



N Society

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FEMALE WEAKNESS.

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TO ACT AS A FOOD FOR CONSUMPTIVES WYETH'S LIQUID MALT! IS STRONGLY RECOMMENDED BY PHYSICIANS

A MOTHER'S SACRIFICE; OR, WHO WAS GUILTY?

By Christine Faber, Authoress of "Carroll O'Donoghue."

CHAPTER III.

Madame Bernot's evidence was taken—taken in her own room while Margaret stood beside her, pale and nervous enough to have been considered another invalid.

The young girl never forgot that morning. From the time that her own examination had been concluded she had watched for this promised official visit to her aunt, and she had recognized at first sight the face which looked out from the carriage that stopped before the door—it belonged to the gentleman who had suggested that this evidence should be obtained.

She flew to the sick room, dismissed the attendant with an injunction to rest, as she was now prepared to wait on her aunt, and when she was summoned to meet the strangers she rang for Annie Corbin to attend Madame Bernot.

Three men met Margaret on her entrance to the parlor. The professional man whose suggestion was the cause of this visit, said blandly: "You shall see, Miss Calvert, that we have arranged every detail of this case in such a manner that the slightest alarm cannot be given to your aunt. This gentleman," pointing to a florid-faced man on his right, "is a physician; he will ask all the questions so that Madame Bernot shall be led to think that she is simply answering a doctor's necessary inquiries. You can prepare her, if you choose, by telling her that he is skilled in such cases and you have engaged his services for her."

"And this gentleman," pointing to a sharp visaged man on his left, "is a reporter who will accurately note down everything that occurs."

Margaret only bowed, but she fancied that the fluttering of her heart could be seen through her dress as she left the room.

She knelt beside Madame Bernot while Annie Corbin retired to a window, and said with as much firmness as she could assume: "Aunt Bernot, an eminent physician is in the parlor. I heard of his skill in the cases of others and so have engaged him to visit you. For my—Hubert's sake, allow him to see you."

"Dear child!" was the reply; "it takes long to convince you that my disease is beyond all earthly remedy—my sufferings are entirely in God's hands."

"But see him," pleaded Margaret, "for just this once; I wish it so much."

"Be it so, then," the invalid answered, and she fixed her eyes on their usual resting place, the picture of Christ's bleeding head.

The three professional gentlemen evidently were not prepared for the sight of this patient, suffering woman. Only one, he who was to make the inquiries, came in her sight; the other two, in obedience to a request from Margaret, remained near the door, so that Madame Bernot supposed she was in the presence of only one stranger. They looked embarrassed for the first few moments, and the physician hesitated as if fearful how to begin.

At length he commenced by inquiries about the amount of pain she suffered, all of which Madame Bernot patiently answered. Then he asked the length of time she had thus suffered.

"My niece will have to tell you," was the reply. "I remember no dates and know nothing of the passing of time. I am simply here waiting the Master's call."

It was impossible to discredit her. Her angelic face, her clear eyes, with their peculiarly touching expression, told too convincingly the truthfulness of her statement.

The physician again hesitated while he pretended to rub softly the helpless hands lying in her lap, and when he spoke his voice slightly trembled. He asked a few unimportant questions.

Poor Margaret! the lump was returning to her throat. But Madame Bernot answered as quietly as before: "Neither am I able to answer that question. Since it has been the Divine will to afflict me, I have allowed little incidents to drift in and out of my life without thinking, or even after remembering the time of their happening. All I know is, that my son was here; he kissed me while I sat as I am sitting now, and left me. My niece will give you any further particulars you may wish; and, pardon me, but I seldom give so much time to strangers."

The expression of her eyes still fixed on the picture, and the motion of her lips, conveyed to her immediate listeners the fact that she was praying.

The physician glanced again for his cue, and receiving a nod from the lawyer signifying that sufficient questions had been asked, said he would leave his directions with Madame's niece, and he departed gently from the room, followed by his companions and Miss Calvert.

All repaired to the parlor, Margaret going slowly that she might gain time to calm herself.

The gentlemen grouped themselves near the door, and Margaret, on entering, leaned slightly against a marble pillar which supported a large arabesque vase, and asked in a low tone:

"Are you satisfied, gentlemen?"

The lawyer had been talking eagerly to his companions, and he answered Miss Calvert in the same eager tones:

and then he casually inquired about her immediate attendance, saying that hers was such a peculiar case she should seldom be left entirely to the charge of hired nurses.

Margaret tremulously answered: "I attend her most of the time."

The gentleman assumed a more confident air. He was slowly but surely approaching his point, and he felt sanguine of success. Raising his eyes to Miss Calvert's face, he said:

"But this case does not devolve entirely upon you—there are other relatives I presume—"

"My son!" interrupted Madame Bernot with true maternal tenderness in her voice.

"So there is an equal division of the duty, I suppose," he said, smilingly. "You have reason to be proud, my dear madame, of such dutiful kindred; but I shall have some directions to give that the case which your case requires may be rendered in accordance with my mode of treatment, and, if possible, I should like to see your son."

"He is not at home," said Madame Bernot; "he is travelling."

"Ah, then!" looking again at Miss Calvert, "the affectionate duty does devolve entirely upon you."

He bent his head to Madame Bernot's hands and appeared to study intently their delicate veins.

Margaret bowed her head and tried to quiet the wild beating of her heart. She knew he was but seeking a pretence on which he might ask one question of the invalid; and what if the latter should correctly answer? The girl's heart beat wilder at the thought, and a choking sensation came into her throat.

The physician lifted his head and looked sharply into the sick woman's eyes.

"At some time in your life," he said, slowly, "you have received a very severe shock, of which your present condition is the consequence. Your mental state now is far from being quiet, and you have experienced recently some new agitation—perhaps due to the departure of your son—which has left baneful effects. When did you last see your son?"

Margaret's heart gave a thump, which, to her excited imagination, seemed as if it must be as audible to every one in the room as it was to herself; and the choking sensation in her throat increased, till it seemed to her that she must be experiencing all the sensations of a drowning person.

Madame Bernot's eyes had not once turned from the vivid picture opposite.

She was not startled by the physician's words, for every practitioner who had treated her, had told her that her illness was the result of a severe shock to the mental system; neither was she surprised by the rather abrupt and unnecessary question with which he had concluded. She answered, quietly:

"I have said before that I keep no account of time. My son was here, but he has gone. The time of his departure I am unable to tell you. He says will tell you when."

The strange sensation went suddenly out of Margaret's throat, and she spoke with quite firm when she answered—the same answer that she had given in the court room.

The physician looked discomfited, and made a hasty glance over Madame Bernot's shoulder at the two silent figures near the door—one so busily writing—as if imploring help in his emergency. The lawyer answered with a glance that seemed to say:

"On no account must you give up yet."

And the medical man swept his hand across his forehead, and said in a slightly nervous tone:

"I should like to know precisely, my dear madame, for the reason that it is necessary for me to have such particulars in order to determine with greater accuracy upon your case—have you the goodness to make an attempt to remember—was it in the day time or in the evening that your son took his leave of you? Perhaps in that way we shall arrive at the exact time."

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"Are you satisfied, gentlemen?"

The lawyer had been talking eagerly to his companions, and he answered Miss Calvert in the same eager tones:

"By no means satisfied; the case remains precisely where it was before. We have gained nothing; we have learned nothing. Sufficient evidence has not been elicited to warrant the arrest of Mr. Hubert Bernot; and this murdered man will not be avenged just yet. It is probable that the case will be dropped now, for others do not entertain my views of this affair; but murder will out in this as in other instances, and when it does, you and I shall meet again. That you may not forget me, here is my card."

He placed in her listless hand a little square of enameled pasteboard, on which she read, in a mechanical way, the single and singular word:

"ROQUELAIRE."

Even in her strange state of feeling the singularity of the inscription struck her, and she found herself wondering if that was the name of the gentleman; and then she looked at his heavy face again, and seemed to be making a special examination of each one of his features. They were not easily forgotten—square cut, and prominent, and yet with a heavy, fathomless expression about them which, on first sight, frequently conveyed the idea of lack of intelligence.

He seemed to desire her close inspection for a few minutes, then, as the mental examination still continued, he turned to his companions and signified his wish to depart. Margaret accompanied them to the door in a half abashed way.

The lawyer was the last to descend the stoop, and while his companions entered the carriage, he paused to say to Miss Calvert in a significant tone:

"You may calm your fears; nothing more will be done for a while; but remember, that truth is sometimes strangely revealed."

He followed his companions into the carriage, while Margaret turned from the door and repaired to her aunt's room.

"Did this eminent physician leave a prescription dear?" Madame Bernot asked, as her niece having motioned Annie to withdraw, took her accustomed place beside the invalid's chair, and there was a slight smile on the patient's face.

"No, ma'am," was the reply. "I think your case puzzled him."

"I think it did," said the invalid, "and I think also he asked rather strange questions, but I suppose the cunningness of his profession made it necessary for him to do so."

Her eyes returned to the picture and it was evident that she wished all thought of the late visit dismissed.

Annie Corbin's face on her descent to the kitchen wore a half frightened expression, which at once attracted the attention of the cook, who had leaned to her with a sympathizing look in her own countenance, and asked:

"Have they gone? And how does that young creature up stairs feel?"

Cook's sharp wit had discovered the object of that unusual visit as quickly and correctly as Miss Calvert herself had done.

Annie told hurriedly all that her memory retained of the conversation between Madame Bernot and one of the strangers, at which the cook sagely shook her head, and made other signs that there was an assured connection between Annie's statement and her own previous thoughts of the affair.

"What does it all mean?" Annie concluded, "surely, Miss Calvert had never anything to do with that murder?"

"Is it only on me the burden is pressing; he has cast it off."

With what a hearty greeting he met each one of the domestics!

Annie Corbin said when he had left them:

"Just his being home makes the house like another place!"

And Hannah Moore, when she was alone that night, soliloquized:

"An' it's on him, the kind hearted gossamer, he wanted to put the crime! Thank God, I said nothing!"

Hubert partook of the tempting dishes prepared for him in his mother's room, where her eyes could fix their loving glances upon him. As if to apologize for her desire to have it so, she said, smilingly:

"I wish to feast my eyes this once; we have been parted so long."

But when he had partaken of the repast she insisted that he should retire for rest after his journey, and he playfully obeyed. Margaret as usual busied herself about the invalid; but there was a choking sob in her throat and a squeezing pressure about her heart which made her gladly resign her charge to the attendant, and seek her own room.

As she was about to ascend the stair, she heard her name called from the hall below and looking over the balustrade she saw Hubert standing there. He beckoned to her, and when she reached his side he drew her into the library.

"I must see you, Margaret," he said, "I could not go to my room without speaking to you, and I waited for you, feeling that you must soon come forth."

He closed the door, and, leaning against it, extended his hands with just such a cry as that with which he had extended them to her on the night after his crime.

Ah! the mask had fallen completely from his countenance and his manner, and Margaret shuddered at the suffering face which met her.

"Help me, Margaret, help me!"

The cry found an echo in her own sad soul, and the pressure about her heart and the sob in her throat dissolved in a passion of tears. The sight of her grief seemed to have a soothing effect upon him, for he took

a boarder, who had mysteriously disappeared from his house. He had been an inmate of the house but a few days, and had given his name as Cecil Carter.

The authorities immediately proceeded to the room which Carter, or Clare, had occupied, but, beyond a trunk filled with handsome clothes a few letters bearing the signature of the banking-house in Germany of which Mr. Plowden had spoken, and a check for a large amount of money, payable at one of the city banks, they found nothing to show what friends he had possessed.

A letter asking for particular information of him had been despatched immediately to Germany, and the reply tallied exactly with what Mr. Plowden had told of the dead man's affairs. The check had also been forwarded to Europe, but his watch, and ring and clothes disappeared through some of the meshes of the law.

So, at last, the public regarded the affair as one of those mysteries which would only be cleared at the Divine Judgment Seat.

Hubert Bernot's letters came regularly, and Margaret always hastily scanned the contents before she read them to her aunt, lest there might be a sentence referring to the fearful event of the past weeks, or a stray word to betray the unhappy state of the writer's feelings; but each missive was calmly, even happily, written—detailing only the pleasant events of his journey, or describing in his graphic way, the novel sights he witnessed.

Margaret in her replies was equally careful not to touch on the murder; but she thought sorrowfully how his crime seemed to weigh less upon him than the knowledge of it did upon her. She carried about with her a worm, the gnawing of which never ceased. Her face never for a moment now lost its sad expression, and her manner, contrary to its old wont, was frequently languid and abstracted.

Months went by, and at length a letter from Hubert announced his speedy return.

"God is very good," said Madame Bernot, "to have spared me to see my son again." And she smiled, but made no remark when Margaret said to her one bright morning:

"This is the day Hubert has fixed for his return to us."

Miss Calvert herself was nervous and writhed. An undefinable dread had seized her—a terror which she felt would not desert her even in his presence; so she went forth slowly from the carriage, which had gone to meet him, returned, and she heard him alight, and a moment after his quick springing step on the stoop.

He did not wait for the door to be fully opened, before he bounded within, and bestowed on Margaret a passionate greeting.

He was too eager, too excited to notice that she hardly returned his affectionate salute, and he proceeded to inquire hurriedly for his mother.

"Her health is the same," said Margaret. And she led the way to her aunt's room.

He wore such a bold, confident air; he looked so handsome and well, even his mother delightedly commented on his appearance.

While a special repast was being prepared for him he entertained his two auditors with a lively description of his tour; and when he rose to visit the servants, as had always been his wont after a lengthy absence, Margaret thought with a sick heart:

"It is only on me the burden is pressing; he has cast it off."

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her hand between his own and said tenderly:

"My poor, brave darling! that I could take this cup from you; that I could pour back into my own heart the bitterness that has come into your life—but bear it for me awhile, and one day perhaps you shall be free; but not yet, not yet!"

He released her suddenly, and, resuming his former position against the door, continued, his voice sinking to a hoarse, ominous sounding whisper.

"You are the only one to whom I can wear my own face. To every one else I show the mask you saw me wear below. I have worn that mask during all the time of my absence, and I fancy that I have schooled myself to wear it even in my sleep. I jested and laughed with the very paper in my hands in which I saw the rigid means they were adopting to discover the murderer. I laughed the loudest when my fears of arrest were greatest. Unexpected grips made me start, and strange voices suddenly speaking made me shudder, but mightily effort kept start and shudder from being perceived."

"I shouted with mirth when there were gaunt devils whispering all sorts of evil things to my black heart. I thought time would insure me to my wretched secret, but it has failed to do so most miserably. If the phantom which pursues me grows a little dim while I am talking to others, and light and mirth are around me, it is only to come on me more startlingly distinct when I am alone—to pursue me relentlessly then, to hold me, and compel me to look at the bloody thing as it was—as it is!"

He stopped suddenly and put his hands before his eyes, as if he saw that which he was describing.

His words were harrowing Margaret's soul. She, too, covered her face, not to shut out the imaginary scene he pictured, but that she might not look upon his suffering.

In her pity for him she had almost ceased to pity herself.

Minutes elapsed before either looked up, and then it was Hubert who withdrew his hands first and said in that same dread whisper:

"I have disclosed to you now a part of the agony which I continually suffer. I have been so long alone with it that the mere telling of it to you has afforded me intense relief. It has given me courage to assume my mask again and to wear it perhaps even in your presence. I shall plunge into the work I have planned for myself, letting the worm that is here, placing his hand on his heart 'gnaw, till it has eaten the very cords which bind me to life.'"

He turned away, moving with a firm step toward the centre of the room. Margaret followed; her own sad heart was full of tenderness, now that she knew he had not cast aside his wretched burden.

She had words of hope and comfort upon her lips, speaking them sweetly, while her face had such an expression as an angel might wear. He listened calmly, and even something like hope lit up his own countenance, until she said:

"And after a little, Hubert, God, in pity for your suffering, and in love for your repentance, will give you grace to kneel at His tribunal and confess."

He became furious:

"If you would drive me to commit suicide name confession again. I tell you I shall never confess to mortal man, and did they arrest me, 'should not my existence before Hubert Bernot would stand in a felon's dock.'"

Her passionate sobs calmed him.

"Never again, Margaret, speak of confession to me. Remember your oath, and remember also that you are the only one in this wide, wide world who can afford one ray of comfort to my desolate soul."

He stooped and kissed her forehead. She flung her arms about his neck and clung to him as a frightened child might do to its parent. Alas! she felt the need of companionship in her misery, and she tried to imagine that the love and tenderness of a creature could compensate for the God she had resigned.

When both had grown outwardly calm, she sought to tell him of his mother's official examination, and of the card bearing the strange inscription, but he interrupted:

"No, Margaret! let the dead past bury its dead as much as we may do. I read the papers carefully and wish to know no more than they contained; if anything else has happened do not tell me, it might but add to my fears."

She made no more attempts to tell him, but bade him good night.

He accompanied her to the door, clasping her hand for a moment before opening it, and whispering:

"We two, bound by a bloody bond." She shuddered at his words, but even while she shuddered, a thrill—an undefinable thrill—ran through her form. Now, too, surely she knew that a creature usurped her Creator's place in her heart. God help her! Murderer as he was, she loved Hubert Bernot.

TO BE CONTINUED.

To make your business pay, good health is a prime factor. To secure good health, the blood should be kept pure and vigorous by the use of Ayer's Sarsaparilla. When the vital fluid is impure and sluggish, there can be neither health, strength nor ambition.

A little three-year old girl went to a children's party. On her return she said to her parents: "At the party a little girl fell off a chair. All the other girls laughed, but I didn't." "Well, why didn't you laugh?" "Cause I was the one that fell off."