

A LOST WIFE

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A NOVEL.
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BY MRS. H. LOVETT CAMERON,
Author of "Worth Winning," Etc.

"Who—Captain Thistleby? Not at all."

"Not like him!" cried Bella, in genuine amazement, staring blankly at me.

"I think him—well, never mind what I think of him, after all, I have not spoken above a dozen words to him, recollect."

"No; that is true. Ah, well, you will like him better to-morrow."

I doubted it, but by a strong effort of self-control refrained from saying so, and we bade each other good-night.

The next morning, on coming down rather later than usual, I was surprised to find Bella arrayed in her bonnet and cloak, with her gloves, and traveling-bag on the table beside her, eating toast and poached eggs with breathless haste, whilst Captain Thistleby was pouring out her tea, and otherwise waiting upon her.

"Why, Bella!" I exclaimed.

"Oh, my darling child! What will you say to me? I am obliged to go up to town for the day—your last day, too! I am so dreadfully sorry."

For one minute I was almost inclined to accuse her of inventing this scheme on purpose to leave me alone with her brother-in-law, but her pretty face was full of concern as she held out a letter for me to read. It was from her lawyer. I glanced hurriedly through it, without much understanding it; but this much I did see, that there was some solicitor who was to be met by her in town, and some paper which she must sign, after having conferred with him, in order to effect a pending sale of some of her property, of which I had heard her speak. There was evidently no foul play about it.

"Make haste, Bella, or we shall be too late," said Captain Thistleby; and at his words I perceived, with a gasp of relief, that he was going up with her. Indeed, when I came to think of it, what else could he do?

"I am so distressed, Freda, dear! Your very last day and all! What will you do to amuse yourself?"

"Oh, I shall do very well. I have my sketch of the boat-house to finish; I shall go, but this much I did not be at all. Don't make yourself unhappy about me, dear."

"Here is the fly—come along!" cried Captain Thistleby.

Bella hugged me as if she were going to South America, jumped into the fly, followed by her brother-in-law, and they drove off.

Left to my own devices, I leisurely finished my breakfast, and then, taking my shady straw hat and my drawing materials, I sauntered down through the garden on to the beach.

There was a flight of stone steps from the terrace leading to the shore, and in the triangular bit of shadow which they cast upon the beach I installed myself with my back against the garden wall.

An old boat-house, lower down formed the principal object of my sketch; behind were red cliffs, and long lines of white sands and dark rocks stretching out to the blue sea beyond. The picture, if somewhat tame, was nevertheless a well-scaled bit of English coast scenery, and afforded full scope for an artist's fancy.

To-day it is at its best. The distance is all hazy gold, the sky is flecked with soft white clouds, the sea is gently ruffled into a hundred varied lights and shades, and the boat-house stands out in richest sepia against the delicate tints of the background.

It was deliciously peaceful and quiet, and I began to enjoy myself exceedingly. The only sounds that broke the silence were the monotonous wash of the little waves upon the shore and the occasional cry of a seabird sailing up on big white wings.

The Dangers of Childhood.

Summer is the most deadly season of the year for little ones. The little life hangs by a mere thread; diarrhoea, infant cholera and other hot weather ailments come quickly, and sometimes, in a few hours, extinguish a bright little life. Every mother should be in a position to guard against, or cure these troubles, and there is no medicine known to medical science will act so surely, so speedily and so safely, as Baby's Own Tablets. A box of the Tablets should be kept in every home where there are little ones, and by giving an occasional Tablet hot weather ailments will be prevented, and your baby will be kept well and happy. Don't wait until the trouble comes—that may be too late. Remember that these ailments can be prevented by keeping the stomach and bowels right. Mrs. A. Vandervort, Port Colborne, Ont., says: "My baby was cross, restless and had diarrhoea. I gave her Baby's Own Tablets and they helped her almost at once. I think the Tablets a splendid medicine for children."

The Tablets are guaranteed to cure all the minor ailments of little ones; they contain no opiate or poisonous drug, and can be given safely to a new born babe. Sold by medicine dealers or mailed at 25 cents a box by writing to the Dr. Williams' Medicine Co., Brookville, Ont.

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"I did not see you."

"No, I know you did not, you could not; I had blown out my candle, and the passage was quite dark at my side of the house; but the hall-lamp shone full upon you. I saw you perfectly. You stepped out and listened, drawing back your dress with one hand. There was a pretty indecision in your face; a white ruffle round your throat bordered your perfectly simple dress; then you evidently determined to wait a little longer, and I waited too. When you came down with that gorgeous lace wrapped round you, and that scornful look on your face, you were no longer the same girl I had seen on the landing."

I knew directly that something had happened in the interval to upset you. Your very first words told me what it was. You were so feverishly eager to let me know that you were engaged to be married, that you were somebody else's property not to be made love to."

"Oh, don't—don't!" I cried, holding my burning cheeks in my hand. "You cannot complain of me, Miss Clifford," continued my tormentor. "You cannot but say that I took your hint. I did not press my attentions, did I?"

"No, you were dreadfully rude," I stammered.

"Yes, and though that is what you had wanted me to be, you were angry with me for it. So like a woman! Your song amused me exceedingly. I could not help giving you that one little cut. Will you not forgive me?"

"I wish you would go away," I said, in great distress. "I have made a fool of myself, and—and I think I hate you," I added, somewhat incoherently.

"Oh, no, you don't," answered my companion, confidently. "Now, look here, Miss Clifford, will you say no more about last night, let us begin afresh. But we must first understand each other. Let us look our position in the face. Here are we two people left together for a whole day, to make the best of each other, now, and to spend it in fighting and snarling like a couple of terriers, or in rational conversation, like reasonable beings?"

"Just as you like," I answered meekly, but with a dawning sense of the comic in the situation.

"Well, I have seen Bella off," he said, cheerily, "such a shave it was! I thought she would have missed the train—it was actually moving—she had no time to take her ticket."

"But I thought you were going too!" I exclaimed, with, I fear, a very uncomplimentary dismay in my voice.

"What, up to London in August with such a day as this at Seaside? No, thank you, not I! But I am sorry to disappoint you, Miss Clifford," he added, looking very much amused.

I muttered some unintelligible disclaimer, and went on with my sketch.

"Do you mind my finishing my cigar here?"

"Oh, not at all," with elaborate politeness. "I am quite used to smoke."

"What, does the idol of your dreams indulge in tobacco?"

"Who?" I exclaimed, bewildered. "What do you mean?"

"Why, you did not tell me his name. The gentleman to whom you are engaged to be married."

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"Good heavens, how ludicrous!" I cried. "Mr. Curtis is his name, and if you had seen him—"

"I wasn't thinking of him, I was thinking of my father."

"Oh!" and my companion puffed away at his cigar in silence.

He had thrown himself on his back on the beach beside me, but a little lower down, so that I could not see his face; his arms were thrown up under his head, and he had tilted his hat over his nose, to shade his eyes. He seemed to me to have every intention of going to sleep. I devoutly hoped he would.

"Yes," he said, presently, removing the cigar from his mouth and contemplating its smouldering end with close attention, "yes, our friend Bella thought you would be very dull alone, so she has left me the charming task of entertaining you until eight o'clock this evening."

"I am exceedingly sorry you should have thought it necessary to stop here on my account," I said, coldly.

He laughed slightly, but answered not.

"I am never dull, I assure you; and I am quite able to entertain myself."

Still no answer. I was more nettled by his silence than by his words. Nothing aggravated a woman so horribly as an antagonist who won't speak. I wanted to fight, and my enemy would not even exert himself to take up his weapons. A few minutes ensued, and then I burst forth aggressively:

"I should be exceedingly glad to company for you; I must really beg of you to go and find amusement elsewhere to-day. There is a billiard-room, in the town, and a reading-room, I believe; anything would be better. I should think, than a bread-and-butter girl, who expects you to make love to her."

"But out at last!"

His shout of triumph positively made me jump. He flung away his cigar, and turning round on his hands and knees, leant his chin on his hands so as to stare straight up at me under my hat.

"I knew I should bring it out! So you heard my incautious speech on the stairs? Well, I guess it told the instant you came into the room last night."

His eyes were sparkling with triumphant fun, his face and voice were full of animation. The complete transformation in his manner amazed and confounded me almost more than his words.

I stammered, and turned crimson. "How did you know? What made you guess?" I faltered.

"Why, the Spanish point, to begin with."

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"I had seen you before, Miss Clifford. If you remember, you came out of your room once, ten minutes sooner. I was at the end of the passage, coming out of my door, too."

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"No, I know you did not, you could not; I had blown out my candle, and the passage was quite dark at my side of the house; but the hall-lamp shone full upon you. I saw you perfectly. You stepped out and listened, drawing back your dress with one hand. There was a pretty indecision in your face; a white ruffle round your throat bordered your perfectly simple dress; then you evidently determined to wait a little longer, and I waited too. When you came down with that gorgeous lace wrapped round you, and that scornful look on your face, you were no longer the same girl I had seen on the landing."

I knew directly that something had happened in the interval to upset you. Your very first words told me what it was. You were so feverishly eager to let me know that you were engaged to be married, that you were somebody else's property not to be made love to."

"Oh, don't—don't!" I cried, holding my burning cheeks in my hand. "You cannot complain of me, Miss Clifford," continued my tormentor. "You cannot but say that I took your hint. I did not press my attentions, did I?"

"No, you were dreadfully rude," I stammered.

"Yes, and though that is what you had wanted me to be, you were angry with me for it. So like a woman! Your song amused me exceedingly. I could not help giving you that one little cut. Will you not forgive me?"

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"Well," he resumed, "let us begin by sweeping away all Bella's mistakes on little plans. You know as well as I do, doubtless, what a matchmaker my dear little sister-in-law is. She is very fond of me, and you are her dearest friend; what more natural idea than that, therefore, you and I are made for each other?"

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