

and that was in the paper that she found next to Miss Philippa's heart—a marriage certificate. Thank God he had been man enough for that! Miss Abby knew the whole story. After the baby was born, untimely, on that bitter night, she had pieced it out from Miss Philippa's ravings in the delirium of the supervening fever—a story as old as the hills, as oft repeated as wave succeeds to wave on the sea of circumstance, but coming as a unique experience, with a new bitterness, in every instance: infatuation, possession, satiety, indifference, hatred, desertion! And a woman's expiation!

There were whispers which grew and grew until they were cried upon the housetops; there were inquiries covert and open; there were suspicions which assumed the force of certainty among the people roundabout; but no one questioned Miss Abby. She devoted herself to the care of Miss Philippa as if the woman who had been wife and mother was indeed a child. Vainly she sought to develop again the lingering remains of Miss Philippa's intellect. Over and over with a patience that was painful to think of, she taught Miss Philippa her letters, for instance. No more sternness, no more reprovings, no more warnings, came from Miss Abby. A keen observer might have said that after a time the house again contained sunshine and shadows this time Miss Abby was the sunshine—a fierce blaze kindled by anger, fed by desire, yet ever gentle to Miss Philippa, unconscious of it all.

Miss Abby still lived for two things: for Miss Philippa as she had always lived for her, and for revenge upon David Graham. Miss Philippa gave her little mental occupation; she was not so great a stimulus to her mind as an intelligent dog might have been, so that Miss Abby practically lived alone with a desire for some requital upon the man who had ruined the lives of the two women.

In her way—and it was a more dangerous way—Miss Abby was as mad as Miss Philippa. She pondered over the pages of the Old Testament just as the Ironside Cavalry had been wont to do two hundred fifty years before. Every denunciatory clause found an echo in her heart. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, evil for evil, blow for blow—so her gospel was written. She prayed day after day for its consummation. A desire to compass it was her obsession. The more powerful, the more intense, the more tremendous, was this feeling because she gave no outward sign of it. She only waited. She stayed quietly at home with Philippa, whose every mindless laugh pricked on her resolution.

Then civil war burst over the land. No spot in the country was more fought over than the fertile valley in which Heronshaw stood. The quiet strip of country became the granary of armies. Miss Abby's patriotism was unbounded. She discovered that she loved Virginia with a force which she had not realized until the demand was made upon her. Battles raged about her house. Armies marched in front of her door. Wounded and ill craved her attention. She did not refuse succor to the men in blue; but her heart went out to the stricken men in gray. The Union troops respected her, and the Confederate soldiers adored her. So she lived on unmolested by either side, impartially ministering to everyone in trouble, yet with her heart fixed in its allegiance to the flag that was barred rather than to that which was striped.

Summer in 1864. The men in gray had been fought to a standstill. The end was evident to officer and man. Weaker souls desert the losing battle. With stern determination the braver hearts strove in vain to check the abandonment of the cause by those who lacked the fortitude that sustains defeat. The way of a deserter, if he was caught, was hard.

Miss Abby was standing on the high, pillared porch scanning the white road before her. Suddenly through the hedge upon the other side of the road a figure crawled. Her eye was attracted to it. A man cautiously rose to his feet, stared up and down the road, then darted across it and plunged into the

neglected undergrowth bordering what remained of Heronshaw. Again he waited, watchful. Finding himself unobserved, he slunk through the grass under the trees, and stopped before the Hall. He had been wounded; there was a long scar across his face, and his cheek was marred by an ugly wound. He was a handsome man whose face and mouth were hidden by a mustache and beard. He wore a sergeant's chevrons upon his sleeve.

"For God's sake, Miss—" He stopped. "Ma'am, won't you please help me?" he went on, speaking entreatingly.

Miss Abby knew him at once, in spite of his beard and the change that years of hard living, and hard campaigning, perhaps, had wrought in him. She

had awaited him had he been captured—"I—I always admired you."

"I know," said Miss Abby. "Go in there. The window opens on a balcony at the back of the house. From there you can get to the roof."

"But if the soldiers come?"

"I will keep them off. You need not fear."

She observed with a fierce joy in her heart that he was trembling.

"I've fought through four years of it, Miss Abby," returned the shamefaced man apologetically, "as long as there was a chance of success; but the whole cause has gone to smash, and—"

"How were you wounded?" interrupted the woman.

"I was fired on by the guard yesterday when I tried to break away."

"I will do what I can for you," she said, closing the door and leaving him.

When the patrol of cavalry scouring the country for deserters, which had been hot upon his trail, drew up before the great door of Heronshaw, Miss Abby was ready for them. Without a compunction she told them that she had seen the deserter, that he had crossed the road and gone on. Such was her reputation that no man dreamed of questioning her statement. The officer, who had experienced her hospitality, accepted her words without hesitation. He led his men away, and when they had gone Miss Abby went up-stairs and summoned Graham from the roof.

"You are safe now," she said; "they have gone up the road."

"Did you tell them—"

"I lied to them. I told them that you were not here."

"God bless you, Miss Abby!" cried the man, seizing her hand and lifting it to his lips.

The woman suffered this action without a change of countenance.

"You are tired?" she said to him, somewhat coldly.

"Desperately."

"And hungry?"

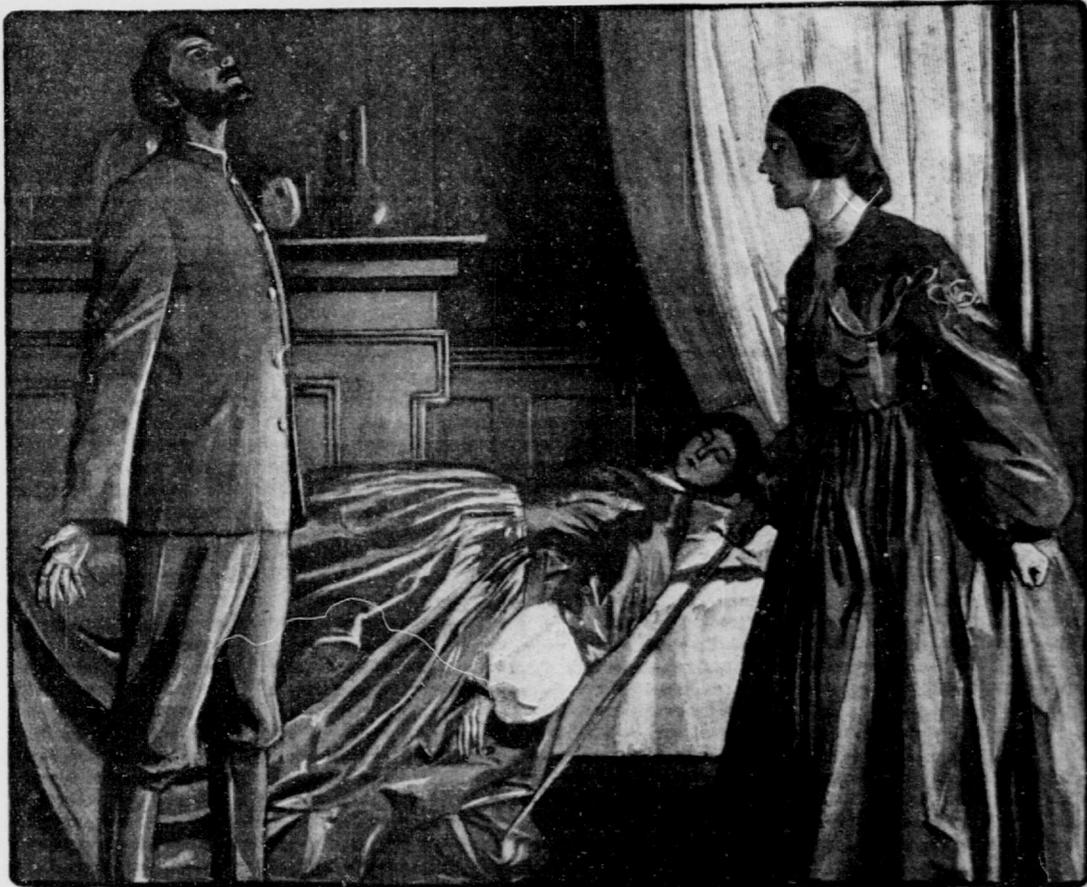
"I have eaten nothing since early yesterday morning. I have had no sleep all night. They hunted me like a runaway negro, curse them!"

"Come in here." She threw open a door. "This is my room. You will be safe here, undisturbed. No one enters. I will bring you something to eat."

She ministered to him like an angel. She washed and bound the wound upon his face. She brought him the best that the ravages of the war had left. The last bottle of wine of rare old vintage, which had remained concealed in the cellar, she gave to him. He expanded under her treatment as a flower in the sun. Safe, comfortable, well-fed, his fears left him. He became more like his old self. All his fascination came back to him. Actually he made love to this woman. Neither of them spoke of Philippa. And Miss Abby had given orders that she should not be disturbed. The feelings that ran riot in her breast are beyond description. She discovered to her horror that she still loved this man. Yet her decision to take revenge upon him with her own hand was as strong as ever. She had thought swiftly enough, as he stood a suppliant before her, a deserter from his colors, that she had only to say the word to see him executed; but that would not satisfy her. Her own hand must do the deed. Vengeance was hers, not God's.

She listened to him. She permitted him to ramble on. She did not discourage his efforts at love-making. She hated herself for her response to them. He would make love to a woman—any woman—if one foot was in the grave, she thought bitterly. She loathed him, yet she lingered. She spent a long time with him, and at last reluctantly withdrew and bade him rest. Forgetful of her as soon as she left him, he threw himself upon the bed, and fell at once into a sleep so sound that it was almost a stupor, while she waited listening outside the door.

Miss Abby had fully made up her mind to kill him. One of the precious treasures of her heritage had been the sword of the first Herondine, a long, straight,



"Strike!" He Said—Clenching Her Teeth, Miss Abby Lifted the Sword

schooled herself into absolute immobility. He had intended to make himself known to her; but after his first glance at her he came to the conclusion that she had not recognized him, and he decided that he would remain unknown, as the better part of discretion.

"I always am ready to help any loyal soldier who wears that uniform," said Miss Abby calmly.

There was a sudden patter of hoofs far down the road. The man and the woman both heard it at the same time.

"My God!" he said; "they are after me!"

"Are they Federal troops?"

"No," answered the man reluctantly, "our own cavalry."

"What! Then you are—"

"A deserter," desperately. "For God's sake, ma'am, hide me somewhere, unless you wish to see me shot here on this porch. I beg you, for—"

He intended to say "for Philippa's sake"; but Miss Abby interrupted him.

"I will help you," she said. "Come!"

The lingering remains of decency in the man smote him. Like all characters who are not wholly bad, who simply are weak, he could rise to the measure of obligation sometimes. He followed her into the house therefore, and as soon as he was concealed from outside view he stopped her.

"Miss Abby," he said, "I am—"

"I know who you are," said the woman quietly. "I knew you as soon as I saw you. Come, you have no time."

"And you will hide me for—for Philippa's sake?"

"What I do I do for her."

"Where is Philippa?"

"Dead—to you," answered Miss Abby slowly.

Fortunately Philippa was far afield down by the brook where she was wont to play with her faithful black mammy as a guard. If only Miss Abby could get Graham hidden before she came back and before the soldiers came up!

"Miss Abby," said the man, striving to catch her hand as they ascended the stairs—true to his instincts even in his frightful peril, for a short shrift would