



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."

(Continued.)

CHAPTER XIII.

"Yes," Myra answered slowly, then she added, "And she does—she stay here with me?"
Count Jura hesitated.
"Yes," he replied; then with a careless nod he went out through the curtains into the passage, to the corner in which the men slept.
Myra stood glaring after him.
"He lies to my face. Traitor! coward! villain! But though my hands are tied now and I seem helpless, I shall find a way, and he shall learn what it is to break the heart of Myra Burden!"

CHAPTER XIII.

Myra crept back to the inner room. Alice was not awake, but she was murmuring in her sleep.
The other girl drew a rug over the stone floor and crouched down on it to get a little rest.
She burned with a fever of pain, jealousy, and shame in her heart, but her hands were cold as ice.

As she lay down on the rug the memory of bygone days came to her—dim visions of a tiny house and shop in a crowded city, where her mother was busy all day.
She could hardly remember her father, though away in the misty past she seemed to recall a tall, dark man who returned but seldom to his home, and always tossed her on his shoulder and played with her.

She knew now that he had been a sailor, and that he was dead. Then years passed and she could see plainer.
Her mother left the shop; they lived in a dingy, dirty locality; their lives were strange. Roused at the dead of night to admit men with bundles and packages, she learned to know them all, and as she blossomed from a bud into a lovely flower, she grew to welcome one with a flutter at her heart.

For George she had always a smile, and in return she got many golden glimpses of happiness.

George admired her beauty. He loved to look out her dark locks in glittering jewels, clothe her in silken robes, and let her walk about the dingy house like some beautiful star caught in a prison.

Myra loved this man with all the warmth and passion she inherited from her Spanish father. Her mother cared nothing about the intimacy one way or another, except that she let Myra amuse George; it kept him in a good temper, and he was a man to be feared and fawned to.

He was the most daring of the whole gang; a gentleman by birth, of exceptional manners, he mingled with the very people whose houses he robbed.

Myra was eighteen when she first realized what her mother's calling was—the receiver of stolen goods! It did not shock her.

She had no knowledge of the sin it was. Her companions had kept her in the dark so long, merely to prevent her talking, and when she knew the truth she was indifferent. George was one of them, and what George did was followed in her eyes.

But there came a time when Myra's dream was shattered.

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What a man attains to seems for a little time to be the highest rung in the ladder, and during that brief period he may be content, but when he discovers that there are other rungs, still higher up, ambition gives birth to discontent, and he begins once more to climb. To climb is really man's chief end. It isn't in attainment, but in work, that man finds his real happiness, consequently it is not strange that we find men working until they break down when there is no real necessity for it.

If men only knew it, they could work to almost any extent on through middle life and into old age, if they would only take a little common sense care of their health. The trouble is that they do not take the little stitches here and there that are necessary to preserve health. They pay no attention to the signs of on-coming ill-health. A little biliousness, a little indigestion, a little loss of sleep and appetite, a little nervousness, a little headache, a little shakiness in the morning, and a little dullness all day, a little this and a little that—all these little things they neglect. Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery makes the appetite keen, digestion and assimilation perfect, the liver active, the blood pure and the nerves steady. It is the great blood-maker and flesh-builder. It is the great liver invigorator and nerve tonic. It fits a man to work and work and work. Medicine dealers sell it and have nothing else "just as good."

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George wearied of her love; he came less often; then he announced that it was decided between Paul Ross and himself that he should go to Italy, get introduced to Roy Darrel, become his friend and thus rob Darrel Castle of some of its world-famous treasures.

The whole gang was ordered to find their way to the Abbey ruins.
Paul Ross knew them well; he had lived in their mouldy vaults during the whole time his sister was luxuriously lodged as Lady Darrel's guest.

With sullen sorrow Myra went about her work.
George went off to Italy without a word, and despair and grief had eaten her heart nearly away when the burning fire of jealousy was added to her burden, and transformed her at once into a woman full of cares and thoughts of vengeance.

Alice's fair loveliness was a sight that brought the flush of agony to her dark cheeks; the knowledge that George loved her was a very sword thrust into her bleeding heart, and filled her eyes with unshed tears.

"He means to take her with him!" she thought bitterly, as she lay crouched on the rug. "What right has she to come and push him from me? He did love me once, and her fair beauty blinds him to me. What if I—she started, half-raised herself on her arm—"what if I separate them forever? She sleeps a blow with this," touching a dagger that hung on the wall, "and all would be ended!"

She stretched out her hand, then let it drop heavily with a shudder.

"No, no, she begged for pity; she hates and fears him. I promised I would help her, but oh, my heart is broken! Why does Heaven let such suffering come? It is too much—too much!"

She burst into a heavy fit of tears, then buried her face in the cushions, and worn out with excitement and fatigue, sobbed herself to sleep at last.

She was awakened early by her mother. The faint morning light streamed in through a slit in the wall, but the old woman held a candle.

"Be sharp, put on your thick coat and hat. George is waiting for you."

Myra staggered to her feet; she passed her hands over eyes swollen from the bitter tears she had shed.

"All right—I will come," she muttered. "What is the time?"

"Six and after. Sam is going to drive you—look sharp."

Dame Burden turned away and bent over Alice. There was a flush on the lily-white skin, the lips were brown and parched.

"She's in a high fever," muttered the old woman.

Myra woke from her dream. She strode up to the couch, and a thrill of joy swept through her.

"He can't take her away to-day—it would kill her to be moved," was the rapid thought that flashed through her brain.

She turned, and pouring some water into a great basin, plunged her face into it. Then, when thus refreshed, she divested herself of her weird garments, donned a thick ulster, and an every-day kind of hat, and with her hair tucked safely away, looked a quiet demure girl with splendid flashing eyes.

Dame Burden was busy spreading a board with some food as her daughter, moving tenderly drawn the coverlet carefully over the sleeping form, and placed a cup of water near, entered the outer vault.

"There, eat that, Myra, and be quick about it," she exclaimed.

"Where is George?" asked the girl, ignoring the command; "what are my orders?"

"He is putting the plate into the sack. Sam is going to drive you to Nestle Town; he'll put you into the train for London. Bill will meet you at the other end with the cart. Come, girl, eat some food, or you'll faint before the day's out."

Myra took the cup of coffee, drank a little, and ate a few mouthfuls of bread. She looked pale and strangely resolute.

"Mother," she said suddenly, speaking in a low voice, "look to her; she is ill—very ill. Keep her here till I come back. If—if George offers to get her away, don't help him. Do you hear? I shall be back by nightfall. Keep her here; promise me."

"I promise," answered the old woman at once. "Where would George take her to? Don't fill your head with jealous nonsense, Myra; she's here to please some spite; he has nothing else—"

"She's here because he loves her," the girl said bitterly; "do you think I am blind? He never looked at me as he looked at her. At moments I feel as if I could kill her, and then—then I remember she pleaded to me, and I pity her. Mother, you swear to keep her here?"

"Yes—yes, I swear!" Dame Burden replied hurriedly.

Myra glanced at her; her heart was full of misgivings.

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"Am I her child?" she asked herself; "she will swear one moment and break her word the next. Well, I can but trust she will be too ill, I must save her."

She turned at the thought and a slight flush mounted to her face.

Count Jura had just passed through the curtains.

"Ah, Myra, you are ready? You are a treasure! Here is the key of the house. Bill will be at the station. Empty the sack, carefully lock all away—you know where. Go to Moses, tell him all is ready for his brazier, then come back straight. I want to see you before I start abroad with the diamonds."

"Is that safe?" demanded Myra suddenly, pointing to the glittering ring on the dirty hand of the old woman.

Dame Burden looked up angrily, but Count Jura simply shrugged his shoulders.

"It's all right here, it pleases her to wear it; there is no one to see it; when she goes from here it will be different. But Myra is wise; be careful, Dame Burden—be careful!"

"It's not me you need warn," muttered the old woman angrily, glaring at her daughter. "I am to be trusted."

"Of course," rejoined the count. "Now, Myra, it is time to start; remember all you have to do. You are always safe, my girl—always safe."

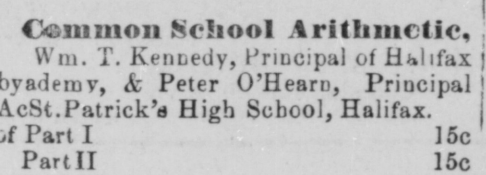
"George," Myra turned, "do not go away to-day."

The count frowned, then his face cleared.

(To be Continued.)

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