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CHAPTER XXVII.—Continued.

Madame de Varnier seated herself in the shadow, so that she would not at once confront Helena as she entered. Her jeweled fingers touched her hair lightly; her pose suggested the languid indifference of a woman of the world who awaits the entrance of a caller. Mercy and tenderness and womanly pity were denied this beautiful animal at her birth. Or these divine qualities had been fiercely crushed by fanatic zeal.

I paced to and fro in an agony of rage and pity; and this Medusa followed my every movement with her cruel, mocking smile.

The woman whom I had hoped to save from suffering, yes, the woman I loved, was coming to this chamber of horror. She was coming, radiant with hope. Happiness awaited her, she thought—the caresses of a loved brother, repentant of his momentary folly. And, perhaps, her heart was beating high with gratitude to me—to the man who she thought had made this much wished-for reconciliation possible.

Black despair awaited her in the little oratory yonder. She was to be tortured with a dilemma as cruel as ever racked the heart of woman.

But her decision I could not doubt. I had a proud faith in this lady who had sent me into the lists to fight for her. When first I had seen her on the terrace of the hotel at Lucerne—it seemed ages ago, instead of days—I remembered how her clear gaze had thrilled me. The calm, unwavering look of her gray eyes was truth itself, I had thought. A lie was not possible for her—not even a lie to be spoken by another for her sake.

But with what abhorrence would she regard me! Had I not been drawn in the subtle web of this Circe's net, the dilemma at least would not exist for her. But if the dilemma did not exist, Sir Mortimer's dishonor would still be a terrible reality. After all, the curtain had not fallen yet. Helena and I were both puppets in the hands of capricious Fortune. It was she who held the balances; or, rather a just God whose wheels may turn slowly, but sooner or later He sees that justice is done.

I had left the door slightly ajar. It was pushed open with a brusque suddenness that startled. The servant must have known the tragedy that awaited the woman he was conducting here. With a Frenchman's love of the dramatic, he ushered her in with pompous ceremony, and stood waiting expectantly. As I closed the door roughly on him, Helena saw me. Madame de Varnier, seated in the shadow, she had not yet seen.

I scanned her face closely. I saw that not hope nor the expectancy of a happy meeting with her brother was her dominant emotion. Eager she was, but it was the eagerness of anxiety, and not of hope. Her quiet assurance came from courage and self-control. Her brother had disappeared mysteriously; Captain Forbes had been the victim of a trick; she had put her faith in one who was almost a stranger to her; and now she had ventured to the chateau alone. Even a man might have hesitated.

But when I stood before her, I was touched to see how she leaned on me, who had twice failed her.

"My brother?" she whispered.

Once before she had wrung from me the bitter truth. Now, as then, a certain courage came from her presence. Her own scorn of weakness and subterfuge supported me. I answered her simply, as I knew she would have me answer—the direct, stern truth:

"Your brother is dead, Miss Brett."

There followed a silence so intense that I could hear quite distinctly the river Aare beating against the chateau walls. With the curious irrelevance that comes so often in moments of tense anxiety I thought it strange that Captain Forbes had not given some sign of his presence in his prison during the past half hour. Helena leaned toward me, frowning slightly as if in perplexity.

"Dead, did you say? Not dead!"

I repeated the words; unconsciously I spoke a little louder. The scene seemed unreal, theatric. Again the irrelevant thought intruded, how, when a boy, I used to wonder if all the things that had hitherto happened in my life—all my existence—were not one long dream; a dream from which I should awake presently, to find myself living a life utterly different.

"It seems, sir," she faltered, "that your mission is always to bring bad tidings. It was only the other day you told me that the man who loved me had died. Now it is to tell me that the brother I loved so much is dead."

She smiled pitifully, a curiously twisted smile that expressed her suffering more than any tears. No reproaches could have troubled me as did that pathetic smile. I turned abruptly to Madame de Varnier, whom she had not yet seen. My rage and pity overcame my reason. I might have appealed to a heathen idol sitting in grotesque majesty in its temple of gloom with as little effect.

"You are a woman. You must have a woman's heart; you must feel some tenderness for others in their grief. You have told me that your life has been one of suffering; then have mercy for this girl who is suffering. You will not torture her further. You will leave to her the only comfort that remains for her, the proud memory of a brother who served his country with honor."

"It is for you to do that, monsieur." She spoke with assumed indifference, fingering the cross that hung from her neck.

"Mr. Haddon," said Helena proudly, "you will make no appeal to Madame de Varnier to spare me from suffering. Where is my brother? I suppose that there is no one here who will deny me my right to see him?"

The two women faced each other.

"Death is sometimes not the worst calamity that may befall one, madam."

At these ominous words Helena turned to me with a gesture of pain. Her courage faltered, though she fought for her control before the woman whom she hated so bitterly.

"Death is not the worst calamity?" She repeated the words slowly, as if seeking their hidden meaning. "Ah, this infamous woman, who dragged down my brother to disgrace when he lived, will not spare even his memory. She threatens to make his shame even more public than it is."

"Your champion has it in his power to prevent that," suggested Madame de Varnier softly.

Helena turned on her with horror.

"It is incredible that you should make traffic of a man's love."

"To me the love of a man like Sir Mortimer Brett would have been a glory, not a disgrace," returned the adventuress calmly. "But there was no love between Sir Mortimer Brett and myself in the sense you mean. Whatever feeling your brother had for me was controlled. Yes, and I tempted him. In that regard his honor is stainless."

Motionless, each looked into the other's eyes.

"And yet you said there is a calamity worse than death?" Helena questioned, torn between hope and fear.

"And I say it again. Dishonor is worse than death."

Helena turned to me, dazed and appealing, a trembling hand drawn slowly across her forehead.

"You are silent. What do those extraordinary words mean?"

I hesitated.

"It is said—this woman says—but it is false. Do not believe her," I cried desperately at length.

"He has not the courage to tell the truth," cried Madame de Varnier, walking slowly toward Helena, who shrank back. "Your brother is known to be guilty of taking bribes."

"You are right not to believe that, Mr. Haddon," she said scornfully, and sighed her relief.

"There are proofs to convince the most skeptical, even you," insisted her tormentor with savage emphasis.

"What you say is impossible. Where is my brother, Mr. Haddon?"

I pointed silently to the oratory. Helena turned to go thither, but Madame de Varnier barred her entrance.

"Ah, you are afraid!" she cried, standing at the door of the oratory with extended arms. "You dare not face the truth. Listen, madam; the proofs of your brother's guilt are not imaginary. They exist in his own writing. Not one signature which may be forged; there are whole pages. You listen now; you will tremble before I have finished. At present there is no one who has seen these proofs except myself. But dare to doubt me, to ignore these proofs, and they shall be for the whole world to read. Do you hear? I say for the whole world; and Russia would give me any sum I chose to ask for those papers. Do you hate me so much, and scorn me so bitterly, that you prefer to see your brother's name held up as a byword for Europe's contempt? You disdain to think it possible that my charge be true. Then what have you to fear? There is no one who can more surely identify your brother's writing than yourself. Which will you choose? It is for you to say. Will you consent to see these papers now, or am I to sell them to the embassies of Russia or Austria?"

The two women measured each other in a long silence. I watched the duel from the open window where I stood. Madame de Varnier's threat was a terrible one. It was the fierce pleading of a desperate and unscrupulous adventuress striving frantically to move the lofty trust of a sister in a brother's rectitude and honor. I had faith in the courage and nobility of soul of Helena. I believed that she would face shame and unhappiness with calm resolution. But I could not wonder that Madame de Varnier's menace made her hesitate.

The slow seconds passed, and still they faced each other in silence. That long silence seemed to me ominous. I suffered with Helena in the anguish of her decision.

To yield would be to doubt. But if she refused to yield, to doubt. And if this woman spoke the truth, and made good her threat— For herself she would endure everything rather than compromise with this betrayer of men's honor. But there was the mother to be thought of.

She had decided. She raised her hands slowly in a gesture that pathetically showed her submission. Madame de Varnier had conquered—so far.

"Do not think I doubt because I consent." She turned to where I stood. "But if this woman is sincere, and believes that these proofs exist, others will believe it too. There is no forgery so clever that I should not detect it. My brother's handwriting was peculiar. His honor must not be questioned because of a clever trick. Come, I will see those papers."

Madame de Varnier glided across the bare room and struck the heavy door of the little chamber she had already pointed out to me as containing the safe. To my surprise the door had not been locked. It opened ponderously, and I saw the gleam of the safe. She stood at the doorway and beckoned to Helena.

"Come, madam, or are you afraid to trust yourself in the room alone with me?"

"Has Mr. Haddon already seen these papers that he is not to come?"

"Mr. Haddon has seen copies of the original papers in the safe," returned Madame de Varnier in triumph. "He was so convinced of your brother's guilt that he destroyed these copies. You will not be surprised then if I refuse to trust him with the precious originals."

I attempted no expostulation. I knew the uselessness of that, and we had agreed that Helena was to decide for herself. I had faith enough in her not to doubt her ultimate decision.

"I will see these papers with you alone," said Helena quietly.

"And you will give me your word of honor that you will not follow the example of Mr. Haddon in attempting to destroy them?"

"My word of honor!" cried Helena with bitterness. "Would you believe that if you think my brother guilty of dishonor?"

"I should believe it," answered Madame de Varnier.

"Then I give it to you."

She walked to the room with a firm step, passing me where I stood.

"Be brave," I whispered. "Be on your guard. Refuse to believe that your brother is guilty, no matter what specious proofs this woman may show you. It is simply impossible that he be guilty."

"Why do you say that?" Her eyes were very wistful.

"Because," I looked at her steadily, "I know how impossible it would be for the sister."

"Your faith strengthens mine." She entered the room, passing by Madame de Varnier at the threshold.

"Au revoir, M. Coward!" the woman cried tauntingly, and the key turned in the door.

"Your Brother Is Dead, Miss Brett."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"Coward!"

I heard a clock in the village strike the hour. It was six. The chateau walls cast a long shadow on the opposite bank of the river. The mountains in the far distance were purple and red in the evening light. The long day was coming swiftly to an end; and the night was mysterious with its promise of despair.

This tower of the three rooms! Two of these rooms held their tragedies. What if the third room had its tragedy likewise!

I struck sharply the door of that room in which Madame de Varnier had said that Captain Forbes was imprisoned. I listened; there was no answer. I called the name of the king's messenger aloud; still there was no answer. Soon the moon would rise, and its cold rays might fall on the lifeless body of Forbes; for, if all were well, why should there be this ominous quiet?

The suspense was unendurable. I listened at the door of the room that concealed the two women. I heard the murmur of voices. That reassured me so far as Helena's safety was concerned; but it made me absolutely certain that Captain Forbes must have heard my voice if he were living, and in that room.

And when the two women came out? I shrank from that coming with dread. I had told Helena to be brave, to ignore the evidence of her own sight. But I had been shaken in my own belief as to Sir Mortimer's innocence. Surely her faith would be greater than mine; but the evidence seemed so overwhelmingly against Sir Mortimer, if Sir Mortimer's letters and notes were genuine. At any rate the woman I loved must hold a bitter cup to her blanched lips; it must be emptied to the very dregs. Her suffering was inevitable, whether she believed her brother innocent or guilty.

I could not doubt that she would refuse to purchase the silence of Madame de Varnier at the cost of further dishonor, even though I were chiefly to bear that myself. But if she demanded that? Was I strong enough to resist her tears? I must be. My reason told me of the folly of Madame de Varnier's plan. But if I yielded weakly presently, and the ruse actually succeeded, I knew that the hypocrisy of the act would become more and more dreadful to Helena with the coming years. No; if in that supreme ecstacy of her agony she should entreat me, I must still refuse. I must decide for her, even though she thought my own cowardice responsible for that refusal.

Coward! How that word beat a devil's tattoo on my excited brain. It had been the keynote to all my suffering, and to all my joy. Willoughby had died uttering it; Helena had echoed it in thought; and Madame de Varnier had spoken it again and again in her fierce contempt during the past hour. Yes, it was the keynote of my suffering and my joy. It was the motif that obtruded again and again in the stormy music of these past hours. It was a baneful talisman, a watchword. Its letters seemed to have almost a magic potency. It was a countersign that opened for me the gates of paradise and hell.

A talisman! A watchword! A countersign! Suddenly I saw the word C-O-W-A-R-D written in flaming letters. They revolved furiously. They danced before my vision.

This was sheer madness—this impossible conjecture. I reasoned the unreasoning impulse to hope against hope. But the forlorn, desperate possibility fought obstinately for recognition. It held me with all the damning power of a hallucination.

And then suddenly it became a conviction. It was no longer an impossible hope, not even an intuition. It became an absolute belief, a certainty. And this was the reason for my belief:

Whenever Madame de Varnier had mentioned the safe she had called me coward.

C-O-W-A-R-D!

That was the combination of the safe.

At last a door opened. Helena made her way toward me with uncertain steps, her hands held out before her, as one groping in the dark. Her splendid fearlessness was gone. She looked at me with the wild eyes of a wounded animal vainly seeking a way of escape. As she reached my side her hands were still held out as if for protection. I grasped them firmly, but I did not speak.

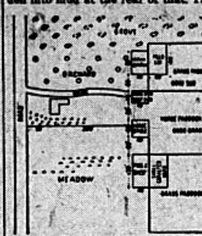
(TO BE CONTINUED.)

A kiss on the lips is worth two on the hand.

PLANNING A FARMSTEAD.

Some Suggestions for the Locating of the Farm Buildings.

The accompanying plan may prove suggestive and helpful to one who desires to locate the farm buildings most advantageously. In it the buildings are placed in a row 300 feet back of the front line of the house. This will take them far enough back to prevent smells or unpleasant sounds reaching the home and yet make them near enough for convenient reach. Placing them in line 60 feet distant from each other nearest the grove we would put the main cattle barn, with a small concreted feedlot back of it, and a grass paddock that will never be trodden into mud at the rear of that. Then



An Excellent Arrangement.

comes a large double corncrib with buggy shed between the cribs, this nearest the house, and next it the horse stable.

A distance of 60 feet should prevent fire spreading from one building to another if the roofs are of slate or galvanized iron and if there is any water at all available for drenching the sides of the buildings. Back of the horse stable is a large grass paddock, carefully kept in thrifty condition, and not turned on when too soft to hold a horse up. Then after another interval the pigs and sheep or either as the use of the farm demands, and again a very small concreted yard with a grass paddock at the rear of this.

Now all is provided for save the tools. I suggest, continues the writer in Breeders' Gazette, that between the horse stable and the pig and sheep barn a roof all of galvanized iron on iron supports be put over the 60 feet space, and tools stored under this. Fire would not travel through such a structure, or at least it might easily be prevented. Such an iron framework is not now very costly. There should also be a wagon shed on the side of the horse stable, unobstructed by posts, so that farm wagons may be driven under and horses unhitched in the dry.

To the south of the house why not have a sweep of meadow? It would be beautiful and give one a sense of space and freedom. Some clumps of trees near the house, but not too near, would add to the beauty of the scheme. Not all the buildings need be erected at one time.

INTENSIVE FARMING.

It Is Neither an Impossibility or an Absurdity.

Intensive farming is a much-neglected art says Farm and Fireside. Some men think it an impossibility! others, an absurdity. But in fact both are wrong, for it is a reality. The day of limitless acres and endless forests has gone. It is unfortunate that the earth doesn't grow with its population; but it doesn't, and this fact puts us face to face with the problem of how to get the most out of our land. As population increases farms must necessarily grow smaller. Some farmers are making more from ten acres than others make from a hundred acres. What a man can get from his farm depends a good deal on the farm, but a good deal more upon the farmer.

Many market gardeners and fruit growers utilize every square foot of available space, and get large crops and big prices. The close, personal attention they give their land and crops shows in the results. This is in direct contrast to the belief which so many farmers have that the less men they have working for them, the more they save. Land needs to be carefully cultivated and looked after to give best results. Not enough labor is more of waste than too much labor, for besides the loss on the crops there is the loss caused by neglecting the land.

Intensive farming never injures the land, but on the contrary improves it through close cultivation. If the men of this country would run their farms on the intensive plan, they would not only largely increase their incomes, but vastly improve their farms

Using Corn Fodder.

There can always be a lot of good corn fodder used during the winter and spring on the ordinary farm, where from a dozen to 20 cows are kept doing their best at milk. It will soon be "everlastingly too late" to cut corn for fodder, as it will soon be past the stage for making the best feed, if the frost does not catch it. We never regret having a few shocks too many, while we always do regret running out two weeks sooner than we should in the spring. Be sure there is plenty.

HOW TO HANDLE MANURE.

It Should Be Gotten on to the Land as Soon as Possible.

It is not a question of saving all the value of the manure. In the nature of things, that is impossible. The best we can do under the circumstances is the question: Is it better to let manure remain in the barnyard in large heaps and haul it out twice a year, spring and fall, or is it best to haul it as fast as made? What are the advantages of the latter system? We must remember that the manure is never so rich in fertilizing value as when first made. It must waste some of its value anyway, but hauled out as fast as made, it wastes less than in any other way. If piled in large heaps under shelter, it wastes, according to recent experiments, 18 per cent. If piled up in the open air, it wastes 21.7 per cent. From spring to fall we are obliged to let the manure accumulate in the barnyard. But to prevent as much waste as possible, we sprinkle over it twice or three times a week ground phosphate rock. We want the phosphate in the soil, and we want to prevent evaporation, while there is nothing that makes the phosphate more available than the fermentation of organic matter. So we accomplish three things in this way. But from the time the cattle are stabled in the fall till the ground is too soft for wagon wheels in spring, the manure is hauled daily to the fields that are to be plowed for corn.

The advantages of this system are: (1) The manure is hauled and spread when the labor will cost the least. (2) We have clean barnyards. (3) We secure the least loss from fermentation and evaporation.

For the summer accumulation, we find the largest value in hauling it out on to alfalfa or clover sod in the fall, plowing it under at once. On this land we plant either corn or potatoes the next spring.

But the wise farmer will make generous provision for the keeping up of fertility in his land. He will not be afraid to buy commercial fertilizers like ground phosphate rock, or plow under in the fall a good stand of clover or alfalfa. Every dollar he spends in this way will bring him ten in return.

DRAGGING WITH BRUSH.

Home-Made Device Which Will Level the Field After Seeding, Etc.

Get some tough brush—plum, bull brush or some kind of thorn brush is the best—five or six feet long, then

Brush Drag Ready for Use.

make according to illustration. Plank A is to sit or stand on; a spring seat can be placed on the plank if preferred. Drag the field crossways after the seed is drilled in, says the Missouri Valley Farmer, and it will leave it as level as a floor.

Jottings.

Plenty of good roughness for winter feeding is timely now.

Mill feed will be high again this winter. Have you alfalfa hay to take the place of wheat bran?

When a person can raise three to four crops of bran—alfalfa—to the acre, getting better than a ton to each crop, what pays better for a dairy farmer to raise?

The first frost of the season always puts a keener edge on a cow's appetite, causing her to eat in the stall or yard more freely than she did even with good grass still in her pasture. Almost before we have time to realize it we will be dry feeding entirely.

Milking fifteen cows may mean a whole lot, or it may mean only as much as some get from ten cows. Quality instead of quantity should be looked after more than it is. The good milker eats no more than the ordinary poor milker, which is another point to consider.

Demand for Good Butter.

An observing friend argues that the increased use of breakfast foods, all of which require milk and cream, has had a tendency to advance the price of butter and butter fat. He says that large dairy districts close to the cities that once sold in the form of butter fat or butter now sell the whole milk. This goes direct to the consumer, and is never made into butter. No doubt this does take an enormous amount of milk which is used whole; more, probably, than the ordinary observer realizes. Anyway, the demand for good butter never was quite so brisk as it is now.

Do It Right.

In fruit culture there is either neglect to prune or it is badly performed to a large degree. If proper work is done at the time of planting trees and for the next four or five years but little labor or time will be required afterward.