

# The Wife's Secret, OR A BITTER RECKONING

By CHARLOTTE M. BRAHME

**CHAPTER IX.**

For some reason Pauline Melling was in a very irritable state of mind. Perhaps she was regretting the moment's impulse that had prompted her to accept a useless young painter. Babette, too, seemingly had a weight on her mind. She crept about her work, laying out Miss Melling's elegant evening toilet with a subdued air very different from her usual noiseless activity. Babette was doing her best to get through her duties, when, as ill luck would have it, memory for a moment asserted itself and brought before her a picture of a pretty black-eyed urchin tossing from side to side in his small cot and crying out her name unceasingly as he refused the cooling drink offered by a hand he did not love. The maid sobbed—sobbed audibly.

Miss Melling raised her eyes from their contemplation of the carpet and looked in dignified surprise at the young Frenchwoman. Noting for the first time the signs of tears on her face, Miss Melling felt angry.

"What in heaven's name is the matter with you, Babette? Pray don't let me have any weeping and wailing. If there is one thing that exasperates me more than another, it is a crying woman."

"Pardon, mademoiselle; the grief overcame me in spite of myself. I did not intend to speak; but, as you have noticed my sorrow, I will make bold to tell you that I have a little stepbrother, the only one being in the world who is related to me, and I have here a letter telling me he is very ill, and that he asks for me night and day—night and day. The poor girl's voice broke for a moment; but she rallied and went on: "If mademoiselle could spare me for just enough time to go to Boulogne and back to see the poor little fellow."

"And what am I to do in the meantime?" Pauline asked felly. "Of course you can go if you like; but you need not come back. I am surprised you should ask me such an insane thing, when you know the house will be full of people the day after tomorrow. I could not possibly do without you. Pray do not say another word about it, and please leave off crying."

Babette moved away to the far end of the room, wiped her eyes, and stood for an instant quite still, repressing the sobs that shook her frame.

"If my little Pierre dies without seeing me I will never forgive you—never! I will watch for a chance of doing you a great harm, and it will come if I am patient," she girl thought.

After dressing Miss Melling and making the dressing room tidy, Babette passed through the picture gallery on her way to Mrs. Perkins' sanctum for her usual cup of tea. Thinking everybody must be downstairs, she stopped at Jack's case, and looked at Pauline's picture.

"So you think the world is made for your pleasure? You are too high a lady to trouble yourself with your servant's affairs; but perhaps they will trouble themselves with yours, madame! I have seen you flinch and shiver up strategies sometimes. People don't shiver up for nothing, unless they have a fear of something; and if they have a secret fear, there must be something bad to cause it. If my little darling dies without the comfort of kissing his Babette, since it will be your fault; and all my life long I will watch, watch, watch, to try to repay your cruelty to me and him!"—and she looked as if she meant it.

Jack, who had stopped until the last moment finishing his rather difficult letter to Ethel in his own room, was struck by the intense hatred in the woman's face as she opened the door, wondered for the moment what could have caused it, wished the next that he could call it up at will and use her as a model for a head, and the next moment forgot all about it. Throwing his letter on the hall table, he hurried into the drawing room to make his peace for being late.

Babette had her quiet cup of tea with Mrs. Perkins, and, with a plentiful shedding of tears, wrote to the woman who had charge of little Pierre, to say that she could not come to her darling just now.

The letter was full of loving messages and promises, and the poor girl's heart felt very heavy as she put it into the bag. She had taken it into the hall herself. There was another letter lying there ready stamped for the post; she took it up eagerly, recognized it by the red seal as the one Jack had had in his hand when he passed her in the gallery, and stood transfixed with surprise as she read the address.

"The address of that pretty demoiselle that I followed home from the museum, by her orders! Why, there is something in this! Why, if she wants the address of a lady who is known to Monsieur Dornton, does she not ask him, instead of setting me to follow her like a policeman? I shall have that to find out!"

"Babette, I want you," Mrs. Perkins called from the door that shut off the servants' quarters.

Something in the voice, some subtle touch of sympathy, struck Babette's quick ear. She turned as sharply that Mrs. Perkins had not time to conceal the black bordered letter she held in her hand. With a heart rending cry, Babette started forward and snatched the letter from her.

She was a quick, impetuous, unreasoning and unreasonable creature; she did not stop to consider that she could not have reached the child even if Pauline had given her instant consent. She remembered only that her mistress had been cruel to her in the time of her trouble; and she registered a vow that, if there was any secret in Pauline Melling's past life, she would hunt it out and humiliate her.

A letter lay by Ethel's plate; but she did not touch it. Mr. Mallitt, self-absorbed as ever, did not notice how his daughter was struggling to preserve her usual composure all through the breakfast time.

Jack Dornton had not intended to be equal when he wrote; but, after destroy-

blow to him when he found himself robbed of everything by his brother's injustice. What did he do? Where did he go?

"I don't know. He is as proud as any of the family, and when his brother told him never to come near the place again, he put on his hat without one word, and walked away with his head as high as if he were the heir of thousands. We've never seen a sight of him since that day, and it's my belief we never shall."

Babette believed she had found the key to Pauline's secret trouble. That there was secret trouble she never doubted for an instant. She had observed her mistress too closely to be misled on that point; she knew that nothing but some slight fear could cause those sudden starts, followed by periods of anxious, heavy-browed thought, to which she was subject. And, when Babette went upstairs, she reasoned the matter out.

"I have heard that she never knew she was her uncle's heiress until after her father's death. What is more likely there than she should have married out there in Italy—married some poor idiot who was caught by her pretty face? And then, when my lady suddenly finds that she is a rich woman, she is tired of this poor fool, and runs away and enjoys her life by herself. I believe I have found the dark spot in my fine lady's life! If this is as I think, I can take from her her beloved fiance and her riches at one blow. How glorious that would be!"

Her face glowed with savage satisfaction at the bare thought of so complete a revenge. She left her seat by the bay window of Pauline's dressing room, and paced up and down, her excitement being too great for her to remain still. The dusky gloom deepened until the room was all in shadow, and presently a housemaid came in and lighted the candles in the large silver branches on the toilet table.

As the door closed behind the maid Babette resumed her promenade, and came to a sudden stop as her eyes rested on the key left in the lock of a small bureau box. This box contained Miss Melling's private keys! She looked up very little, but what she did look up she was rather particular about, and her keys were invariably kept in this Indian box, the key of which she carried about with her.

As Babette stood looking with a dull, fascinated gaze at the key, she heard the rustle of silken skirts in the gallery outside. With a swoop like a hawk's, so swift and noiseless was it, she plucked the little key from the lock and slipped it into the pocket of her dainty frilled apron. The next instant Miss Melling turned the handle of the door and saw Babette rearranging the lace draperies round the looking glass. She crossed the room and went straight to the table, glanced quickly at the box, and then turned to Babette.

"Have you seen the key of this box?"

"Not to-day, mademoiselle."

"Proving!" She took it up in her hands and shook it. Yes, the keys are inside. Babette, I wish you not to leave these rooms to-night until I come up to bed. I have dropped the key somewhere. I don't suppose it will be found until we have daylight to help us—it is so small. Have your supper sent up to you here."

"Very good, mademoiselle."

Babette stood with her hands held tightly over her heart, listening to the rustle of the silken skirts along the gallery and down the stairs. Then her expression changed from strained attention to vivid triumph. She threw her clasped hands high over her head. She locked both doors, closed one window to prevent the blinds from rattling, and then unlocked the small bureau box. She laughed as she picked out a key from the bunch and tried to unlock Pauline's large desk.

"At last!" she whispered, as the lock of the desk flew back.

(To be continued.)

**Just Reckoning.**

"You say your beard began to grow when you were 16," remarked the visitor at the dime museum. "May I ask how long it has taken you to bring it to its present magnificent proportions?"

"Sir," said the Bearded Lady, justly incensed, "you are the first man that has ever dared to ask my age!"—Chicago Tribune.

**Chance for Him.**

"Ah!" sighed the fair maid. "I knew what it is to have loved and lost."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the surprised youth, who had hopes that her father would give him a job as son-in-law some day.

"Yes," explained the fair one. "Poor, dear Fido passed in his checks this morning."

**Saying and Thinking.**

"Why is it," asked the young widow, "that you old bachelors say such horrid things? Married men never talk that way."

"That's easily explained," replied the o. b. "A bachelor is in a position to say what a married man is only permitted to think."

**Feminine Way.**

Mrs. Homer—Our new neighbor is an awfully forward woman.

Homer—In what way?

Mrs. Homer—Why, when I called on her this afternoon she proceeded to tell me all about the trouble she has with servants before I had a chance to tell her mine.

**Artful Dodger.**

He—Then I may hope?

She—Well, you may ask papa.

He—Impossible.

She—Why do you say that?

He—Because I haven't been able to get sight of him since I loaned him \$10 before Christmas.

**His Idea of It.**

The Minister—Young man, you should be making preparations for eternity.

Young Man—I am, sir. The girl I am engaged to is taking lessons at a cooking school.

The red snow, which is found in the Alps and in some parts of the Rocky Mountains, owes its hue to a microscopic plant of a bright red color.

**PRESCIENCE.**

Still the sky was gray and grim,  
By the winter's breath congealed;  
Bare and gaunt were bush and limb,  
White and bleak were moor and field,  
But beneath the frozen sod  
Burst a host of blossoms, shy,  
Saying, with triumphant nod:  
"Spring is nigh!"

Through the grove a rustle crept:  
Neighbor unto neighbor spoke;  
Drowsy who for long had slept  
In their culls of bark awoke,  
Felt a subtle, eager thrill,  
Stretched their arms, by rigor numb,  
Passed the word o'er vale and hill:  
"Spring is come!"

"Blind, insensate things!" I thought,  
"All the world is ice and snow;  
Yours a hope too dearly bought,  
As a few short days will show.  
Spring, you prate? When deep amid  
Frost and drift the leaf and spear?"  
But, behold, 'e'en while I chide  
Spring was here!

—New England Magazine.

**THE CASE OF FLORA.**

WILLIBERT FRAREY was already spoken of as "an old bachelor" when he first went to board with Mrs. Albrecht. He was 23 then, a man of somewhat particular habits, none of them very sociable. What he wanted was a quiet, comfortable place to board, as homelike as possible and free from any annoyance from other boarders. He offered Mrs. Albrecht unimpeachable references and demanded the like of her, caution being his strong point. Even then he would only take the room for a week, having his doubts of Flora Albrecht, a maid of 14. He feared she might be noisy and he wanted to try the place before he definitely settled down.

At the end of the week, however, he sent for his trunks, congratulating himself upon the circumstance of having at last found something that suited him. Mrs. Albrecht was a quiet, neat, self-contained little woman who did not bother him with attempts at conversation, kept his room in perfect order and gave him a good breakfast and dinner. What more could he want? As for Flora, the lanky daughter with the usually tousled mane of light hair, Frarey saw scarcely anything of her heard less.

On his part, Frarey was a model boarder, quiet, regular and prompt in his settlements. He paid monthly now. The experimental stage had passed and as far as he knew he was willing to spend the rest of his days with the Al-



WITH AN AIR OF EMBARRASSMENT.

brechts. He went down to the wholesale grocery house, where he had an excellent position, every morning at 8 o'clock and returned at 4:30—in time for dinner. Sometimes he spent the evening in his room, reading an improving book, sometimes he went out to hear an improving lecture.

Frarey was totally indifferent to the budding charms of Flora, who was really as hearty and wholesome a girl as need be. It was a year or two before she began to bud at all—two years at least before Frarey took any notice of the fact. She wore her first pompadour for three evenings before he observed even that. A year later he thought about Frarey, meeting her in the hall, saw that she was wearing an uncommonly attractive white dress and mentally remarked that she had beautiful white teeth that showed to advantage when she smiled.

Then Flora went away somewhere to take a course of the higher education. Perhaps Frarey missed her, but he hardly knew. It is certain that in a general way and without any reference to anybody in particular he had occasional thoughts of settling down in a home of his own. It would be nice to have some one to read the improving books to and to take to the improving lectures. That was all it amounted to—just hazy general thoughts.

But when Flora returned a year later with charms that now began to blossom from the bud his reflections became more definite.

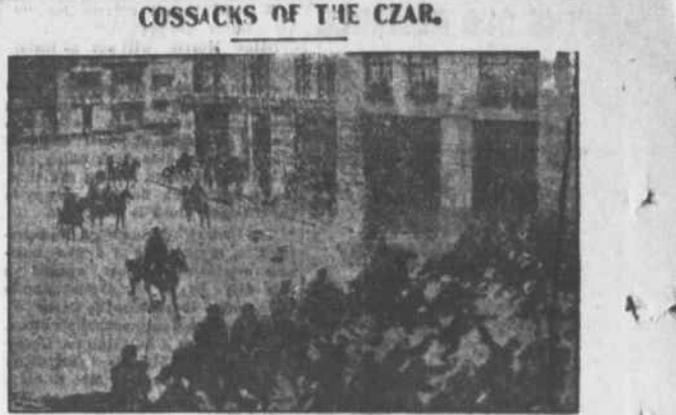
"I'd best go slow about this," he said to himself. "A man needs something more than pearly teeth and a rosy complexion to make him comfortable."

So he did not encourage her, though, when she went away the following June for her second year, he bought her "The Stones of Venice" and the North American Review to read on the train for which she was very grateful.

Time passed and Flora came back. On the evening of her arrival what he called her improvement almost took Frarey's breath away. Her former prettiness had become actual beauty and her conversation, which Mrs. Albrecht no longer attempted to restrain, was bright.

The next morning Frarey met Flora on the stairs and as he stood aside to let her pass she, too, stopped.

"Mr. Frarey," she said, with a charming air of embarrassment



**COSSACKS OF THE CZAR.**

News dispatches from various parts of Russia report how the Cossacks have made brutal use of their sabers and whips against the excited people. The Cossack's whip is an instrument of torture, and it is used by these semi-barbarian followers of the Czar with wonderful expertise. Generally the whip has but one thong or lash; occasionally it has two or three. The end of each thong is loaded with a bit of iron or lead to render the pain and wound inflicted more intense. A Cossack has been known to pick an eye from a man's face with a blow of his miniature knout. He can split an apple on a man's head with a cut of the lash, and he can snip off the burning end of a match held in a comrade's fingers. But no thoughts as to accuracy of stroke govern him when confronted with a vengeful, howling mob. Then he simply lays about him with the full strength of his lusty arm, and the recipient of the blows will remember for a lifetime that he has had an encounter with these dreaded hirelings of absolutism.

The Cossacks are said to be of Tartar origin. They generally inhabit the steppes of Russia about the lower Don and Dnieper, but are found in lesser number in eastern Russia, Caucasia and Siberia. Ethnologists are uncertain as to their origin, but their nucleus is supposed to have consisted of refugees from the ancient limits of Russia forced by hostile invasion to adoption of military organization, and later into a more or less free tribal existence. They have indulged in many unsuccessful revolts against the Czar, ending in their subjection, but they retain various privileges. With regard to their military prowess they were surrounded with a certain amount of romance, like the French zouave and the Prussian shikan; but the war with Japan has tended to dispel much of the glamour that attended their alleged exploits.

The Cossack was supposed to be unparalleled as a scout—in fact, he was supposed to be the eye and soul of the Czar's legions. But the unpretentious cavalryman of the Mikado has shown that as a scout and fighter he ranks as high, if not higher, than the vaunted Cossack. The Cossack generally is armed with a rifle without bayonet, and with a sword, which has no scabbard. The front ranks of most Cossack regiments also carry lances. At the beginning of the war with Japan it was estimated that there were 130 regiments of Cossacks of six squadrons each and eighteen of four squadrons, besides fifty-three independent squadrons. Army service with them begins at the age of 18 and lasts for twenty years, seven of which is in actual service, and generally they provide most of their own equipment.

"Mother tells me that some of your things need mending. There are—er—some socks that need darning and other things. You know, mother never had much time for such things, but I have, and—I wonder if you would let me try my hand at them?"

"What would you have thought in such a case?"

At first the mending and darning were done rather roughly and unskillfully, but Frarey didn't care for that—not a cent. He would have had to throw the socks away in any event. But the improvement was rapid and in a short time an incredible neatness was shown in the darns. Within a week Frarey, commenting on the excellence of the bread at table, was informed that Flora had made it.

Still Frarey hesitated, not from any misgiving now, but from sheer diffidence. He brought books often now and candy once or twice. Gradually he tried to accustom himself to the idea of an engagement and matrimony. He had long reveries in the solitude of his room.

One evening he was indulging his fancy in this way when he thought he heard voices on the steps below his window. His room was on the second floor. Yes, one of the voices was Flora's. It was her laugh. The other voice was manly.

A chill of apprehension came over Frarey. He approached his window and stealthily, noiselessly raised it and listened. He was just in time.

"No, dear," Flora was saying; "I won't consider anything but house-keeping, and, Dick, you have no idea how domestic I am getting. I can do lots of things—cook, make bread, mend, darn socks—I've been practicing on Mr. Frarey's poor man. But he was very sweet over my early failures. I used to think him such an awful crank, but lately he's got to be just the dearest old thing!"

Frarey shut down the window hastily.—Chicago Daily News.

**HON. JOHN C. SPOONER.**

President Will Depend Much Upon Him This Session.

There are two important matters of legislation before the present Congress in which President Roosevelt will depend upon Senator John C. Spooner, of Wisconsin, for considerable assistance. One is the Panama Canal legislation and the other railroad rate regulation. On two previous



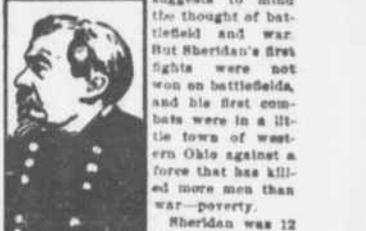
HON. JOHN C. SPOONER.

occasions he saved the Panama Canal legislation and the President sees in him his chief reliance in the coming debate on that subject. What part he will take in the Senate fight on the railroad matter has not been outlined, but he is a recognized authority on constitutional questions and is the legal adviser of the Senate leaders. He is also chairman of the Committee on Rules.

Senator Spooner is 62 years old, a graduate of Wisconsin University and a Civil War veteran. He is in the Wisconsin Legislature as a young man and sat in the United States Senate from 1865 to 1891, when William F. Vilas succeeded him. In 1892 he was defeated for Governor, and in 1897 was elected Senator at Washington, being re-elected in 1903. President McKinley on several occasions offered him places in his cabinet, which he declined. He is one of the really great men of the Senate.

**A LITTLE LESSON IN ADVERSITY.**

No accustomed are we to think of Gen. Philip Sheridan entirely as a military hero that adversity naturally suggests to mind the thought of battlefield and war.



But Sheridan's first fights were not won on battlefields, and his first combats were in a little town of western Ohio against a force that has killed more men than war—poverty.

Sheridan was 12 years old when he went to work in a country store. His wages amounted to 50 cents a week. He was industrious and he was capable. How the boy ever managed to live on such a stipend is cause for wonder. He lived at home, but the family was correspondingly poor. Nearly two years afterward Sheridan was receiving a dollar and a half a week, and at the age of 17 he was acting as bookkeeper and manager at the munificent salary of \$3 weekly.

He had cherished ambitions of becoming a soldier. He now applied to a member of Congress for appointment to West Point. The Representative was pleased with Sheridan's ambition, determination and the power he had already exhibited of conquering obstacles and, though most of the places in the military academy were given to sons of veterans of the Mexican war, he secured the appointment for the young man.

Sheridan realized keenly his need of wider knowledge, and would often hang blankets in the windows of his room in order to be able to study after the signal had sounded for lights out. His later career is a matter of history. But that it was won by the same determination that overcame the narrow environments and petty opportunities of a little village and carved success for himself is evident to all who read his story.

Men and women get along surprisingly well, considering how much the men know about the women, and how much the women suspect about the men.