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Old Hagar's Secret

BY MRS. M. J. HOLMES

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"Purified by Suffering," "A Grass Widow,"
"Woman Against Woman," Etc.

Conway, stamping her foot in her wrath, and thinking only of Henry Warner. "I'll turn him from my door instantly. My blue satin bodice, indeed!"

"'Twas I, grandma—'twas I," interrupted Maggie, looking reproachfully at Theo. "'Twas I who cut up the bodice. I who brought down the scarlet coat."

"And I didn't do a thing but look on," said Theo. "I knew you'd be angry, and I tried to make Maggie behave, but she wouldn't."

"I don't know as it is anything to you what Maggie does, and I think it would look quite as well in you to take part of the blame yourself, instead of putting it all upon your sister," was Madam Conway's reply; and feeling almost as deeply injured as Mrs. Jeffrey herself, Theo began to cry, while Maggie, with a few masterly strokes, succeeded in so far appeasing the anger of her grandmother that the good lady consented for the young gentlemen to stay to breakfast, saying, though that "they should depart immediately after, and never darken her doors again."

"But Mr. Douglas is rich," sobbed Theo from behind her pocket handkerchief, "immensely rich and of a very aristocratic family. I am sure, else where did he get his money?"

This remark was timely, and when, fifteen minutes later, Madam Conway was presented to the gentlemen in the hall, her manner was far more gracious toward George Douglas than it was toward Henry Warner, to whom she merely nodded, deigning no answer whatever to his polite apology for having made himself so much at home in her house. The expression of his mouth was, as usual, against him, and fancying he intended adding insult to injury by laughing in her face, she coolly turned her back upon him ere he had finished speaking and walked down stairs, leaving him to wind up his speech with "an old she dragon!"

But this time both the sun and the servants had risen, the former shining into the disorderly dining-room, and disclosing to the latter the weary, jaded Anna, who, while Madam Conway was exploring the house, had thrown herself upon the lounge and had fallen asleep.

"Who is she, and where did she come from?" was anxiously inquired, and they were about going in quest of Margaret, when their mistress appeared suddenly in their midst, and their noisy demonstrations of joy and surprise awoke the sleeping girl, who, rubbing her red eyes, asked for her aunt, and why she did not come to meet her.

"She had been a little excited and forgot you, perhaps," answered Madam Conway, at the same time bidding one of the servants to show the young lady to Mrs. Jeffrey's room.

The good lady had recovered her composure somewhat, and was just wondering why her niece did not come with Madam Conway, as had been arranged, when Anna appeared, and in her delight at once more holding a child of her only sister and her husband's brother, she forgot, in a measure, how injured she had felt. Ere long the breakfast bell rang; but Anna declared herself too weary to go down, and as Mrs. Jeffrey felt that she could not yet meet Madam Conway face to face, they both remained in their room, Anna again falling asleep, while her aunt, growing more calm, sought, and this time found, comfort in her favorite volume. Very cool indeed, was that breakfast partaken in almost unbroken silence below. The toast was cold, the steak was cold, the coffee was cold, and frosty as an icicle was the lady who sat where the merry Maggie had heretofore presided. Scarcely a word was spoken by any one; but in the laughing eyes of Maggie there was a world of fun, to which the mischievous mouth of Henry Warner responded by a curl exceedingly annoying to the stately hostess, who, in passing him his coffee, turned her head in another direction, lest she should be too civil!

Breakfast being over, George Douglas who began to understand Madam Conway tolerably well, asked of her a private interview, which was granted, when he conciliated her first by apologizing for anything ungentlemanly he might have done in her house, and started her next by asking for Theo, as his wife.

"You can," said he, "easily ascertain my character and standing in Worcester, where for the last ten years I have been known first as clerk, then as junior partner, and finally as proprietor of the large establishment which I now conduct."

Madam Conway was at first too much astonished to speak. Had it been Maggie for whom he asked, the matter would have been decided at once, for Maggie was her pet, her pride, the intended bride of Arthur Carrollton; but Theo was a different creature altogether, and though the Conway blood flowing in her veins entitled her to much consideration, she was neither showy nor brilliant, and if she could marry \$200,000, even though it were American coin, she would perhaps be doing quite as well as could be expected. So Madam Conway replied at last, that "she would consider the matter, and if she found that Theo's feelings were fully enlisted, she would perhaps return a favorable answer."

"I know the firm of Douglas & Co. by reputation," said she, "and I know

it to be quite a wealthy firm; but with me, family is quite as important as money."

"My family, madam, are certainly respectable," interrupted George Douglas, a deep flush overspreading his face.

He was indignant at her presuming to question his respectability, Madam Conway thought, and so she hastened to appease him, by saying, "Certainly, I have no doubt of it. There are marks by which I can always tell."

George Douglas bowed low to the far-seeing lady, while a train of thought, not altogether complimentary to her discernment in this case, passed through his mind.

Not thus silent would Madam Conway have been toward Henry Warner, had he presumed to ask her that morning for Maggie; but he knew better than to broach the subject then. "He would write to her," he said, immediately after his return to Worcester, and in the meantime, Maggie, if she saw proper, was to prepare her grandmother for it, by herself announcing the engagement. This, and much more he said to Maggie, as they sat together in the library, so much absorbed in each other as not to notice the approach of Madam Conway, who entered the door just in time to see Henry Warner with his arm around Maggie's waist. She was a woman of bitter prejudices, and had conceived a bitter dislike for Henry, not only on account of the scars and stripes, but because she read to a certain extent the true state of affairs. Her suspicions were now confirmed, and rapidly crossing the floor, she confronted him, saying:

"Let my granddaughter alone, young man, both now, and forever."

Something of Hagar's fiery spirit flashed from Maggie's dark eyes, but forcing down her anger, she answered half earnestly, half playfully, "I am nearly old enough, grandma, to decide the matter for myself."

A fierce expression of scorn passed over Madam Conway's face, and harsh words might have ensued had not the carriage at that moment been announced. Wringing Maggie's hand, Henry arose and left the room, followed by the indignant lady, who would willingly have suffered him to walk, but thinking \$200,000 quite too much money to go on foot, she had ordered her carriage, and both the senior and junior partner of Douglas & Co. were ere long riding a second time away from the old house by the mill.

CHAPTER XII.

"Grandma wishes to see you, Maggie, in her room," said Theo to her sister one morning, three days after the departure of their guests.

"Wishes to see me! For what?" asked Maggie; and Theo answered, "I don't know, unless it is to talk with you about Arthur Carrollton."

"Arthur Carrollton!" repeated Maggie. "Much good it will do her to talk to me of him. I hate the very sound of his name." And rising she walked slowly to her grandmother's room, where in her stiff brown satin dress, her golden spectacles planted firmly upon her nose, and the Valenciennes border of her cap shading but not concealing the determined look on her face, with an open letter upon her lap.

It was from Henry, Maggie knew, by her handwriting in a moment, and there was another, too, for her; but she was too proud to ask for it, and seating herself by the window she

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waited for her grandmother to break the silence, which she did ere long as follows:

"I have just received a letter from that Warner, asking me to sanction an engagement which he says exists between himself and you. Is it true? Are you engaged to him?"

"I am," answered Maggie, playing nervously with the tassel of her wrapper, and wondering why Henry had written so soon, before she had prepared the way by a little judicious coaxing.

"Well, then," continued Madam Conway, "the sooner it is broken the better. I am astonished that you should stoop to such an act, and I hope you are not in earnest."

"But I am," answered Maggie and in the same cold, decided manner, her grandmother continued: "Then nothing remains for me but to forbid you having any communication whatever with one whose conduct in my house has been so unpardonably rude and vulgar. You will never marry him, Margaret, never! Nay, I would sooner see you dead than the wife of that low, mean, impertinent fellow."

In the large dark eyes there was a gleam decidedly Hagarish as Maggie arose, and standing before her grandmother, made answer: "You must not, in my presence, speak thus of Henry Warner. He is neither low, mean, vulgar, nor impertinent. You are prejudiced against him, because you think him comparatively poor, and because he has dared to look at me, who have yet to understand why the fact of my being a Conway makes me better. I have dreamed to be Henry Warner's wife, and Margaret Miller never yet has broken her word."

"But in this instance you will," said Madam Conway, now thoroughly aroused. "I will never suffer it, and to prove I am in earnest, I will here, before your face, burn the letter he has presumed to send you; and this I will do to any others which may come to you from him."

Maggie offered no remonstrance; but the fire of a volcano burned within, as she watched the letter blackening upon the coals; and when next her eyes met those of her grandmother, there was in them a fierce, determined look, which prompted that lady at once to change her tactics, and try the power of persuasion, rather than of force. Feigning a smile, she said:

"What ails you, child? You look to me like Hagar. It was wrong in me, perhaps, to burn your letter, and had I reflected a moment, I might not have done it; but I cannot suffer you to receive any more. I have other prospects in view for you, and have only waited a favorable opportunity to tell you what they are. Sit down by me, Margaret, while I talk with you on the subject."

The burning of her letter had affected Margaret strangely, and with a numbness feeling at her heart, she sat down without a word, and listened patiently to praises long, and praises loud of Arthur Carrollton, who was described as being every way desirable, both as a friend and a husband.

"His father, the elder Carrollton," said Madam Conway, "and wishes our families to be more closely united; by a marriage between you and his son Arthur, who is rather fastidious in his taste, and though twenty-eight years old, has never yet seen a face which suited him. But he is pleased with you, Maggie. He liked your picture, imperfect as it is, and he liked the tone of your letters which I read to him. They were so original, he said—so much like what he fancied you to be. He has a splendid country seat, and more than one nobleman's daughter would gladly share it with him; but I think he fancies you. He has a large estate near Montreal and some property connected with it will ere long bring him to America. Of course he will visit here, and with a little tact on your part you can, I'm sure, secure one of the best matches in England. He is fine looking, too, I have his daguerreotype; and opening her work-box, she drew it forth and held it before Maggie, who, reluctantly shut her eyes lest she should see the face of her she was so determined to dislike.

"What do you think of him?" asked Madam Conway, as her arm began to ache, and Maggie had not yet spoken.

"I haven't looked at him," answered Maggie. "I hate him, and if he comes here after me, I'll tell him so, too! I hate him because he is an Englishman. I hate him because he is an aristocrat. I hate him for everything, and before I marry him I'll run away!"

Here, wholly overcome, Maggie burst into tears, and precipitately left the room. An hour later and Hagar, sitting by the fire, which the coolness of the day rendered necessary, was startled by the abrupt entrance of Maggie, who, throwing herself upon the floor and burying her face in the old woman's lap, sobbed bitterly.

"What is it, child? What is it, darling?" asked Hagar, and in a few words Maggie explained the whole. "She was persecuted—dreadfully persecuted. Nobody before ever had so much trouble as she. Grandma had burned a letter from Henry Warner, and would not give it to her. Grandma said, too, she should never marry him, should never write to him, nor see anything he might send her. Oh, Hagar, Hagar! isn't it cruel?" and the eyes, whose wrathful, defiant expression was now quenched in tears, looked up in Hagar's face for sympathy.

The right chord was touched, and much as Hagar might have disliked Henry Warner, she was his fast friend now. Her mistress's opposition to Maggie's love had wrought a change, and henceforth all her energies should be given to the advancement of the young couple's cause.

(To Be Continued.)

(Mightn't it be right; but it is seldom left.

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