, the young Doctor Oakley, and ask his aid. Something tells me that Walter will be in great peril.—But I will save his life; which, Heaven knows, is far dearer to me than my own!"

Mrs. Clayton reached Henry Oakley's office about half an hour before Mara's arrival. She told him of the meeting with Walter Elmore, and repeated their interview.

"The letter he has received," she said, "can be nothing but a decoy, intended to place him in the power of those who would harm him. Will you accompany me to this place—pier No. —, East river, to night, at half past eight, to preserve the poor boy from whatever danger awaits him?"

Henry consented at once, adding:

"But, madam, Walter's wish to penetrate this secret has become almost a monomania; and causes him, I know, much unhappiness. Would it not be well to tell him all? Would the possession of this knowledge not be less painful than the total ignorance which now torments him?"

"It cannot be — It cannot be!" the woman cried. "Walter must learn patience and resignation as I have learned them—though God forbid that he ever pass the fiery ordeal it has been my lot to endure."

Mrs. Clayton was much agitated. For a moment she paused; and then added, in her usual tone:

"I will call here this evening at 8 o'clock, doctor. Have a carriage ready, and we will proceed without delay on our mission."

"Very well, madam."

Mrs. Clayton left the office. On her way home she noticed a man on the opposite sidewalk gazing very intently at her. Turning, he followed her a short distance; and finally, as if acting upon a sudden impulse, stepped forward and said:

"Pardon me, ma'am; but I'm almost sure I knew you many years ago. I have information of great importance to give you if you are the lady I think you are."

"Whom do you suppose me to be?"

The man uttered a word which drove the color from the woman's face.

"You are the first who, for many long years, has called me by that name," she said.

"Then I am right!" the man exclaimed.

"You are; but what information can you possess that will interest me? Why do you address me? Your utterance of the name I once bore recalls to memory a bitterness which I would gladly banish forever. For years I have been as dead to the world as if I lay beneath the sod. For what purpose have you sought this interview?"

"Oh, ma'am!" the man exclaimed, "if you knew how I've longed to see you—how I've said to myself, 'If I could meet that much wronged lady, and tell her the secret that's been wearing on me for years, I'd be content to die;' if you only knew the hours of remorse I have endured, you'd not chide me for speaking to you."

"Well—well," said Mrs. Clayton, somewhat moved by the man's apparent agitation, "what is the secret?"

"First let me tell you my name. It's John Douglas. Do you remember it?"

The woman reflected a moment, and then replied in the negative.

"I was a servant in old Mr. George Elmore's house twenty-five years ago," the man added.

"I do not remember you," said Mrs. Clayton. "I may have seen your face, but I do not recollect it. But your mention of that time and place awakens painful memories. Proceed at once with what you have to say."—To be continued.

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W. H. CLARK,
123 Monterey Street, Allegheny, Penn.

VEGETINE.
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Pastor of the M. E. Church.

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