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Woman AGAINST Woman

BY MRS. MARY E. HOLMES.

Author of "A Woman's Love," "The Wife's Secret," "A Heartless Woman," "Her Fatal Sin," "A Wife's Peril," "A Desperate Woman."

CHAPTER XV.
"To trace them down," answered Roy madly. Geoffrey put his hand on the rein. "Can you say nothing?" he said to the prisoner who had struggled so hard. Paul Ross lifted his eyes and glared at the speaker, but made no answer. "Do nothing, Lord Darrell, till we have questioned them further. Now to Nestley goal," commanded Geoffrey firmly.

CHAPTER XVI.
Valerie Ross was chatting in her most pleasant manner to Lady Darrell when her quick ears caught the sound of arrivals on the gravelled path leading to the castle entrance. She rose and swept to the window; her quick eyes caught a glimpse of Roy's face, white and agitated, as he threw himself from his horse, and her heart told her that something had happened. So great was her emotion that for an instant a film gathered over her eyes; she could distinguish no other among the group of horsemen below, and when the mist cleared away they had all dismounted and had entered the Castle. At all hazards she must know what had happened. She made some hurried excuse to Lady Darrell, and slipped from the room. In the passage she met Davis—Alice's maid. The woman had never liked her, and since her very open abuse of poor Alice, had grown to hate her. "What has happened, Davis?" cried Valerie shrilly, forgetting even her dignity in her fear. "Is anything the matter?" "Nothing that I have heard of, miss," answered Davis, and then Valerie knew she must endeavor to grow calm, or she would betray herself. "I thought I heard a noise," she said, coldly, "but I dare say I was mistaken." "I think you must have been, miss," Valerie swept away. At the head of the staircase she halted. Should she go downstairs or not? Her movements were soon decided, for at that instant Roy, followed by Frank Meredith and Geoffrey Armistead, ran up the stairs. "Ah, Valerie!" he cried excitedly. "Great news! We have captured some of the burglars, and traced—my—Lady Darrell. Where is my mother? I—"

"Is below in handcuffs." "My God! failed!" she murmured wildly; "what has happened?" she passed her hand over her eyes; then her brain cleared. "Mr. Armistead," she pleaded passionately, "help me, I beg. My wretched brother! You know what I have suffered through him. For God's sake help me now. They know nothing of him here. I shall be disgraced—eternally shamed, unless you will aid me. See, I will fling myself at your feet! Help me to escape this." "I will help you on one condition," Geoffrey Armistead said quietly. "Lifting Valerie from her humiliating position; and on one condition only." "Name it!" cried Valerie. "That you confess what share you had in Lady Darrell's abduction?" She gave a slight scream, then drew herself up. "I don't understand you," she said haughtily. "You insult me by such words!" "Oh, no, I don't," answered Geoffrey. "I am a pretty good judge of things, Madame Valerie, and your own lips have condemned you. What did you whisper just now? 'Failed!' What had failed? Your plan, of course. Come, will you confess?" "Never!" said Valerie passionately. "It is all false! I know nothing!" "I hear Lord Darrell coming. I will tell him all—tell him that the woman he is harboring in his home is the sister of a—"

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"I have been thinking that our best plan will be to ride in separate directions, to try and trace this Italian scoundrel; the others had better stay here, if you don't object to turning your castle into a prison for the nonce." "Object!" cried the earl. "I feel safe when I know they are within my grasp. Armistead, I put myself into your hands. What you think wisest I will do. As soon as the detectives return from Nestley with the police I will start with you." "Good," returned Geoffrey; "it will be a strange thing if we don't catch him I think." Frank Meredith here joined them, and they went down the stairs together. "Look after your friend, Armistead," said the earl, waving his hand towards the dining-room, where a dejeuner was spread. "If you will pardon me, I must take Sir Humphrey up to my mother." He left the two friends, and hurried in search of Alice's grandfather. Alice's grandfather! The news came back to him with all its strange force. The moments of excitement and anxiety while the burglars were captured had driven it from his mind; but now he remembered all that Sir Humphrey had said, and even while his heart was torn with fear that she, perchance, was lost to him for ever, a thrill of pride went through him for her sake. Sir Humphrey was pacing the floor of the library as the earl entered. "You have no picture of your wife to show me, have you?" he asked abruptly. Roy colored with pain, for, in the knowledge that he possessed no memento of Alice, he had to own to the past feelings of coldness, injustice, and contempt. "I have none," he replied quietly, but Sir Humphrey read his face. "Please God you will need none," he observed. "Surely she must be found to-night, Darrell." Their hands unconsciously tightened in each others grasp. "I dare not think of it," muttered Roy hoarsely. "The old woman has confessed that—Jura loved her. She is in his hands. When I know this, I feel mad!" "Take me to your mother," the older man said gently. "It is but right you should both know the history of this girl who so strangely became your wife. Ah, Darrell, truth is indeed stranger than fiction, and this child's story is a proof of that." Roy turned and led the way to his mother's room. Lady Darrell rose, with outstretched hands, as Sir Humphrey entered.

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