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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.

"It is useless staying longer," Roy said with disappointment; then his brow cleared. "We will come to-night and watch. What do you say?" "An excellent plan; by then Geoffrey will have brought the detectives." He mounted his horse again, and they rode slowly back on to the path. "I suppose it is the animal instinct with me," Frank said suddenly, "but I feel convinced that the robbery at the Castle and attempted robbery last night at the Grange were all one plot, and I strongly suspect that foreign count is in it, Lord Darrell." "It seems incredible," began Roy; then he stopped. "Who are these men coming towards us?" he added hurriedly. Frank looked for an instant, then with an exclamation spurred his horse on. "It is Geoffrey and the detectives. How quick he has been!" The earl drew rein and waited till the riding party approached him. Geoffrey Armistead knew; but the tall, white-haired stranger on his left he did not, nor the three others who rode behind. "You have travelled on wings, Geoffrey," exclaimed Frank Meredith, shaking his friend's hand. "I did not go too sleep, certainly," returned Mr. Armistead, greeting the earl, "and I have worked to some good, too. Frank, our suspicions were correct. There is a gang of the most notorious burglars somewhere about here. I have brought down Mr. Newton, the celebrated detective, who has been seeking their whereabouts for some time." "They've just fairly puzzled me," spoke a keen-faced man from the three behind; "but I think we have got them now."

Roy bit his lip. "Yes," he said huskily. "I have lost my wife." "One other question, and I have done. Was that wife precious to you, or did you regard her coldly?" "When I married her, my heart was not mine to give, but since my return here, only one short week, I love her with all my life; she is to me the most precious jewel earth can hold." The old man put out his hand silently, and Roy grasped it, his face bearing witness of his words. "I thank you for this," said Sir Humphrey, speaking as with difficulty. "You look surprised—as, indeed, you may. I will tell you all in full afterwards. To be brief now, I will simply say that the girl you have married is no low-born farmer's niece, but the child I sought for many years ago—the child of my dead son, Fulke Durant. My granddaughter is heiress to all I possess." Roy passed his hand over his brow. "Your granddaughter!" he repeated blankly. "I thought—the world thought you had no kith or kin." "As I have thought for many a dreary day. But, come, we must return to the others. You shall know all later on. I was on my way to Darrell Castle, to make myself known to the child of my beloved son, when I learnt the sad news of her abduction—for abduction it must be—and once again I am compelled to wait and hope." "We will work together to find her," exclaimed Roy eagerly. "And now tell me—you say they could find nests here?" "Indeed they can," Sir Humphrey answered as they joined the others again. "Beneath the ruins are series of vaults, some good, large, and airy. There, if we search well, we shall discover our birds, I doubt not." Geoffrey Armistead motioned the detectives on. They each produced a revolver. "Now, remember, if we meet anyone, endeavor to seize him without hurt. We do not want to shed blood unnecessarily." Sir Humphrey dismounted from his horse. "How many years since I have stood here?" he said musingly. "It recalls the boyish days when I played at nights with my cousin and brothers—all dead now—all dead!" He stood still for one moment, then led the way round till he halted at the very spot where Frank had picked up the sovereign. This coin was already handed over to the care of Mr. Newton. Sir Humphrey peered about, then looked up. "Here is the door," he said, pointing to a piece of stone that seemingly lay on the turf where it had fallen; "it leads to the vaults. Come, I will lead you." "Not you," cried Roy. "I am young and he—" "Beg pardon, gents; but if you will permit me, as an officer of the law, I must go first." Mr. Newton took up his position, and both Sir Humphrey and Lord Darrell fell back. The two detectives, at their chief's orders, lifted the stone. To their surprise they found it rolled over as lightly as possible, and the way was clear. Roy shuddered as he glanced down the dark passage. Was she, the woman he loved, entombed there? Frank Meredith pushed forward, but Geoffrey Armistead held him back. "Not so fast, Frank. You remain here with Sir Humphrey and Darrell." The detectives, headed by Mr. Newton, crept down the steps and groped their way. Geoffrey Armistead went after them. "Remain round here," he said hurriedly to the others, "in case of an escape." Roy flung himself off his horse, and even as he did so, a confused sound came from the vaults. With wild excitement he approached the entrance. He heard Mr. Newton's voice utter, deep and loud, "Surrender!" He heard muffled sounds of men struggling, loud exclamations, the report of a revolver shot, and then a woman's shriek. His heart stood still, and he fled down the steps, Sir Humphrey, with face as white as his hair, following, while Frank endeavored to quiet the horses that were tethered together. Geoffrey Armistead pushed Roy back. "Out in the air!" he said excitedly. "They are fighting hard; but we have got them, I think." "But she! Good God! she screamed—did you not hear her? She is hurt. Let me go!" Roy panted. "Back, I say," Geoffrey said bluntly; "there is no one there but a man, a boy and an old woman; it was she who screamed—I swear I am speaking the truth. Ah, here comes Newton; lend a hand."

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W. D. MCKAY

Scarce knowing what he did, Roy grasped a struggling arm. He dimly saw a man's form held by Newton and Geoffrey; his eye was wandering over the other two prisoners that were led out. Geoffrey was right. A youth came first, white and trembling, then an old woman, whose coarse face looked ghastly with its fear; her hands were linked together, but she was pouring out cries for mercy, all of which fell on deaf ears.

Geoffrey Armistead and the detectives struggled with the man and succeeded in forcing him on to his knees; then after some little difficulty they put the handcuffs on his wrists and let him free.

Roy gazed at him eagerly; his heart fell. It was not Jura. "Let me search," he said eagerly. "We have searched him, lord," said the detective civilly; "this is all at present."

"Only let me go and I'll tell all," screamed Dame Burden. "Oh, kind gentlemen, good, kind gentlemen, have mercy—let me go. I am a poor, harmless woman."

She held out her hands, and Roy, glancing at them, caught them in his. "You were right," he cried to Frank; "the diamonds are here, for she wears one—see! Then—"

The old woman tried to snatch back her hand. "You answer my question," and Geoffrey Armistead advanced to the old woman, drew his pistol and pointed it at her head. "Where is the young lady who was brought here two days ago? Answer quickly—the truth, or—"

Mrs. Burden turned green with fear. "I will speak—I will speak." She went away with George; and, oh, sir, I swear it—I tried to help and give her a sovereign—on my honor I did!"

Roy and Frank exchanged glances. "Where have they gone?" continued Geoffrey. "Yes, speak," broke in Sir Humphrey hoarsely. "To furnin' parts—I think to Italy." Roy turned and mounted his horse. "Where are you going?" eagerly asked Frank.

(To be Continued.)

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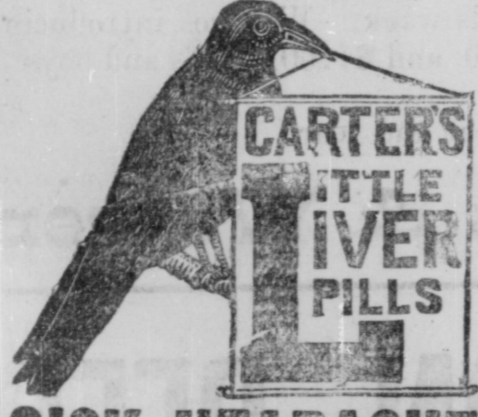
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