



UNITED AT LAST

BY
MISS M E BRADDON

CHAPTER IV. OFFEND HER AND SHE KNOWS NOT HOW TO FORGIVE

Three days after the little dinner in Half-Moon street, Mrs. Walsingham sat at her solitary breakfast-table rather late than usual, dawdling over the morning papers, and wondering drearily what she should do with the summer day before her. She had seen nothing of Gilbert Sinclair since the dinner, and had endured an agony of self-torment in the interval. His name appeared in one of the morning journals among the guests at a distinguished country's ball on the previous evening, and in the list of names above Mr. Sinclair she found those of Lord Clancy and his daughter. There had been a time when Gilbert set his face against all fashionable entertainments, voting them the abomination of desolation. He had changed or late, and went everywhere, raising fond hopes in the breasts of anxious mothers with large broods of marriageable daughters waiting for their promotion.

Mrs. Walsingham sat for some time looking vacantly at the long list of names, and thinking of the man she loved. Yes, she loved him. She knew his nature by heart; knew how nearly that obstinate, selfish nature verged upon brutality, and loved him nevertheless. Something in the force of his character, and especially in the charm of his own imperious disposition. She had believed in the strength of his affection for herself, which had been shown in a passionate, undisciplined kind of manner that blinded her to the shallowness of the sentiment. She had been intensely proud of her power over this rough Hercules, all the more proud of his subjugation, because of that half-hidden brutishness which she had long ago divined in him. She liked him for what he was, and scarcely wished him to be better than he was. She only wanted him to be true to her. When he had asked her, years ago, to be his wife, she had frankly told him the story of her youth and marriage. Her husband was five and twenty years her senior, a man with a constitution broken by nearly half a century of hard living, and she looked forward hopefully to a speedy release from a union that had been hateful to her. She had believed that it would be possible to retain Gilbert's affection until the time when that release should come without sacrifice to her reputation. Had she not believed and hoped this, it is impossible to say what guilty sacrifice she might have been willing to make rather than lose the man she loved. She had hoped to keep him dangling on, governed by her womanly tact, a faithful slave, until the Colonel, who led a stormy kind of existence about the Continent, haunting German gambling tables, should be good enough to depart this life. But the Colonel was a long time exhausting his battered constitution, and the flower chain in which Mrs. Walsingham held her captive had faded considerably with the passage of years.

A loud double knock startled the lady from her reverie. Who could such an early visitor be? Gilbert himself, perhaps. He had one of those eccentric constitutions to which his figure is a stranger, and would be no later astir to-day for last night's ball. Her heart fluttered hopefully, but sunk again with the familiar anguish of disappointment as the door was opened and a low, deferential voice made itself heard in the hall. These courteous tones did not belong to Gilbert Sinclair.

A card was brought to her presently, with James Wyatt's name upon it, and "on special business, with many apologies," written in pencil below the name, in the solicitor's neat hand.

"Shall I show the gentleman to the drawing-room, ma'am, or will you see him here?" asked the servant.

"Ask him to come in here. What special business can Mr. Wyatt have with me?" she wondered.

The solicitor came into the room as she asked herself this question, looking very fresh and bright in his carefully dressed morning costume, with the hot-house flower in his button-hole, and his perfectly fitting coat. He was more careful of his toilet than many handsome men, and knew how far the elegance of his figure and the perfection of his dress went to stone for his plain face.

"My dear Mrs. Walsingham," he began. "I owe you a thousand apologies for this unseasonable intrusion. If I did not think the nature of my business would excuse—"

"There is nothing to be excused. You find me guilty of a very late breakfast, that is all. Why should you not call at half-past ten as well as at half-past two? It was very kind of you to come at all."

"I hold it one of my dearest privileges to be received by you," he replied, with a certain grave tenderness. "There are some men who do not know when they are happy. Mrs. Walsingham, I am not one of those."

She looked at him with a surprise that was half scornful.

"I'll spare me the pretty speeches which make you so popular with other women," she said. "You spoke of business just now. Did you really mean business?"

"Not in a legal sense. My errand this morning is of a rather delicate nature. I would not for the world distract or offend you by any unwarranted allusion to your domestic relations, but I believe I am the bearer of news which can scarcely have reached you yet by any other channel, and which may not be altogether unwelcome."

"What news can you possibly bring me?" she asked, with a startled look. "Would it distress you to hear that Colonel Walsingham is ill—dangerously ill, even?"

Her breath came quicker as he spoke.

"I am not hypocrite enough to pretend that," she answered. "My heart has long been dead to any feeling but anger—I will not say hatred, though he deserved as much—where that man is concerned. I have suffered too much by my alliance with him."

"Then let me be the first to congratulate you upon your release from bond-servitude. Your husband is dead."

DOMESTIC ECONOMY.

TOPICS OF INTEREST TO FARMER AND HOUSEWIFE.

Clara Walsingham's cheek blanched and she was silent for some moments, and then she asked in a steady voice, "How did you come by the news of his death?"

"In the simplest and most natural manner. My business requires me to be an au courant as to continental affairs, and I get several French and German newspapers. In one of the last I found the account of a duel, succeeding upon a quarrel at the dining-table, in which your husband fell, shot through the heart. He only survived a few hours. His opponent was a Frenchman and is now under arrest. Shall I read you the paragraph?"

"If you please," answered Mrs. Walsingham, with perfect calmness of manner. Her heart was beating tumultuously, nevertheless. She had a dismal conviction that no advantage—that is to say, not that one advantage for which she longed—would come to her from her husband's death. How eagerly she had desired his death! To-day the news gave her little satisfaction.

Mr. Wyatt took a slip of newspaper from his card-case, and read her the brief account of the Colonel's exit from this mortal strife. Duels were common enough in Prussia, and the journal made very little of the sanguinary business.

"As many of my friends believe me to have been left a widow long ago, I shall make no fuss about this event; but I shall be very grateful if you will be good enough not to talk of it anywhere," Mrs. Walsingham said, by and by, after a thoughtful pause.

"I shall be careful to obey you," answered the lawyer.

"I wonder how you came to guess that I was not a widow, and that Colonel Walsingham was my husband. He took me abroad directly after our marriage, and we were never in England together."

"It is a solicitor's business to know a great many things, and in this case there was a strong personal interest. You accused me just now of flattering you; and it is quite true that I have now and then amused myself a little with the weaker sex. Until about a year ago I believed myself incapable of any real feeling—of any strong attachment, and had made up my mind to a life of solitude, believing in the inviolability of society. But at that time a great change came over me, and I found that I was doomed to suffer life's greatest fever. In a word, I fell desperately in love. I think you can guess the rest."

"I am not very good at guessing, but I suppose the lady is some friend of mine, or you would scarcely choose me for a confidante. Is it Sophy Morton? I know you admire her."

"As I admire wax dolls, or the Haines and Zuleikas of an illustrated Byron," answered Mr. Wyatt, with a wry face. "Sophy Morton would have about as much power to touch my heart or influence my mind as the wax dolls or the Byronic beauties. There is only one woman I have ever loved, or ever can love, and her name is Clara Walsingham."

Mrs. Walsingham looked at him with unaffected surprise.

"I am sorry that I should have inspired any such sentiment, Mr. Wyatt. I can never return it."

"Is that your irrevocable reply?"

"It is," she answered, decisively. "You reject the substance—an honest man's love—and yet you are content to wear the best years of your life upon a shadow."

"I don't understand you."

"Oh, yes, I think you do. I think you know as well as I do how frail a reed you have to lean on when you put your trust in Gilbert Sinclair."

"You have no right to speak about Mr. Sinclair," answered Clara Walsingham, with an indignant flush. "What do you know of him, or of my feelings in relation to him?"

"I know that you love him. Yes, Clara, it is the business of a friend to speak plainly; and even at the hazard of incurring your anger, I will do so. Gilbert Sinclair is not worthy of your affection. You will know that I am right before long if you do not know it now. It is not in that man's nature to be constant under difficulties, as I would be constant to you. Your hold upon him has been growing weaker every year."

"If that is true, I shall discover the fact quite soon enough from the gentleman himself," replied Mrs. Walsingham, in a hard voice, and with an angry cloud upon her face. "Your friendship, as you call it, is not required to enlighten me upon a subject which scarcely comes within the province of a solicitor. Yes, Mr. Wyatt, since plain speaking is to be the order of the day I am weak enough and blind enough to see for Gilbert Sinclair better than for anyone else upon this earth, and if I do not marry him I shall never marry at all. I may as well go to jail me. Yes, I have seen the change in him. It would be a vain falsehood if I denied that I have seen the change, and I am waiting for the inevitable day in which the man I once believed in shall declare himself a traitor."

"Would it not be wise to take the initiative, and give him his dismissal?"

"No. The wrong shall come from him. If he can be base enough to forget all the promises of the past, and to ignore the sacrifices I have made for him, his infamy shall have no excuse from any folly of mine."

"And if you find that he is false to you—that he has transferred his affection to another woman—you will banish him from your heart and mind, I trust, and begin life afresh."

Mr. Walsingham laughed aloud.

"Yes, I shall begin a new life, for from that hour I shall only live upon one."

"And that will be—"

"The hope of revenge."

"Revenge is a hard word," he said, after a long pause. "Redress is much better. If Mr. Sinclair should marry, as I have some reason to think he will—"

"What reason?"

"Public rumor. His attentions to a certain young lady have been remarked by people I know."

"The lady is the beautiful Miss Clancy."

"How did you discover that?"

"From his face the other night."

"You are quick at reading his face?"

"Yes, I believe he is over head and ear in love with Constance Clancy, as a much better man, Cyprian Davenport, was before him; and I have no doubt Lord Clancy will do his utmost to bring the match about."

"How long has this been going on?"

"Since the beginning of this season. He may have lost his heart to the lady last year, but his attentions last year were not so obvious."

"Do you know if Miss Clancy cares for him?"

"I have no means of knowing the lady's feelings on the subject, but I have a considerable knowledge of her father in the way of business; and I am convinced she will be made—induced—I am not hypocrite enough to pretend that," she answered. "My heart has long been dead to any feeling but anger—I will not say hatred, though he deserved as much—where that man is concerned. I have suffered too much by my alliance with him."

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suppose, a more appropriate word—to accept Sinclair as a husband. Lord Clancy is as poor as Job and as proud as Lucifer. Yes, I think we may look upon the marriage as a certainty. And now, Mrs. Walsingham, remember that by whatever means you seek redress I am your friend, and shall hold myself ready to aid and abet you in the execution of your just right. You shall expect me as a husband. You shall discover how faithful I can be as a son."

"I have no doubt I ought to be grateful to you, Mr. Wyatt," she said, in a slow, weary way, "but I do not think your friendship can ever be of much service to me in the future happiness of my life, and I trust that you will forget all that has been said this morning. Good-by."

She gave him her hand. He held it with a gentle pressure as he answered her.

"It is impossible for me to forget anything that you have said, but you shall find me as secret as the grave. Good-by."

He bent his head and touched her hand lightly with his lips before releasing it. In the next instant he was gone.

"How she loves that snob!" he said to himself as he walked away from Half-Moon street. "And how charming the girl is! I could scarcely make a better match. It is because of which inclination and tendency go together. And how easily I might have won her but for that man! Well, well, I don't despair of ultimate victory, in spite of Gilbert Sinclair. Everything comes to the man who knows how to wait."

TO BE CONTINUED!

THE SUPREME COURT.

The Majority of Cases Brought Before It Are Simply for Delay.

That august body, the Supreme Court of the United States, has been dubbed "the great mechanism of procrastination" and to call it by that title seems to do it no injustice. It is said that nine out of every ten cases submitted to this high tribunal are carried up to it not for the purpose of obtaining the reversal of decisions rendered by lower courts, but purely and simply for the sake of delay—or ordinarily to keep people out of money which they have not paid.

How effective is this? The Supreme Court of the United States has been delayed for four years, and ordinary cases before the latter can come up for consideration. There are 4,000 cases on the docket now.

No other legal tribunal that ever existed has possessed such well nigh absolute power as is wielded by the Supreme Court of the United States. It can even overthrow any law passed by Congress and signed by the President if it chooses to discover a constitutional flaw in the measure, and from its decision there is no appeal. Such a law is likely to be delayed while it is considered that after the briefs are filed in the case, it is often delayed for four years.

It is a solicitor's business to know a great many things, and in this case there was a strong personal interest.

You accused me just now of flattering you; and it is quite true that I have now and then amused myself a little with the weaker sex.

Until about a year ago I believed myself incapable of any strong attachment, and had made up my mind to a life of solitude, believing in the inviolability of society. But at that time a great change came over me, and I found that I was doomed to suffer life's greatest fever.

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It is a distinguished legal luminary from New York confessed the other day that, after arguing a case at the bar of the Supreme Court, he always goes straight to his hotel and changes his underclothing, because it is soaked with perspiration. And at that time a great change came over me, and I found that I was doomed to suffer life's greatest fever.

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