

Major Fitz-David opened the letter, and read it through to himself. When he had done, he threw it on the table with a gesture which was almost a gesture of contempt.

"There is but one excuse for him," he said. "The man is mad."

Those words told me all. I knew the worst; and, knowing it, I could read the letter. It ran thus:—

"MY BELOVED VALERIA,—  
When you read these lines, you read my farewell words. I return to my solitary unfriended life—my life before I knew you."

"My darling, you have been cruelly treated. You have been entrapped into marrying a man who has been publicly accused of poisoning his first wife—and who has not been honourably and completely acquitted of the charge. And you know it!"

"Can you live on terms of mutual confidence and mutual esteem with me, when I have committed this fraud, and when I stand towards you in this position? It was possible for you to live with me happily, while you were in ignorance of the truth. It is not possible, now you know all."

"No! the one atonement I can make it—to leave you. Your one chance of future happiness is to be disassociated, at once and for ever, from my dishonoured life. I love you, Valeria—truly, devotedly, passionately. But the spectre of the poisoned woman rises between us. It makes no difference that I am innocent even of the thought of harming my first wife. My innocence has not been proved. In this world, my innocence can never be proved. You are young and loving, and generous and hopeful. Bless others, Valeria, with your rare attractions and your delightful gifts. They are of no avail with me. The poisoned woman stands between us. If you live with me now, you will see her as I see her. That torture shall never be yours. I love you. I leave you."

"Do you think me hard and cruel? Wait a little, and time will change that way of thinking. As the years go on, you will say to yourself, 'Blessed as he deceived me, there was some generosity in him. He was man enough to release me of his own free will.'"

"Yes, Valeria, I fully, freely release you. If it be possible to annul our marriage, let it be done. Recover your liberty by any means that you may be advised to employ; and be assured beforehand of my entire and implicit submission. My lawyers have the necessary instructions on this subject. Your uncle has only to communicate with them, and I think he will be satisfied of my resolution to do you justice. The one interest that I have now left in life, is my interest in your welfare and your happiness in the time to come. Your welfare and your happiness are no longer to be found in your union with me."

"I can write no more. This letter will wait for you at the hotel. It will be useless to attempt to trace me. I know my own weakness. My heart is all yours: I might yield to you if I let you see me again."

"Show these lines to your uncle, and to any friends whose opinions to you may value. I have only to sign my dishonoured name, and every one will understand, and applaud, my motive for writing as I do. The name justifies, amply justifies, the letter. Forgive me, and forget me. Farewell."

"EUSTACE MACALLAN."

In those words he took his leave of me. We had been married—six days.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE WOMAN'S ANSWER.

Thus far I have written of myself with perfect frankness, and, I think, I may fairly add, with some courage as well. My frankness fails me, and my courage fails me, when I look back to my husband's farewell letter, and try to recall the storm of contending passions that it roused in my mind. No! I cannot tell the truth about myself, at that terrible time. Men! consult your observation of women, and imagine what I felt. Women! look into your own hearts, and see what I felt, for yourselves."

What I did, when my mind was quiet again, is an easier matter to deal with. I answered my husband's letter. My reply to him shall appear in these pages. It will show, in some degree, what effect (of the lasting sort) is the result of me produced on my mind. It will also reveal the motives that sustained me in the new and strange life which my next chapters must describe."

I was removed from the hotel in the care of my fatherly old friend Benjamin. A bedroom was prepared for me in his little villa. There I passed the first night of my separation from my husband. Towards the morning my weary brain got some rest—I slept."

At breakfast-time Major Fitz-David called to enquire about me. He had kindly volunteered to go and speak for me to my husband's lawyers on the preceding day. They admitted that they knew where Eustace had gone, but they declared at the same time that they were positively forbidden to communicate his address to any one. In other respects their "instructions" in relation to the wife of their client were, as they were pleased to express it, "generous to a fault." I had only to write to them and they would furnish me with a copy by return of post."

This was the Major's news. He refrained, with the tact that distinguished him, from putting any question to me beyond questions relating to the state of my health. Questions answered, he took his leave of me for that day. He and Benjamin had a long talk together afterwards, in the garden of the villa."

I retired to my room and wrote to my uncle Starkweather, telling him exactly what had happened, and enclosing him a copy of my husband's letter. This done I went out for a little while to breathe the fresh air, and to think. I

was soon weary, and went back again to my room to rest. My kind old Benjamin left me at perfect liberty to be alone as long as I pleased. Towards the afternoon I began to feel a little more like my old self again. I mean, by this, that I could think of Eustace without bursting out crying, and could speak to Benjamin without distressing and frightening the poor old man."

That night I had a little more sleep. The next morning I was strong enough to confront the first and foremost duty that I now owed to myself—the duty of answering my husband's letter."

I wrote to him in these words:—

"I am still too weak and weary, Eustace, to write to you at any length. But my mind is clear. I have formed my own opinion of you and your letter, and I know what I mean to do now you have left me. Some women, in my situation, might think that you had forfeited all right to their confidence. I don't think that. So I write and tell you what is in my mind, in the plainest and fewest words that I can use."

"You say you love me—and you leave me. I don't understand loving a woman and leaving her. For my part, in spite of the hard things you have said and written to me, and in spite of the cruel manner in which you have left me, I love you—and I won't give you up. No! As long as I live I mean to live your wife."

"Does this surprise you? It surprises me. If another woman wrote in this manner to a man who had behaved to her as you have behaved, I should be quite at a loss to account for her conduct. I am quite at a loss to account for my own conduct. I ought to hate you, and yet I can't help loving you. I am ashamed of myself—but so it is."

"You need feel no fear of my attempting to find out where you are, and of my trying to persuade you to return to me. I am not quite foolish enough to do that. You are not in a fit state of mind to return to me. You are all wrong, all over, from head to foot. When you get right again, I am vain enough to think that you will return to me of your own accord. And shall I be weak enough to forgive you? Yes—I shall certainly be weak enough to forgive you."

"But how are you to get right again? I have puzzled in brains over this question by night and by day, and my opinion is that you will never be right again, unless I help you."

"How am I to help you?"

"That question is easily answered. What the Law has failed to do for you, your Wife must do for you. Do you remember what I said when we were together in the back-room at Major Fitz-David's house? I told you that the first thought that came to me, when I heard what the Scotch jury had done, was the thought of setting their vile Verdict right. Well, your letter has fixed this idea more firmly in my mind than ever. The only chance that I can see of winning you back to me is to change that underhand Scotch Verdict of Not Proven into an honest English verdict of Not Guilty."

"Are you surprised at the knowledge of the law which this way of writing betrays in an ignorant woman? I have been learning, my dear; the Law and the Lady have begun by understanding one another. In plain English, I have looked into Ogilvie's 'Imperial Dictionary,' and Ogilvie tells me: 'A verdict of Not Proven only indicates that, in the opinion of the jury, there is a deficiency in the evidence to convict the prisoner. A verdict of Not Guilty imports the jury's opinion that the prisoner is innocent.'—Eustace, that shall be the opinion of the world in general, and of the Scottish jury in particular, in your case. To that one object I dedicate my life to come, if God spares me!"

"Who will help me, when I need help, is more than I yet know. There was a time when I had hoped that we should go hand in hand together in doing this good work. That hope is at an end. I no longer expect you, or ask you, to help me. A man who thinks as you think, can give no help to anybody—it is a miserable condition to have no hope. So be it! I will hope for two, and will work for two, and I shall find some one to help me, never fear, if I deserve it."

"I will say nothing about my plans; I have not read the Trial yet. It is quite enough for me that I know you are innocent. When a man is innocent there must be a way of proving it; the one thing needful is to find the way. Sooner or later, with or without assistance, I shall find it. Yes; before I know any single particular of the Case I tell you positively—I shall find it!"

"You may laugh over this blind confidence on my part, or you may cry over it. I don't pretend to know whether I am an object for ridicule or an object for pity. Of one thing only I am certain—I mean to win you back, a man vindicated before the world, without a stain on his character or his name—thanks to his wife."

"Write to me sometimes, Eustace, and believe me, through all the bitterness of this bitter business, your faithful and loving

"VALERIA."

There was my reply. Poor enough as a composition—I could write a much better letter now—it had, if I may presume to say so, one merit: it was the honest expression of what I really meant and felt."

I read it to Benjamin. He held up his hands with his customary gesture when he was thoroughly bewildered and dismayed. "It seems the rashest letter that ever was written," said the dear old man. "I never heard, Valeria, of a woman doing what you propose to do. Lord help us! the new generation is beyond my fathoming. I wish your uncle Starkweather was here. I wonder what he would say? Oh, dear me, what a letter from a wife to a husband! Do you really mean to send it to him?"

I added, immeasurably to my old friend's surprise, but not even employing the post-office. I wished to see the "Instructions" which my husband had left behind him. So I took the letter to the lawyers myself."

(To be continued.)

## Amusement.

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RICHARD BULL,

Montreal, Nov. 1874.

Secretary.

10-21-2-43.

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