

Thursday, - - - March 14, 1912.

[CONTINUED.]

HAFLED VILLAIN.

CHAPTER II.

THE TEMPTRESS AND THE VICTIM.

"That is nothing but mockery, sir, and you ought to know it," she again interrupted him, this time rather passionately. "Thinking that I will quietly await your wife shuffling off her mortal coil to wear her shoes. You must entertain a wonderfully high opinion of yourself or of me to plan out such a delightful future arrangement. What else have you to propose I should like to know."

"What else can I propose? only tell me, and I swear by all the saints in the calendar to follow your wishes in every practicable way. Do not forget that I have often begged you to accompany me to some distant place—that I have offered to sacrifice everything that I possess for you, and, oh, dearest, let me pray you again to leave this cursed place with me."

"Do not trouble yourself, Mr. Spotter," she mockingly replied. "This place agrees with me very well and I am in no hurry to leave it as your mistress. You are either a great fool or a great sinner."

"Sinner, yes; fool, no," he loudly exclaimed with an angry fire in his eye. "Yes, sir, fool," she replied with calm deliberation. "Yes, if you mean as you say, you would not tamely yield to petty obstacles. Brave men act differently."

"Heaven's Little," he cried, "what is it you mean? I am desperate enough to sell my soul to win you, if you but show me the way. Speak, I beseech you."

"Well, Reuben," she tenderly replied, putting her hand into his, "if your wife be so disagreeable to you and such an incubus on your life and our happiness, why not get rid of her?"

"What you would not have me murder her?" he hoarsely asked with paling cheeks.

"No, indeed," she replied with a beautiful smile, "but get a divorce from her, which is a much better way."

"I would, if I knew how," quickly enough," he said. "But I know of no complaint to proceed on. Cause her?"

"Will you follow my advice?"

"Yes, and unless all the furies in my behalf, if you will promise to be my wife immediately I am free if I succeed."

"I promise all you wish, Reuben."

"Then, for Mercy's sake, tell me what I am to do and end my torture."

"Go, and consult Marcus Spearwell, a lawyer whose address I will give you. Put your case unreservedly in his hands for he can be trusted to the death where there is a good fee to be obtained, and have no hesitation in agreeing to everything he advises. If he does not contrive some way to get the divorce I am greatly mistaken. Mention nothing in reference to me or our plans, remember."

"And you will marry me at once?"

"Yes, I will marry you whenever you are free," the beautiful demon softly whispered.

"Then, by Heaven! I'll do it, Letitia. You have made me happier than I hoped to be again, and I swear that years of devotion shall reward you."

"Now you must leave me," she getting late, so good night," and the two separated, the man to seek over the gleam he contemplated, and the woman to smile over the success of her plans.

The result of the unfaithful husband's interview with lawyer Spearwell is already known, and it is not too much to say that he began to regard the separation from his wife almost as good as a fact accomplished. Not a word, however, did he utter to the unsuspecting woman, respecting his intentions, and his treatment of her was, if anything, more gentlemanly than it had been for some time previously. His aim was to delude her so utterly until the visit of Spearwell's accomplice that she would never for a moment suspect him of conspiring against her.

Not an instant did he experience a desire to withdraw from the disgraceful compact which he had made. There was no pity in his heart for the woman whom he had at one time so fondly loved, and who had for so many years made her own happiness secondary to his. His moral nature had become like a tree blackened and splintered by the lightning—all its vitality was destroyed, and the great rain and sunshine might strive to nurse it again into life, the sap would never more produce bud or blossom.

Mr. Spotter had written to his lawyer appointing the night for his wife's visit, and Mr. Spearwell had duly instructed the respectable Mr. Reedy into the part he was to act. Neither entertained the slightest apprehension as to the success of their plans.

The evening arrived, and Spotter, for the life of him, could not feel at ease. His wife was reading by a table before him, looking the pure and good woman she was. Her hair now was slightly silvered with gray, notwithstanding that she was still comparatively young, but her heart sorrows had made her prematurely old, and though she still retained her husband with the feelings of a good wife, much of the great love she once bore him had been crushed out of her heart by neglect and harshness.

This evening, however, he was unusually gentle; the old smile wreathed his face, the old light, as she thought, shone in his eyes, and his suffering heart fluttered with a gladness to which it had long been a stranger, restoring some of what the lost sunshine of his life.

"What are you reading, Minnie?" he inquired. "You seem greatly interested."

"A book Mrs. March lent me," she replied, recasting it towards him. "It is 'No Name,' by William Collins—a curious title is it not? Have you ever read it?"

"No, indeed," he said with a faint smile, "novels are very little to my taste, even if I had the time to read them, which I have not. But you can tell me the plot."

"That would be difficult," she said turning to the introductory chapter where the writer so prettily explains the nature of his plot. "No, I cannot describe the plot until I have finished; but so far I am impressed with the bravery and determination of a pure woman who had wrong and injustice to fight against."

To be continued.

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