

A FAMILY AFFAIR

BY HUGH CONWAY,

Author of "Called Back" and "Dark Days."

"How could you find him?" "He is sure to be in London. If not, there's those who can tell me where to find him. Say, I may go. Let me go to-day-to-morrow."

Beatrice mused. After all, the suggestion did not seem so absurd. Sarah was by no means a fool. She could travel to England alone perfectly well. She could hear what this man asked now. Why should she not let her go?

Mrs. Miller seemed on thorns of suspense. "Say I may go," she whispered. "I will think. I will think you by and by. Send my boy to me; I will think with him in my arms."

So the "shorlamb," as he was now called, came to his mother, and all the afternoon Beatrice considered Mrs. Miller's proposal. The more she considered the more inclined she felt to give it her consent.

In the evening she told her mother. She gave her many instructions which were not to be exceeded. She was to be firm, and above all have it clearly understood that he must sign a deed of separation, in which he relinquished all claim to the boy. Mrs. Miller nodded grimly. She was not likely to err on the side of mercy.

"Take plenty of money," said Beatrice. "Give him money if he asks for it. Make him understand that I have not concealed myself to save my money. That he can always have."

So it was arranged. Fully one-half of that night was spent by Mrs. Miller on her knees. She was alone—Harry asleep; with his mother as often as with his nurse—so she could offer up her wild prayers without interruption. If ever a fanatic wrestled with the Supreme Being in prayer it was Sarah Miller that night. For what did she pray? Perhaps it is as well not to ask, but to be contented with the assurance that she prayed for Beatrice's happiness.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE MADONNA DI TEMPI.
Beatrice's letter, after having been perused and commented upon by the Talberis, was sent on to Frank Carruthers. A note from Herbert was enclosed with it. "You will see"—he wrote—"that this letter is as unsatisfactory as its predecessor. It gives us absolutely no information as to where she is or why she left us. Now that we are assured of her being well, and, we suppose, safe, our feeling about her prolonged and unexplained absence is more than regret—it is, in fact, serious annoyance. We find it quite a strain to answer inquiries about her without contradicting one another."

Naturally the envelope which bore Herbert's handwriting was the first opened by Carruthers, and of course he read Beatrice's letter before he read Herbert's. He searched the former in vain for his own name, little thinking how the writer had sat for a long time before she could bring herself to seal her letter without sending him a crumb of comfort. He then read Herbert's commentary and smiled faintly as he drew a hitherto picture of Horace and Herbert making counter statements to their friends. He read a while, holding Beatrice's letter in his hand. Her fingers had touched that sheet of paper; so he actually pressed it to his lips, and in doing so caught a faint lingering odor of what he remembered was her favorite perfume. It was clear that Mr. Carruthers' disease was rampant as ever.

By and by he turned to see what else Fate had brought him. Nowadays Fate shoots many of her arrows from the general post-office. Carruthers found among other letters one addressed in a woman's handwriting. It had been sent to Oxford and at Oxford redirected to London. He opened it carefully and found it contained a half sheet of note paper, on which was written: "Remember your promise. Wait, oh, be patient and wait!"

Carruthers threw it aside with a bitter smile. He well knew who was the writer. Wait! What was there to wait for? However, the sight of those words brought back the memory of that strange nocturnal visit; of the woman's earnest, even impassioned appeal to him, to "wait five, ten, twenty years for the one he loved." Why should she write now and repeat the appeal? She who knew everything; she who had accompanied Beatrice and who was probably with her now.

He could not get the memory of that strange creature with her dreary belief, yet unwavering faith as to his own future, from his mind. At the time the woman's earnestness had impressed him more than he cared to confess. Superstition is a quality to the possession of which no man of our time is willing to own, not even to himself. Yet some men out of ten are superstitious.

Carruthers told himself that such hope as he had gathered from Mrs. Miller's words was simply gathered because he believed her to be in Beatrice's confidence. Here he was wrong. It was the woman's broad but absolute assertion, uttered with the passionate inspiration of a prophetess of old, that happiness in this world awaited him and Beatrice, which had been of aid to him in his trouble. If faith can move stubborn mountains, why not a heart which is willing enough to move in a particular direction?

And now this woman repeated her message, and, as Carruthers read the letter, told him his case was no more hopeless than it was months ago.

He took the note which he had crumpled up and tossed away; he spread it out and read it again. He found, moreover, that it was written on paper similar to that used by Beatrice, and upon turning it over he saw on the back a few words in pencil. They were written so faintly that he had to carry the note to a strong light in order to decipher them.

The words were "Madonna di Tempi," and to the best of his belief, as experts say when giving evidence, the handwriting was Beatrice's.

What did the words mean, and how far would they aid him in finding Beatrice? He soon settled in his mind that "Madonna di Tempi" must be the name of a picture. But what picture? Where was it to be found?

Of course, it did not follow that supposing he could ascertain all about this picture, which might or might not be a world-famed one, that he would find Beatrice near it. Nevertheless, the clue was worth following. He would have followed a finer clue than this to the end of the world on the chance of its leading him to Beatrice. So he at once set about the task of getting information, if information could be got, respecting a picture called the "Madonna di Tempi." He hoped, but his hopes were not very strong. Indeed, he could not help comparing his case to that of the fair Saracens, who found her lover by the aid of two words. Yet she was better off than he was. She at least had the name of a place for one of her talismanic words. He had the name of what he supposed to be a picture; nothing more.

Mr. Carruthers was not one of the inner circle of art worshippers. His artistic taste was under the sway of blue and white

china. He had no rhapsodies, written or spoken, to arise hereafter and prick his conscience. He had not bowed his knees to the intense, nor sacrificed on the altar of the incomprehensible. He was fond of pictures as pictures, and was bold enough to say he liked what he did like and that he disliked what he did dislike. Hence it will be at once seen that his opinion was worth nothing to say one except himself.

Having found the knowledge not indispensable, he could not, like many men, check off on his fingers the principal productions of the grand old masters and name the spot of earth on which each one could be found. But like the man who, when challenged to fight, replied, "I can't fight myself, but I have a little friend who can," and forthwith struck down his challenger with a short, stout poker, Mr. Carruthers, if he did not know these things himself, had a friend who knew.

This friend was a Mr. Burnett, a recognized art authority. Frank found Mr. Burnett at his rooms, writing—critiques on the recently opened exhibitions most likely.

"Do you know any picture called the 'Madonna di Tempi'?" asked Carruthers.

"A picture called the 'Madonna di Tempi.' Ah, yes. The 'Madonna di Tempi.' Painted by Raphael. You have heard of Raphael, Carruthers?"

"Where is it?" asked Frank quickly.

"It is in the Old Pinakothek."

"In the what?"

"My dear Carruthers, how ignorant you are! I thought you studied Greek at Oxford—Pinakothek is derived from a Greek word."

"I know all that, but where is it?"

"Your ignorance is deplorable. The old Pinakothek is in Munich. Munich, you may know, is the capital of—"

Frank jumped up. "Thank you," he said, "I am so much obliged."

"Not going, Carruthers? Oh, sit down and have a chat. Tell me all about your book. You must be dying to tell me all."

"No, I'm not. I must go now. Good-bye."

"But where are you going?"

"The words you read have fired me. I am going to Munich."

The smallest slips ruin the most cleverly devised schemes. The omission or the addition on a bill of exchange of a simple mark called a "tick," sent Messrs. Bidwell & Co. into retirement at the country's expense, instead of enjoying the fat of a foreign land at the cost of the old lady of Threadneedle street. An act of Beatrice's, that of penciling down in an idle moment the title of a picture which had struck her fancy, brought Mr. Carruthers in hot haste to her hiding place. Fate is turned by a feather!

CHAPTER XXX.
THE TRUTH AT LAST.

Carruthers reached Munich late at night. He went straight to that comfortable hotel the "Four Seasons," and, feeling that the hour was too late to begin his researches, supped and went to bed. In spite of his excitement at the thought of being in the same town as Beatrice, he slept soundly. Man is but mortal, and after traveling as fast as is possible from London to Munich, it takes a great deal to spoil a night's rest. So in the morning Carruthers arose refreshed and eager to begin the quest.

But how to begin it! He was not even sure that its object was in Munich. Because she had written down the name of a picture it did not follow she was near that work of art. She might only have paid Munich a flying visit—might now be miles and miles away. He grew very despondent as he realized the slender, fragile nature of the clue which he had so impetuously taken up and followed. Nevertheless, he vowed he would not leave Munich until he felt sure it did not harbor the fugitives.

He stepped through the swinging doors of his hotel and stood in the broad Maximilians-Strasse. He hesitated, uncertain what to do, which way to turn. So far as he could see, his only chance of finding Beatrice was meeting her in the public streets; his only plan was to walk about those streets until he met her. At any rate he would do nothing but this for the next few days. If unsuccessful he would then think whether he could apply to such persons as might be able to tell him what strangers were living in Munich.

He turned to the right, went across the Platz, and into the fair Ludwig-Strasse. He walked on with palaces on either hand until he came to the gate of victory. Preoccupied as Mr. Carruthers was, the number of magnificent buildings he passed greatly impressed him. However, he deferred his admiration until happier times.

A kind of superstition made him think it well to see the picture which had brought him so far. He inquired the way to the Old Pinakothek, and upon arriving there sought for and found the "Madonna di Tempi." He stood for a long time contemplating it, not because he so much admired it as in the hope that fate might bring Beatrice to his side. She did not come, so he bade the "Madonna" adieu, and after having run quickly through the large rooms and cabinets in the hope of encountering Beatrice, he left the building wishing that the living masterpiece he sought was as easy to find as that of the dead artist.

Keeping to what seemed the principal and most populous streets he found himself once more in front of his hotel. He started off in an opposite direction, went down the broad Maximilians-Strasse. More palaces, more statues, but no Beatrice. At last he stood on the stone bridge which spans the shallow but rapid Isar. He stopped and looked at the curious artificial bed of smooth planks over which the river runs; and then he looked down into the little triangular pleasure garden which lies between the two arms of the stream.

In the garden, on one of the seats, intently engaged with a book, sat Beatrice. Her little boy was playing near her. It needed not the sight of the boy to assure Carruthers he was not mistaken. Like all lovers, he was not mistaken. Like all lovers, he told himself he would have known that graceful head, that perfect form at least a mile away. Yes, there was Beatrice! The "Madonna" had not led him astray. Had

Carruthers been a Roman Catholic he might have shown his gratitude by the expenditure of pounds and pounds of wax candles. He stood for some time watching Beatrice. Now that he had found her he trembled at his own act. He trembled at the thought of what he had to say to her, what she had to say to him. He comforted himself by the assurance that he had only sought her, broken through her concealment, for the sake of giving, or at least offering, such help as he could give.

After this he walked slowly down to the garden and stood in front of her. She raised her eyes and knew him. Her book fell to the ground. She sprang to her feet and uttered a little cry, a cry that sounded very sweet to Mr. Carruthers, as it was unmistakably one of pleasure. At the unexpected appearance of the man she loved, for a moment there was no thought in her heart save that of joy. She stretched out her hands. "Frank! Frank!" she cried. "You here!"

"You here?" she asked, "You here?"

"You here?" she asked, "You here?"