

CONFESSIONS OF A WIFE

THE FEET OF CLAY

Herbert Spencer came to see me today, and a more-abject creature I never saw.

"What am I going to do, Mrs. Waverly?" he asked. "I am disgraced forever."

I really felt almost sorry for him, poor man. He had always had such a wonderful confidence in himself. I could not help thinking of poor Kitty's definition of him, "a pedestaled saint," and now even he himself had discovered that his feet were clay.

"The little blonde nurse was very pretty, Herbert."

"Damnably so!" he asserted with a groan.

"Why did you not marry her?"

"I thought that people would say I was unfeeling to marry so soon after Kitty's death."

"And so you made love in secret, rather than face the idle speech of people."

"She was always there with the child," he said as if in extenuation, "doing all those little intimate things that mothers do for babies. When she had the croup for three nights we both hung over her, watching every breath that we thought might be her last. I grew to love her, to want her. She seemed an ideal mother, and—and—well, she confessed she loved me. We both decided that we could not marry so soon after Kitty's death, but, alas, we could not keep apart."

"It seems to me, Herbert, that your worst sin after all was giving up this woman who loved you and announcing that you are going to marry some other woman."

Herbert covered his face with his hands. "Oh, Margie, I sometimes think that this awful thing has been sent to me in punishment for my egotism. I thought I was not as other men are, and I have found out that I am. Mrs. Almer is a very wealthy

woman. She can help me very much in my work. She has done so. I know she was interested in me before I married Kitty, and she let it be seen very patiently that she would not say no if I asked her to be my wife. At last she openly hinted that she must withdraw her support of the settlement if I married anyone else. She, too, is very pretty, very sweet." (You see, it is not the woman, but a woman, little book.) "Oh, if you could know how horrible it all was. I finally came to the conclusion it was not right to my poor to cast Mrs. Almer aside. Kitty had been dead a year and I asked her to be my wife."

"What did you think that little blonde nurse would do, Herbert?"

The color surged over his face. "I thought she would see it as I did, as something that was best to do."

"Why, of course, my dear Herbert, it was best for you—but what of her? Was it best for her to give up the child that she had cared for since its birth, and had probably grown to love with the same intensity as its mother might have done?"

"Was it best for her to try to strangle in her breast the thought that you had never loved her?"

"Was it best for her to lose some of her self-respect, for I believe it is only when a man leaves a woman who has given herself to him through overpowering love that remorse rears its ugly, terrifying head?"

"Was it best for her to know that in the future there would be lonely nights when sleep would never come to mercifully shut out the picture of another woman doing for you and your child? Was it?"

"Stop, Margie—I can't bear it. Can't you see that my decision was based on my duty to my poor people?"

"Herbert Spencer, it were better that every person—man, woman and child—in your settlement should live